Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment for Elementary Chinese and Immersion Programs

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Introduction

World language education in the United States is becoming increasingly important and is an integral component of our ever-changing global society. Students must strive to become 21st century citizens, fully equipped with the necessary skills to participate successfully in school, the workplace, and their lives. These skills include intercultural competence as well as interpersonal skills, which are learned and enhanced in language classes. Across the country, more and more young learners have the opportunity to study Chinese in elementary school. Elementary school Chinese programs help to prepare students with a solid foundation in Chinese language and culture and lead them toward becoming proficient speakers. The design of these programs is integral to their success in providing students with Chinese language and culture that is developmentally and linguistically appropriate.

This Brief provides information and strategies for curriculum planning, instruction, and assessment for language learning and teaching. It also highlights components needed for a successful elementary school experience and provides strategies for engaging children in their learning. It intends to be useful for Chinese language teachers, curriculum developers, and program administrators in helping children achieve their targeted learning goals in the elementary school Chinese foreign language or immersion program.

The Brief draws heavily on knowledge and resources developed and lessons learned from STARTALK, a U.S. Department of Defense-funded project whose mission is "to increase the number of U.S. citizens learning, speaking, and teaching critical need foreign languages" (STARTALK, 2017). Since 2007, STARTALK has offered students in grades K–16 and teachers of these languages "creative and engaging summer experiences that strive to exemplify best practices in language education and in language teacher development." These programs are developed using principles of highly effective language teaching and learning, which have become the foundation for successful STARTALK programs. Learners work with authentic, age-appropriate texts, in a learner-centered environment, as they engage in real-world performance tasks, which allow them to use the target language beyond the classroom.

The six principles guide all student and teacher programs through every step of the designing and implementation process:

- Designing and implementing a standards-based and thematically organized curriculum
- Facilitating a learner-centered classroom
- Using the target language and providing comprehensible input for instruction
- Integrating culture, content, and language in a world language classroom
- Adapting and using age-appropriate authentic materials
- Conducting performance-based assessment (STARTALK, 2017, startalk.umd.edu/public/principles)

STARTALK-Endorsed Principles for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

The six research-based principles that build the foundation for effective Chinese and any world language programs are explained as follows:

Designing and Implementing a Standards-based and Thematically Organized Curriculum

In their book *Understanding by Design,* Wiggins and McTighe (2005) define backwards design as "an approach to designing a curriculum or unit that begins with the end in mind and designs towards that end" (p. 338). For teachers and curriculum writers, this means that they must first identify the desired results and then determine the evidence necessary to show that the results have been achieved. This method can be applied to language programs and their curriculum design, keeping in mind the targeted levels of language proficiency and then creating, planning, and designing activities and lessons that allow continual assessment of student progress along the way.

When designing curriculum using the backwards design approach, thematic units are recommended, because learners acquire language best in meaningful contexts (Clementi & Terrill, 2013). Thematic units appeal to young learners by arousing their natural curiosity about a set of related topics. This is also a goal reflected in the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* (ACTFL, 2015). (See Additional Resources for a list of these and other resources described in this Brief.)

According to Clementi and Terrill (in *The Keys to Planning for Learning,* 2013), units should be designed around five basic principles:

- Communicatively purposeful: building toward proficiency
- Culturally focused: developing interculturality
- Intrinsically interesting: relevant to learners
- Cognitively engaging: requiring critical thinking skills
- Standards-based: reflecting goals for learning languages

There are many benefits to thematic planning that helps engage learners and leads them on their journey to becoming proficient. Thematic units immerse students in the target language and culture. According to Curtain and Dahlberg (2016), when the themes are well chosen, students will be more engaged with the learning, because they can see its purpose and find it interesting and engaging.

In addition, Curtain and Dahlberg (2016, p. 38) explain that thematic planning and instruction:

- Makes instruction more comprehensible, because the theme creates a meaningful context.
- Connects content, language, and culture goals to a "big idea."
- Avoids the use of isolated exercises with grammatical structures, practiced out of context, that tend to fragment language at the word or sentence level and to neglect the discourse level.
- Changes the instructional focus from the language itself to the use of language to achieve meaningful goals.
- Involves activities or tasks that engage learners in complex thinking and more sophisticated uses of the language.
- Involves students in real language use in a variety of situations, modes, and text types.
- Offers a natural setting for uses of narrative structure and for task-based organization of content.

Facilitating a Learner-Centered Classroom

According to the National Education Association (NEA, 2017), "new discoveries about how the human brain learns and the subsequent recommendations for how to teach in harmony with these discoveries have guided the learner-centered approach to teaching".

