TACKLING CHINESE LITERACY WITH A LEVELED READING PLATFORM

Presented by
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Acknowledgment

Thank you to the Confucius Institute of the State of Washington (CIWA) for sponsoring our team from Seattle Public Schools and the University of Washington to present at CABE Conference 2018.

Topics for this session

• Seattle’s journey with Mandarin Dual Language Immersion and challenges with teaching Chinese literacy
• Confucius Institute’s Chinese Literacy Project
• CIWA-Sponsored Pilot of Level Chinese and online Joy Reader
• What is Level Chinese and why use it?
• Initial impressions from the pilot
• Looking ahead

Seattle’s Journey in Mandarin Dual Language Immersion

Mandarin Dual Language Immersion (DLI) launched in Seattle:
• Fall 2008 at Beacon Hill International School
• Fall 2014 at Dearborn Park International School
• Fall 2014 at Mercer International Middle School
• Fall 2017 First cohort entered High School

On the Path to Proficiency

• Over multiple years of proficiency testing* at 3rd, 5th, and 8th grade benchmarks, Reading in Chinese was always the lowest skill
• We determined that to expand their Reading proficiency, students need to read more broadly and more often

*Seattle uses the Standards-based Measurement of Proficiency (STAMP) from Avant Assessment

Challenge of Teaching Literacy in a Chinese DLI Program

• In DLI the focus is on teaching content (e.g., Math and Science) so teachers prioritize that
• In a 50:50 time model, there is never enough time in the partner language to teach content and language (and literacy)
• Teaching literacy in a character-based language (like Chinese) requires a different approach than teaching literacy in a language with a shared alphabet (like Spanish)
At middle school, content instruction shifts from Math and Science to Social Studies. Students need strong literacy skills to engage with the content. They need to enjoy communicating and learning in Chinese in order to stay motivated to continue.

Even with books in Chinese provided by Hanban and the Confucius Institute, we could not do a good job of matching books to students. Elementary and Middle School content teachers were not necessarily trained to teach literacy in Chinese. We did not have a systematic approach to developing literacy skills in Chinese.

Following workshops in 2015 with Dr. Mimi Met, sponsored by the Confucius Institute of the State of Washington (CIWA), we decided to launch the Chinese Literacy Project. The goal is to create a set of resources and curriculum frameworks that will benefit Seattle’s Mandarin Dual Language Immersion Programs, but also be shared across Washington state and the United States.

How to make this happen?

1. **Books and Reading Materials**
   Students need access to engaging reading materials—at a level they can comprehend—in order to engage in reading beyond classroom activities. We need to provide our Mandarin teachers and school libraries an ample supply of books and reading materials that students can use at school and take home with them (sometimes to keep). And we need a system for getting them to students, keeping track of what students have read (from grades K-8, not just year by year), and sharing resources across schools so that we can provide greater variety at lower cost.

2. **Articulated Literacy Instruction**
   In addition to access to materials and books, students need a way to identify which materials and books are appropriate for them so that they’re reading things that they can understand and enjoy. In order to provide that guidance, our Mandarin teachers at all levels need a clear sense of how students are developing literacy across the years. We need to make explicit the language and literacy goals for each grade level and develop or identify assessments that will help teachers and students know where they are along the continuum.

3. **Summer Reading Programs**
   We can’t afford to lose an entire summer between school years. Just like the libraries engage in summer reading programs that motivate students to set goals and track their reading, we need to do the same. And we need to have materials available—whether it’s summer reading kits from school or more books available at the local public libraries. We need to recognize students for their efforts and nudge reluctant readers to participate too.
WE NEEDED:

- Source of online books
- Printed books that could be marked with levels
- Leveling system to guide our teachers and students and an assessment system for determining what levels students should be working at
- Instructional objectives so that teachers could guide students into higher reading levels

Dr. Mimi Met recommended that we explore Level Chinese. We decided to pilot Level Chinese along with the online reading platform Joy Reader.

Where to find books at appropriate reading levels?

