

Criteria to Guide Textbook Decisions: Reflections from a Classroom Teacher and Teacher Trainer

[美] Dali Tan*

[摘要] 本文作者根据自己多年从事第一线课堂教学和师资培训的亲身经验,参考了许多美国现行的评估和选用课本的指南,指出了现有中文课本中存在的很多问题。作者列举了一些具体的教学实例来说明自己的观点,并详细阐述了这些课本所应该具有的特点。完美的课本应该关注第二语言习得理论原则,深受学生喜爱,帮助教师构建以学生为中心的课堂,以沟通作为组织原则,包括有意义、有目的的沟通任务和以实际运用为基础的多样化的评估考核,专注意语的使用,利用真实语料和语言,以便让学生体验文化,而不是仅仅听老师讲授文化。这样的课本也应该与其他学科相连贯,充分考虑到学习者的个性以便教师因材施教,应该提供并教授学习技巧、学习策略等等。

[关键词] 理想课本;二语习得;当前课本问题

[Abstract] Based on my years of experience as a classroom teacher and teacher trainer and guided by some of the textbook review and adoption guidelines currently being used in the United States, I first describe the problems with current textbooks and then explain the kind of textbooks teachers and school districts are looking for. First of all, ideal textbooks should be interesting to students. They need to pay close attention to the principles of second language acquisition, to focus on communication rather than grammar, to provide authentic tasks that are real and meaningful, to integrate language and culture, to use age and level appropriate authentic materials, to include performance-based assessments, to focus on target language use, to have interdisciplinary connections to other school subjects, to pay attention to learner variables and differentiation of instruction, to provide and teach learning strategies, to demonstrate intercultural sensitivity among many other factors. In short, ideal textbooks should provide support and guide teachers to become facilitators of language learning in a student-centered classroom.

[Key words] ideal textbooks; SLA; problems with current textbooks

Introduction

As a teacher trainer and classroom teacher in the USA over 18 years of experience

* 作者简介: Dali Tan, Ph. D., Landon School, Maryland, USA, 研究方向为对外汉语教学。

teaching Chinese to students from grade five to the university level, I am constantly in search of high quality textbooks that truly incorporate best practices in communicative language teaching according to the *USA Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* and *The Common European Framework of Reference*. Like me, many teachers and school districts are looking for textbooks that contain thematic units with related topics and logically sequenced learning activities in order to achieve their stated objectives. The profession urgently needs texts that have age and level appropriate instructional materials that are well-articulated and suitable for any type of program, including current and re-designed Advanced Placement (AP)^① programs. Unfortunately, it is difficult to find a textbook that satisfactorily meets this need, especially for K-12 students in the United States.

Because of the increased interest in Chinese teaching, this is a historic moment for Chinese textbooks. We need a variety of high quality textbooks and the textbook producing field according to a common Chinese saying should be in a state of “百花齐放, 百家争鸣” (Let a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend). In other words, the publishers of textbooks should try their best to pay close attention to what teachers will find most useful in helping all their students succeed in learning Chinese language and culture.

In this article, I will first describe the problems with current textbooks and then explain the kind of textbooks teachers and school districts need. My discussion is guided by my years as a classroom teacher and teacher trainer and by some of the textbook review and adoption guidelines currently being used in the United States. The following textbook review and adoption guidelines were helpful:

- Memphis City Schools, Tennessee' *World Language Textbook Evaluation Form Adoption Period July 2010 - June 2016*, 2010.

- “Criteria for Evaluating Textbooks and Other Printed Curriculum Materials” in Curtain, Helena and Carol Ann Dahlberg, *Languages and Children Making the Match: New Languages for Young Learners, Grades K - 8*. Boston: Pearson, 2010. ^②

① The Advanced Placement Program, administered by The College Board of New York in the United States, currently has thirty-three courses and exams. AP Chinese course is one of those courses. AP courses are taught at local high schools. The program allows students to participate in a college level course and possibly earn college credit while still in high school. Some universities/colleges give credit for class work done in high school or to students who prove via examination that they have achieved university-level proficiency in a certain subject. The recently published “The Six Themes for AP World Languages and Cultures” by the College Board based on their AP redesign are “Contemporary Life, Personal and Public Identities, Families and Communities, Beauty and Aesthetics, Global Challenges and Science and Technology.”