Teachers usually have students with a wide range of interests, abilities, learning styles, and personalities in their

classes. In a learner-centered classroom, differentiated instruction is a key approach in promoting the success of all students. Differentiation is defined as "tailoring instruction to meet individual needs. Whether teachers differentiate content, process, products, or the learning environment, the use of ongoing assessment and flexible grouping makes this a successful approach to instruction" (Tomlinson, 2000).

In *A Differentiated Classroom* (1999), Tomlinson offers some strategies that teachers can use to differentiate instruction and reach all learners:

- *Stations.* Using stations involves setting up different spots in the classroom where students work on various tasks simultaneously. These stations invite flexible grouping, because not all students need to go to all stations all the time.
- *Compacting.* This strategy encourages teachers to assess students before beginning a unit of study or developing a specific skill. Students who do well on the pre-assessment do not continue working on what they already know.
- *Agendas.* These are personalized lists of tasks that a student must complete in a specified time, usually two to three weeks. Student agendas throughout a class will have similar and dissimilar elements.
- *Complex Instruction.* This strategy uses challenging materials, open-ended tasks, and small instructional groups. Teachers move among the groups as they work, asking students questions and probing their thinking.
- *Problem-Based Learning.* This strategy places students in the active role of solving problems in much the same way that adult professionals perform their jobs.
- *Choice Boards.* With this strategy, work assignments are written on cards that are placed in hanging pockets. By asking a student to select a card from a particular row of pockets, the teacher targets work toward student needs and also allows student choice.

Can-Do statements can be useful tools for the teacher to address the needs of all students and ensure their progress in a differentiated classroom. (For details about Can-Do Statements, see the section on Assessment, below.) First, they provide a means for student self-reflection which, when stated in age-appropriate language, is informative for even the youngest learners. The self-reflection lets teachers know where the students think they are on certain skills and content. The "show me" opportunities provide evidence for what students can do with the language, which can inform

future instruction. Perhaps some students need more practice with vocabulary, or others are ready to move on to writing short sentences. The activities and modes of communication described in the sample unit (in the section on Conducting Performance-Based Assessment, A Sample Unit Design, and other parts of this Brief), *Me and My Family,* are designed through the lens of differentiation.

In learner-centered classrooms, students and teachers are engaged in speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing, and creating in the target language at least 90% or more of class time (see discussion in the next section). Comprehensible input through well-designed thematic lessons provides contexts and opportunities for interaction with the language.

When students participate in tasks that are at their level and for which they have a clear learning target, they will be engaged and, in turn, make progress in their language learning. (More explanations and examples of learner-centered strategies can be found in the section on Examples and Resources from STARTALK.)

Using the Target Language and Providing Comprehensible Input for Instruction

A key component of elementary school Chinese programs is teaching in the target language and creating an immersion-like environment for the students. The single greatest factor in building student proficiency is use of the target language. This is especially important for the youngest learners, as early exposure to the language leads learners to move through the language proficiency scale to reach the advanced level by high school graduation. In the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* (2015), the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) points out research findings that target-language interaction plays a pivotal role in language learning. ACTFL recommends that language educators and their students use the target language as much as possible (90% plus) at all levels of instruction during instructional time and, when feasible, beyond the classroom (ACTFL, 2010). (For ACTFL's position statement on use of the target language, see https://www.actfl.org/news/position-statements/use-the-target-language-the-classroom.)

Target language input must be comprehensible to students. Krashen advises language teachers to "give students comprehensible messages that they will pay attention to, and

they will pay attention if the messages are interesting" (Krashen, 2003, p. 4).

The STARTALK website (https://startalk.umd.edu/public) provides several examples of strategies for providing comprehensible input in the target language to Novice-level learners, even in the first few days of class. For example, *Storytelling* is one effective way to introduce vocabulary with age-appropriate visuals and hands-on activities (https://startalk.umd.edu/public/videos/lcc1).

Integrating Culture, Content, and Language in a World Language Classroom

Using the Backwards Design Model, teachers are able to develop essential questions that reflect thematic lesson design with a focus on real-life topics and skills. Culturally authentic scenarios help students to immerse themselves in the content as they develop their language skills. Teachers develop a content-focused theme, such as protecting the environment or traveling in the country where the target language is spoken, and use authentic resources to provide instruction. In one example from the STARTALK website (https://startalk.umd.edu/public/principles/ccl), for a unit on *Water, Water, Everywhere,* the teacher uses Chinese waterways, familiar fish-related characters, and songs in a lesson about water and water pollution. Students learn the facts about oil and garbage polluting water in a Chinese context and compare them with those in their local context. In working with units on travel, the Internet offers many real-life examples of traveling in China, from arriving in Beijing, to navigating the train system, to finding historical landmarks to explore. Video clips can be used to introduce language and culture, while learning geography and history.