Level Chinese Pilot: Begin with Middle School DLI

- First priority was Middle School Dual Language Immersion because we knew that if students did not expand their literacy skills they would not be motivated to continue on to AP and IB in high school
- We wanted them to love reading Chinese on their own, growing their curiosity about Chinese beyond the classroom
- Winter 2017: We introduced Level Chinese to 7th and 8th graders; later added 6th graders

Level Chinese Pilot: Don’t forget Elementary

- As the elementary DLI teachers heard about Level Chinese and saw what the middle schoolers were doing, they became interested too
- Started with 2nd/3rd grade Mandarin DLI teacher, who launched the Summer Reading Program for students heading into 4th grade
- Then the 4th/5th grade Mandarin DLI teacher got interested too, seeing it as an important way to transition from elementary to middle school
- At a second school, both K/1st and 2nd/3rd Mandarin DLI teachers began using Level Chinese too
- As of winter 2018, all of the Seattle Mandarin DLI teachers have access to Level Chinese and Joy Reader

Level Chinese Pilot: What about High School?

- At a workshop on Level Chinese and Joy Reader in Summer 2017, the high school Chinese teachers also got interested, so we invited them to join the pilot

What is Level Chinese? Why would I use it?

Reading Objectives: Why do they matter?
Importance of Leveled Fiction AND Non-Fiction

Instruction of objectives MUST be paired with student applying the objectives during reading.

Level Chinese defined 20 levels of Text Complexity Description for Fiction and Non-Fiction.

We level published books, now over 1000 titles in our leveled book list.

And we supply worksheets to ensure student demonstrate reading comprehension.

Track Student Progress

- Green means Mastered
- Purple (any shade) means Not Mastered
- Blue means assessment assigned

Analyze Data

- Objectives are teaching points
- Language & Vocabulary
- Reading Comprehension

Initial Impressions from the Pilot in Seattle

Enthusiastic Chinese teachers after Literacy Workshop August 2017

Student surveys in Elementary

Students 2nd-5th grade were surveyed about their experience of Level Chinese & Joy Reader.

What we found:

- If the students are just given the online books (without careful instruction on the reading objectives in Level Chinese), they tend to find the books “boring” and they don’t think they’re making progress in reading.

- Sometimes they forget to log in to read books.
Student surveys in Elementary

- Comments from 2nd-3rd graders where they have received reading instruction

```plaintext
1. Do you like reading Joy Reader online?
   Yes, it makes it easier to read books because there is a reader and words in some books.
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Student surveys in Elementary

- Are they making progress in reading Chinese?

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3. Do you feel like you’re making progress in reading in Chinese? (Are you more confident now?)
   Yes, I am more confident now.
   Yes, I am more confident now. I read more every time.
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High School Challenges

- We followed up with the high school teachers in the pilot and heard:
  - Teachers felt they could determine the appropriate reading level for their students on their own (so they were not using Level Chinese).
  - Some preferred to assign the same book to all students and create their own worksheets.
  - Some schools lack technology for students to access online accounts on a regular basis.
  - Two of the high schools are International Baccalaureate (IB) schools. Teachers focus their teaching on IB topics and must spend the limited instructional time preparing students for the IB assessments.

High School Successes

- At Rainier Beach High School they are using online Joy Reader for differentiation to offer students supplementary reading resources.
  - Teacher selects books that would be appropriate for the students’ level of Chinese and related to the topics in the curricular units.

Possible changes for next year

- Give beginning (Chinese 1) students Level Chinese accounts and start integrating the objectives from Level Chinese into the current Chinese curriculum map.
- District is rolling out new laptops for students.
  - Will greater access to technology make it easier for teachers to implement leveled reading in a more student-centered way?

Looking Ahead

- Based on our district’s experience with Level Chinese and online books (Joy Reader), we decided to take a similar approach for Spanish and have begun introducing RAZ-PLUS to our Spanish DLI teachers in elementary and middle school.
- We hope to provide a Chinese literacy coach from the district next year to support literacy development in all the Mandarin DLI programs.
- We want to explore further how our traditional high school world language programs are doing Chinese literacy.
We welcome your questions, comments, and suggestions.

For more information, visit:
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Thank you for ATTENDING!