② When screening textbooks for young learners, Curtain and Dahlberg recommend teachers to ask questions in the following areas: Goals, Communication, Culture, Subject Content and thinking skills (Connections), Bias, Flexibility, Physical Characteristics, Support Materials and Budget. (*Language and Children Making the Match: New Languages for Young Learners, Grades K - 8*, 361 - 362)

- *Modern and Classical Languages Textbook Review Guide*, Gwinnett County, Georgia, (No Date).

- California Foreign Language Project. *Mandarin Instructional Material Selection Rubric*. Stanford, California: Stanford University, School of Education, 2009.

- *California Standards for Evaluating Instructional Materials for Social Content*. Sacramento, California State Department of Education, 2000.

Both my experiences and these guidelines highlight that it is important for textbooks to be interesting to students, to focus on communication rather than grammar, to provide authentic tasks that are real and meaningful, to integrate language and culture, and to include performance-based assessments among many other factors.

There are many problems with current Chinese textbooks since they often do not reflect the research in second language acquisition theory and the current best practices in the field mentioned in the previous paragraph. Following is a list of some specific issues with Chinese textbooks:

- They are not interesting to our students.

- They tend to focus mostly on grammar rather than communicative functions, so their language instruction is not contextualized.

- Many textbooks do not have clear articulation of the instructional objectives in terms of functional language goals so that students can understand and appreciate the importance of a given lesson in the context of real-life communication in the target language.

- Most Chinese textbooks do not provide sufficient opportunities for students to use the target language on their own in order to accomplish real life, meaningful tasks.

- Chinese textbooks and supporting materials lack sufficient input in terms of reading texts, visual images, and audio clips; thus, there are not enough opportunities for students to read, watch, and listen for meaning.

- There is a lack of built-in materials that help instructors provide differentiated instructions to meet the needs of all learners. Previous vocabulary and language functions are not systematically recycled.

- There is very limited instruction in the teacher's guide to provide concrete examples to facilitate their efforts to adapt the activities for varying proficiency levels.

- They provide too much translation in English and do not have sufficient support for teachers to use only the target language.

- They separate the teaching of the language and culture.

- They do not have enough meaningful and authentic tasks, nor authentic and real life assessments.

- Chinese textbooks seldom explicitly discuss and teach students learning strategies and how to promote higher order thinking/critical thinking skills. They usually do not provide enough materials in helping teachers support and reinforce key concepts and

knowledge students gained from other discipline.

- They do not use enough authentic materials.
- Sometimes, they lack intercultural sensitivity.

The next section of this article addresses the elements that should be contained in the ideal Chinese textbooks. Most of all, they must be interesting to students, and they must reflect the best practices in the field based on principles of second language acquisition.

Ideal Textbooks Are Engaging, Motivating, And Support A Student-Centered Classroom

Activities must be placed in a meaningful context so that the brain can access the information and place it in long term memory. Students must have opportunities to negotiate meaning with many opportunities for partner and small group work. It is especially important to provide information gap activities since they ensure the participation of all group members. In a very important sense, the best learning takes place while students are having fun and do not realize that they are learning.

In a student-centered classroom, there is a balance of the skill getting and skill using. Teacher acts as the facilitator of the language learning by creating a safe and culturally embedded environment for students to practice and use the target language and their knowledge of the target culture to communicate with the teacher and other students.

Different from a teacher-centered classroom in which the teacher speaks Chinese and students mostly repeat and listen, in a student-centered classroom, students do most of the talking and doing in Chinese. In a teacher-centered classroom, the teacher drives instruction while in a student-centered classroom, students drive instruction and the teacher acts as a facilitator in students' journey in their quest for language proficiency and cultural competence. To use another analogy, in student-centered classroom, students learn how to swim in the water by actually swimming in the water with a help of the swim coach. On the other hand, in a teacher-centered classroom, only the swim coach swims in the water while students watch him swim and listen to what he/she says about swimming.

