

Performing Second Language Texts and Sequels: The Case for New Practical Chinese Reader II

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“All the world’s a stage,” said Shakespeare. If life is a short drama, and everyone is an actor, why don’t we language teachers play an active part of the drama, at least to the extent of a scene? It happens that each Lesson in the first three volumes of the New Practical Chinese Reader series that we use is composed of two dialogues, and each dialogue has at least two characters and can have up to half a dozen people. This format in our Chinese as a foreign/second language textbooks seems perfect for us not only to teach the language, but also to guide the students to perform it.

This essay will specifically discuss how the teaching and learning of the New Practical Chinese Reader II has been combined with performing of the texts and the creation of students’ own plays as a sequel to each dialogue. By comparing the original dialogue-text and students’ or the teacher’s creative writings as a sequel, we will demonstrate that students’ performance is not merely the acting of the text, but rather tailoring it to suit their own familiar settings and daily life, and most importantly, training their imagination pragmatically when a sequel is added to selected dialogues.

It is found that students do not really understand the dialogues in the textbook well until they can perform them dramatically and they do not really get to the heart and soul of the language unless they can write a sequel to the text. It is through their own writings, based on the words and phrases, sentence structures, and content already learned that students can gain new insights through reviewing old material in a comprehensive way. It is through their own performance that students can reinforce everything in an entertaining way, learn the texts by heart, and practice what they have learned in real life more impressively.

In conclusion, in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating, and for communication, performance seems a very good solution in language teaching and learning.