Ideal Textbooks Pay Attention to the Principles of Second Language Acquisition

Benjamin Rifkin's analysis of Russian textbooks thirteen years ago can still be of great help in informing the textbook authors and writers what kind of textbooks would be ideal.

According to some of theories of second language acquisition, numerous and frequent opportunities to listen to and read materials just at or beyond students' current level of competence (Krashen's $i+1$) are of great importance for the acquisition process. The importance of such "comprehensible input" in the learning process cannot be overstated

since, as some researchers have noted, “only a portion of input serves as intake.” (Robin Scarcella and Rebecca Oxford, *The Tapestry of Language Learning* [Boston, 1992], 36 (qtd. In Rifkin, 332).

.....It is far easier, of course, for instructors - even in poorly funded schools—to acquire comprehensible reading text. the problem “information processing activities based on them for their students. According to the “Comprehensible Input Hypothesis” and the “Information Processing Theory”, students should have ample opportunities to work with receptive skills, processing both listening and reading texts before being asked to work with productive skills—i. e. , producing actual target-language utterances (in either speech or writing). Textbooks, should therefore link listening and reading texts by genre, function, and topic to those which students might be expected to produce in speech or writing in the same lesson or unit (Rifkin, 332 - 333).

Unfortunately, current Chinese textbooks do not have enough “comprehensible input” listening and reading materials for students to practice and hone their skills. Ideal textbooks should feature many listening and reading materials that would be of interest to students.

Ideal Textbooks Have Communication as the Organizing Principle

Textbooks should pay attention to the meaningfulness of the tasks. Communication rather than grammar should serve as the organizing principle. Work with language structures should be in the context of functional use rather than analysis. The activities should focus on meaning rather than on form. The materials should be oriented to activity and experience rather than to exercised and drill. The materials should provide opportunities for meaningful, purposeful language use in interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational modes. Activities must be placed in a meaningful context so that the brain can access the information and place it in long term memory.

While some textbooks state communicative goals with various degrees of detail and specificity, many current textbooks still do not have specific communicative goals clearly spelled out for students. Some textbooks use the word “skill” to describe communicative functions while others put communicative goals/aims in their teacher’s guides and still others use the term “Functional Usage” in their unit summary. I strongly believe that communicative goals for each lesson, unit or chapter need to be clearly and explicitly stated for the teacher and, more importantly, for the students.

Ideal Textbooks Have Meaningful, Purposeful, Communicative Tasks

A substantial amount of the tasks and exercises in an ideal textbook need to be intrinsically interesting and cognitively engaging to students. There must be something that students want to do in the target language and a reason for students to want to do it themselves. The topics of study and the content of each unit need to have relevance to lives of students. Listening, speaking, reading and writing tasks should require students to extract, analyze and convey information in contexts similar to those often encountered in the Chinese-speaking world. Janice M. Aski points out: "Recent research in second language acquisition found that learners reached higher levels of achievement when grammar practice included the processing and negotiation of meaning," (57). She correctly observes that the relationship between formal instruction and meaningful, communicative tasks has acquired a prominent role in SLA research and pedagogy. Lightbown and Spada's (1993) review of classroom SLA research led them to conclude: "Experience has also shown that primarily or exclusively grammar-based approaches to teaching do not guarantee that learners develop high levels of accuracy and linguistic knowledge ... The results from these studies support the claim that learners require opportunities for communicative practice" (83). Moreover, Larsen Freeman (1995) highlighted the connection between grammar and meaning when she stated: "Grammatical structures are more than forms; therefore their acquisition must entail more than learning how to form the structures. It must also include learning what they mean and when and why to use them as well" (qtd. in Aski 58).

Aski's study focuses on the analysis of activities for two grammar points in seven beginning Italian textbooks according to the degree to which learners are required to process and negotiate meaning in these activities. She provides us with four types of textbook grammar practice activities: mechanical drills, meaningful drills, communicative drills, and communicative language practice.

According to Aski: "In a mechanical drill, learners do not have to understand the prompt; they need only substitute or manipulate forms, and there is only one correct response. Thus, the focus is exclusively on form. Typical examples of mechanical drills are pattern practice, transformations, and substitutions" (59). An example of mechanical drills would be the following:

- | | |
|------------|---------------------------------|
| 老师说: 苹果 | Teacher says: An apple. |
| 学生说: 这是苹果。 | Student says: This is an apple. |
| 老师说: 桃子 | Teacher says: A peach. |
| 学生说: 这是桃子。 | Student says: This is a peach. |
| 老师说: 西瓜 | Teacher says: A watermelon. |

学生说:这是西瓜。 Student says: This is a watermelon.

While the students do not need to understand the meaning of a mechanical drill, students do need to understand the meanings of input and output in meaningful drills. However, like in the mechanical drills, in the meaningful drills, there is no authentic communication, there is no negotiation of, and there is only one correct answer. Here is an example of a meaningful drill:

Choose a logical answer from one of the four choices:

老师说: Teacher says:

我累了。 I am tired.

我有点儿困。 I am sleepy.

我渴了。 I am thirsty.

我有点儿饿。 I am little hungry

学生说: Student says:

你吃点儿饭吧。 Go and get something to eat.

你坐一会儿吧。 Take a seat for a while.

你去睡一会吧。 Go and sleep for a while.

你喝儿点水吧。 Go and drink some water.

According to Aski, the difference between meaningful and communicative drills is:

“the nature of the responses produced. Unlike meaningful activities, for which there is one correct answer known to all participants, the response of a communicative drill contains information that is new and unknown to the person presenting the prompt, so there is no right or wrong answer. However, like meaningful drills, communicative drills share a formulaic and highly structured format. Part of the activity is prompted, but the rest is left to the personal opinion and creativity of the students”(60).

Here is a simple example of a communicative drill:

老师: 你喜欢吃水果吗?

Teacher: Do you like to eat fruits?

学生: 我喜欢吃。

Student: I like fruits.

老师: 你喜欢吃什么水果?

Teacher: What fruit do you like to eat?

学生: 我喜欢吃西瓜。

Student: I like to eat watermelon.

Aski believes that the type of textbook activity that can be most helpful for learners to achieve proficiency is communicative language practice, which moves beyond the formulaic nature of the mechanical, meaningful, and communicative drills. Instead, it requires, first and foremost, attention to meaning in order to generate form. In other words, this is the practice that truly puts language form (structures) in the service of meaning. As Aski points out that in this kind of communicative practice: “It is not possible to answer randomly, and there is no pattern to follow. The goal is to immerse the learner in a meaningful context in which he or she is motivated to interact. Typical examples are task-based, information gap, and role-playing activities that give learners the opportunity to negotiate meaning. Learners generate the situation in which they interact freely”(61).

The following are two examples of communicative language activities from Aski:

“Awards.

Today we celebrate the people and artistic works that we consider the most notable of the year. With a partner, prepare a list of categories. Then, with the whole class, nominate five candidates for each category and vote for your favorites.”

“Creative moment!

Working in pairs, choose a famous person. Each pair will then describe that person to the other class members, who must try to guess who it is, asking no more than five questions” (61).

When we examine Chinese textbooks using the above four categories as our guide, we find that while some Chinese textbooks have communicative drills (some textbooks have more than others), most are lacking in communicative language practice and do not keep pace with second language acquisition research.

Ideal Textbooks Focus on Target Language Use

Textbooks and their companion/ancillary materials (such as student workbook, teacher's guide, multimedia supplementary materials and websites and so on) should facilitate the exclusive or almost exclusive use of the target language, student-centered instruction, seamless integration of language instruction and culture learning. Outside of Chinese classroom, students have very few occasions to hear Chinese language in their daily lives. Therefore, it is of vital importance for teachers to speak as much Chinese as possible when conducting classes. When teachers speak the target language, they give students the opportunity to experience what it is like to actually be in the target culture. In this way, students can experience culture rather than just talk about the culture. Textbooks need to include more well designed tasks and activities in which students can use the language creatively to express what they really want to say and communicate with native speakers of the language.

Ideal Textbooks Use Authentic Materials and Language

Curtain and Dahlberg encourage teachers to ask the following insightful questions: “Do the materials reflect authentic use of language? Is this the way people in the target culture really speak? Are the situations and language presented culturally authentic and up to date? Are there resources provided or suggested for authentic songs, games, and children's literature?” (361, 362). These questions underscore the importance of use of authentic materials and language.

Ideal textbooks should provide as much input as possible from authentic materials. Authentic materials are resources that have been produced by members of a language and culture group specifically for native speakers. These include printed, audio, and visual materials which can be used as authentic listening and reading texts and cultural realia as a basis for communication. It is important for textbooks to include both audio and printed authentic materials which students will most frequently encounter in the Chinese speaking world, such as school announcements on bulletin boards, public transportation schedules,

and broadcasted announcements (for bus, subway, train, airplane and so on), voice messages from the cell phone companies, real Chinese written envelopes, menus, ads from a travel agency, sale signs from department stores, TV program lists and schedules for performing arts and museums and so on. Other examples of authentic texts include native language textbooks for elementary school students and children's literature from the Chinese speaking world. Other authentic materials can be found in the following from the target culture: Folk and Fairy Tales (books, videos), Songbooks, Books of Simple Poems, Rhymes, board games, picture books and easy readers in the second language and so on. Including culturally-rich authentic photographs in the textbooks is also an important goal.

An extensive use of authentic materials should help offer an integration of language and culture in each lesson. A rich variety of authentic materials and realia should be provided so that students have opportunities to experience the target culture through encounters with authentic audios and visual texts, such as photos, drawings, maps, videos, films and so on. Once again, the questions Curtain and Dahlberg (2010) urge us to ask provide a very helpful guide in our endeavor: "Is culture integrated into the program materials? Is there emphasis on experiencing culture rather than on learning about culture? Do the materials promote an appreciation of the value and richness of cultural diversity?" (260). According to the Standards, culture is the major content of language learning. As Lange puts it so succinctly and insightfully: "In reality, then, the true content of the foreign language course is not the grammar and the vocabulary of the language, but the cultures expressed through that language" (qtd. in Curtain and Dahlberg, 258).

Contrary to some common beliefs in the field, authentic materials can and should be used at the beginning level. The challenge for the authors of our ideal textbooks is to find age and level-appropriate as well as culturally-rich authentic materials. They also need to blend them naturally into the communicative goals of each lesson and each unit. The use of authentic materials can help create authentic tasks that help learners acquire language proficiencies and cultural understanding in realistic and meaningful contexts. These learning tasks should focus on authentic language use. Embedded in Chinese culture, they lead naturally to authentic assessments.

Ideal Textbooks Include Performance-Based/ Multiple Assessments

When examining textbooks, teachers in Memphis City Schools look for "Communication opportunities and assessments (that) are presented within a variety of

contexts (interpersonal, presentational, and interpretive modes are represented).”^① Memphis teachers also want to ensure that:

- The textbook/program provides for multiple methods of assessment, including checklists, rubrics, journals, portfolios, etc.
- The assessments have clear and precise links to the standards and learning goals and include valid scoring systems.
- The program provides access to several performance-based assessments and/or integrated performance assessments consistent with ACTFL (American Council of the Teachers of Foreign Languages) descriptions of PBAs (Performance-based Assessments).
- The program provides strategies for assessing interpretive, interpersonal and presentational modes and provides rubrics for each.
- Sufficient alternative assessment strategies and examples, including performance tasks, open-ended problems, and portfolios are included.

Unfortunately, Chinese textbooks seldom provide multiple ways to measure what students know and are able to do in terms of language usage. They tend to focus on teaching for the test. Also teaching for the test isn't bad if it is the right kind of test, such as performance-based tests. However, the systematic use of performance-based assessment should help in creating a variety of resources to be used in assessing students' performance, assessing what the students are able to do, not how well they can perform on a test.

Performance-based assessments focus on what students can do with the language rather than what they know about the language. These assessments usually puts students in a real life or simulated real life situations and ask them to complete task using the target language and cultural knowledge they have gained in learning the language and culture. Here are some sample performance-based assessment activities based on the USA-focused *Standards for Learning in the 21st Century*.

I . Communication

A. Interpersonal Mode (Speaking and Writing—Two-way Communication)

1. Exchange letters, notes, postcards, or e-mails with other students, other classes, or other schools in the U.S. or in the Chinese speaking countries.
2. Interview a peer to gather information to fill out a form, to complete a survey, to complete a job application or a business interview, etc.
3. Give and/or follow directions such as describing the way to a location or share “how-to-do” something.

^① Three modes of communication are interpretive mode, interpersonal mode and presentational mode. Interpretive mode of communication includes reading, listening and/or viewing. It is a one way communication since listeners and readers do not have opportunities to ask the speaker and writer to clarify their meaning. Interpersonal mode is two-way oral or written communication which is spontaneous and unrehearsed, and characterized by active negotiation of meaning among individuals involved. Presentational Mode is spoken or written communication prepared for an audience and rehearsed, revised or edited before presentation. It also includes showing through visual media or technology.

B. Interpretive Mode (Listening and Reading—One-way Communication)

1. Participate in kinesthetic activities, such as playing “Simon Says”, etc. to indicate comprehension.
2. Participate in a sequencing activity, such as retelling a story, putting sentences or pictures in order, creating a storyboard, filling in the “missing information”, etc.
3. Participate in a listening or viewing comprehension activity that requires problem solving, such as reacting to a scenario by choosing and/or writing the solution to the problem or possible courses of action.

C. Presentational Mode (Speaking and Writing—One-way Communication)

1. Create and present a poster with captions that illustrates something learned, such as a family tree.
2. Research and present an oral or written report about a country, famous person, or important event.
3. Create and present a story, PowerPoint, or dialogue using pictures, realia, props, etc.

II . Cultural Perspectives and Connections

1. Identify cultural differences such as animal sounds and onomatopoeia.
2. Examine newspaper articles, weather reports, movies, radio broadcasts, ads, or commercials and compare them to samples from one's home culture.
3. Create a dialogue between a reporter and a famous figure of the target culture.

1. Ideal Textbooks Have Students Experience Culture Rather Than Just Have the Teacher Talk about It

Indeed, many Chinese textbooks still focus on learning about the target culture rather than putting emphasis on experiencing the culture. An important part of experiencing the target culture is to use the target language to teach culture as much as possible. When teachers speak the target language, they give students the opportunity to experience what it is like to actually be in the target culture. It is important to use the target language to teach the target culture and immerse students in target culture as much as possible so that they can especially experience the culture. In this section I will give several examples of how to experience culture rather than teacher simply talking about it or asking students to read about it in English.

Martial art movements and Taiji movements, as well as many traditional arts, crafts, and cooking, can be taught in Chinese since the textbooks and teachers can illustrate the steps and show students physically, and students can watch, listen to and follow by doing while teachers talk them through the process.

Curtain and Dahlberg (2010) give a variety of examples on how to create experiences with culture. Some of these examples are: using stories, using fantasy activities, and working with art and artists. These are highly structured activities the authors suggests in

using the target language to create opportunities for students to experience the culture, even at the early stage of the language instruction at beginning/novice level. They can be spiraled up to meet the needs of students at different ages and with varying language proficiency levels.

Story and Culture

Story, or narrative, is a powerful vehicle for experiencing culture. Values and concepts of the culture that are embedded in myths and folktales can be shared through story telling, story reading, and dramatization. In this way they become part of the childhood experience that is a foundation for later understanding on a deeper level. For example, Chinese teacher can work on a Chinese children's story, such as Kongrong Takes a Smaller Pear (to each value of harmonious family relationship), The Little Carp Jump the Dragon Gate (the power of determination and will for self-improvement).

Fantasy Experiences/Virtual Trips

It is possible to create more extended experiences with culture in the classroom, even for students who have very limited language background. By creating simulated fantasy experiences the teacher can place students in a setting that replicates important elements of the target culture and offers the opportunity to experience new feelings, new combinations of circumstances, and new solutions to familiar problems. For example, students can take a fantasy trip to China. Chinese teacher can design activities that takes students to Beijing, China to see many of the famous historical sites and sample their favorite Chinese foods.

Art and Artists

Art can play a role in almost every kind of language activity. The stories of famous artists often draw students in and can encourage them to learn more about the artist's work, life, and environment. Some teachers have focused on the work of a single artist and had their students copy the artist's style in their own creations. This focus could serve as a thematic center for an entire unit that integrates.

Other useful strategies for integrating language and culture are found in Chapter 4 of Shrum and Glisan's *Teacher's Handbook: Contextualized Language Instruction* (2010).

- "Visual literacy: Students look at a scene from the target culture (e. g. a street scene with traffic lights or an authentic magazine advertisement and discuss the possible practices and products depicted and the perspectives to which they relate);
- Integration of language and culture: As students learn vocabulary, they see and discuss culturally authentic visuals/realia so that they acquire both language and cultural concepts. For example, in a lesson on housing, students look at photos of various types of housing from the target culture, name features of each building type, and compare and contrast the housing types with each other and with housing from their own culture;
- Semantic mapping: ... semantic maps can be used to associate word clusters graphically around an idea, key word, or concept. Words can be grouped thematically according to cultural practices and products.

• Investigation of cultural truths: students communicate with target language counterparts via e-mail to gather information about their daily routines, school, and interests, and compare these data to their own responses.”(144-145)

Chinese Proverbs, Idioms and Phrases

Culturally-rich but linguistically simple language materials can be used to teach cultural products, practices and perspectives. Such materials can be found in some Chinese proverbs, idioms and phrases. Proverbs embody timeless cultural values and are an ideal authentic way to link language and culture. Proverbs can be an effective way to teach cultural practice and perspectives. They can be used to teach many traditional Chinese values and virtues. I used proverbs to teach traditional Chinese values such as The Five Constant Virtues: 仁(仁慈,仁爱)(human heartedness); 义(righteousness); 礼(礼仪,礼节,礼貌,文雅,得体,有礼)courtesy; 智 wisdom; 信(trustworthiness)and other traditional Chinese values such as 敬老 respect for the elderly; 孝顺 filial piety; 谦虚 modesty and so on. For example, when I teach home and hometown unit, I use“月是故乡明”。(The moon is the brightest in our hometown.) to show the Chinese deep attachment with hometown and their love for their family, relatives and neighbors. I also teach about 中秋节 (Mid-Autumn moon Festival) when family members have a reunion, eating moon cakes and round shaped fruits together and looking at the beautiful full moon together. This shows the importance of roundness (or wholeness) in Chinese family and Chinese culture. As a class, we eat moon cakes together, demonstrating to students that roundness and sweetness of the moon cakes represent a happy and complete family.

To teach the importance of a harmonious family for the Chinese, I use “家有一心,有钱买金,家有二心,无钱买针。”(When a family is united, they have money to buy gold. When a family is divided, they do not even have money to buy a needle.) Even for novice level students, if we prepare appropriate visuals, we will be able to teach cultural practice and perspective in the target language. Then, I use a series of pictures to tell the story of “父亲和他的儿子们”(father and his sons) in which the father demonstrates the power of unity using chopsticks as props to teach his sons this important lesson of life. Students can further experience culture by putting on a skit for the story.

As for the value of 尊敬他人(respecting others), I use the proverb “你敬人一尺,人敬你一丈。”(If you show a foot of respect to others, they will show ten feet of respect to you!) This proverb demonstrates the importance of mutual respect in Chinese society.

As I have shown above, content rich authentic materials can be adapted for all levels of instruction, and they can be used effectively to go beyond cultural products and practices to help students understand cultural perspectives.

Ideal Textbooks Have Interdisciplinary Connections to Other School Subjects

Whenever possible, the content for K-12 textbooks should present clear interdisciplinary connections to other school subjects. Both the National Standards from the U. S. that emphasize connections in “STANDARD 3.1 Students reinforce and further

their knowledge of other discipline through the foreign language.” (“Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century”) and the redesigned AP curriculum themes underscore the importance of interdisciplinary connections for the future of world languages instruction in the United States. Unfortunately, few of the currently available textbooks have successfully addressed these interdisciplinary connections.

2. Ideal Textbooks Pay Attention to Learner Variables and Differentiation of Instruction

The ideal textbook needs to include a variety of activities that inherently and more specifically deal with the issue of learner variables in the contexts of ability, readiness, learning styles as well as addressing the needs of heritage students who are often enrolled in our language classes. This is very important since many textbook adoption policies recommend that “lessons... feature a range of instructional activities that meet the diverse needs of learners and their learning styles” and “Allow for more able learners to progress at a faster pace in the curriculum” (“Mandarin Instructional Material”).

Few Chinese textbooks would be able to meet the “Learning Strategies and Critical Thinking Skills” section of Gwinnett County’s Modern and Classical Languages Textbook Review Guide which suggests criteria for the type of textbooks that help teachers differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of all learners. Here are some helpful criteria they offer for evaluating textbooks:

- The text provides learners with strategies to help them be successful language learners.
- There is a balance of individual, paired, small group, and large group learning activities in each unit.
- Extension activities are included (for more advanced and motivated students).
- Intervention activities are included (for more students with less prior background experience and/or students with learning disability).
- Teacher materials include suggestions for addressing a variety of learning styles.
- Activities promoting higher-level thinking skills are included.

Ideal Textbooks Provide and Teach Learning

Ideal textbooks should provide and teach strategies for learners to learn and understand cognitively engaging aspects of the core curriculum and make progress in their acquisition of Chinese through the use of the target language in the classroom both for our students and their teachers. Since strategies to scaffold instruction in order to facilitate student understanding and mastery of the core curriculum through the target language is one of very important best practice.

Special study tips and more specific listening, speaking, reading and writing strategies

should be included in the textbooks from the very beginning.

Ideal textbooks Demonstrate Intercultural Sensitivity

California's *Standards for Evaluating Instructional Materials for Social Content* highlights another important component of a good Chinese language textbook: intercultural sensitivity. Some of the content areas it evaluates are: "Male and Female Roles", "Ethnic and Cultural Groups", "People with Disabilities", "Thrift", "Brand Names and Corporate Logos", "Diet and Exercise". This document highlights the need to represent cultures in non-ethnocentric and non-discriminatory ways, and it explains the specific requirements in regard to brand names and corporate logos. Some of the Chinese textbook writers might not be aware of the requirement to eliminate brand names and business logos and may include them in their books. Textbook authors need to become more aware of these important issues.

Conclusion

In sum, textbooks should provide support and guide teachers to become facilitators of language learning in a student-centered classroom. They should incorporate real-life texts and tasks, and seamlessly integrate language, culture and curriculum content. In a sense, the authenticity of task, text and context based on the use of culturally rich authentic material might prove to be "the magic" that we have all been looking for in seamlessly integrating the study of language and culture. It is this kind of authenticity that teachers are looking for in their "dream textbook". Ideal textbooks should promote and facilitate engaging students in authentic tasks that are realistic and meaningful as well as age and level appropriate. They should also provide performance-based assessments that measure what students know and are able to do in terms of language use. I realize that this is an ideal and that any movement in any of the directions mentioned in the article will be of great benefit to the profession!

Works Cited:

- [1] Aski, Janice M. Foreign Language Textbook Activities: Keeping Pace with Second Language Acquisition Research. *Foreign Language Annals*. 36.1, 2003.
- [2] California Foreign Language Project. *Mandarin Instructional Material Selection Rubric*. Stanford, California: Stanford University, School of Education, 2009.
- [3] Curtain, Helena, and Carol Ann Dahlberg. *Language and Children: Making the Match: New Languages for Young Learners, Grades K-8*. 4th Ed Boston: Pearson, 2010.
- [4] *Modern and Classical Languages Textbook Review Guide* from Gwinnett County, Georgia.

- [5] National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century: Including Chinese, Classical Languages, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish*. Lawrence, KS: 1999.
- [6] Rifkin, Benjamin. Review: Second Language Acquisition Theory and the New Generation of Russian Language Textbooks. *The Slavic and East European Journal*. 41, 2, 1997.
- [7] Shrum, Judith L. and Eileen W Glisan. *Teacher's Handbook: Contextualized Language Instruction*. Boston: Thomson Heinle, 2005.
- [8] *Standards for Evaluating Instructional Materials for Social Conten*. Sacramento, California State Department of Education, 2000.
- [9] *World Language Textbook Evaluation Form—Adoption Period July 2010—June 2016 from Memphis, Tennessee*: Memphis City Schools, 2010.