Adapting and Using Age-Appropriate Authentic Materials

Real-life artifacts from the country and language of study help learners make emotional and cognitive connections with the language, which is especially true for young students. With the Internet, authentic and culturally rich Chinese resources, such as digital storybooks, advertising, and artwork, are available to learners. Developing appropriate hands-on tasks using carefully selected and adapted materials provides many opportunities for learning. It is also true for differentiated instruction — some students can circle familiar characters, while others can respond to questions about the text. Using these resources also provides wonderful opportunities for learners to access and explore

different cultures. The STARTALK website offers an excellent presentation on how to effectively incorporate authentic images into lessons to increase comprehensible input and culture awareness (https://startalk.umd.edu/public/videos/terrill_image?st=1). For an example of providing comprehensible input and using age-appropriate activities in a Chinese classroom, see https://startalk.umd.edu/public/principles/utl2. Notice how the teacher uses props and gestures to convey meaning and engage her students in meaningful activities.

Conducting Performance-Based Assessment

As students study a language, beginning at the earliest grades and continuing into higher education, the goal is to increase their language proficiency. As teachers guide students through the curriculum, they also assess their performance, what students can do with the language.

ACTFL describes performance as "the ability to use language that has been learned and practiced in an instructional setting" (*ACTFL Performance Descriptors*, 2012, p. 4). The use of performance tasks in the different modes of communication (interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational) allows students to practice the language functions, structures, and vocabulary in a real-life, communicative manner, which increases their proficiency in the target language. Teachers use various performance tasks related to specific curricular content as a means to assess (formatively) their students' progress. The results can inform lessons and activities for future instruction that leads to summative performances.

In *The Keys to Assessing Language Performance: A Teacher's Manual for Measuring Student Progress* (2010), Sandrock describes the need for classroom activities to be motivating, so that students have an interest in communicating. The use of performance tasks that are real-life, at the learners' levels, and related to their interests gives students the desire to communicate as well as a strong basis for assessment. When investigating authenticity of a task in test development, Wu and Stansfield (2001) found that the more valuable tests have "tasks that are as close as possible to tasks in real life that test takers are expected to perform" (p. 203). In this way, students participate in tasks in which they are engaged, moving toward proficiency, and practicing their language skills. The teacher then has the means to assess the students on their performance through the activities and tasks and can use that information to guide instruction.

Assessments in the elementary school language classroom occur daily, often multiple times, on an informal basis. Simple ways to integrate daily learning checks and formative assessments into the classroom include:

- Thumbs-up, thumbs down movement to communicate agreement or disagreement with a statement
- The "do-as-I-say" command, where students act out a simple instruction following a teacher's statement (e.g., please bring me a pencil) or the lyrics of a song
- White board hold-ups, which allow students to write an answer to a question and hold it up for the teacher to view
- Line ups (e.g., Please line up according to your birthday, January at the beginning of the line.)

Assessments also occur at the end of a unit, often in the form of a performance task for each mode of communication. Figure 1 below contains examples of performance activities for each mode of communication.

Several tools for how to map and assess student language learning outcomes are available online. For example, a CELIN Brief, *Mapping Chinese Learning Outcomes in Grades K-12* (http://asiasociety.org/files/uploads/522files/2016-celin-brief-mapping-chinese-language-learning-outomes-in-grades-k-12.pdf), provides two charts illustrating possible student learning outcomes for various program types in a K-16 sequence. It also provides a list of useful external assessment instruments.

Another useful resource for setting student learning outcomes is the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements (https://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/ncssfl-actfl-can-do-statements), which were developed as a means to "help learners identify what they need to do to function at a specific level of proficiency. The statements also help educators plan curriculum, units of instruction, and daily lessons to help learners improve their performance and reach a targeted level of proficiency. Through multiple opportunities to show what they can do in classroom formative and summative assessments, unit by unit, learners collect the evidence that points toward a specific proficiency level" (NCSSFL-ACTFL, 2017). The Can-Do Statements (also referred to as "show me's") allow for differentiation in lesson design and assessment, as students are able to self-reflect, create their own goals, and track their progress as they move toward proficiency.

The *ACTFL Performance Descriptors* (2012) are an additional assessment tool: (https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/ACTFLPerformance-Descriptors.pdf), which offers descriptions of language performance resulting from learning in an instructional setting (in the classroom or online). The performance descriptors describe language performance for the levels Novice through Advanced in each mode of communication. The various elements of the performance descriptors are now incorporated into the language of the performance indicators of the revised Can-Do statements. In this way, they lend themselves well to self-reflection and can serve as a guideline for learning targets and goal setting. However, it is important to note that neither the Can-Do statements nor the performance indicators serve as a curriculum. Instead, they guide teachers in their design of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

For example, as part of the Essential Question; Who Am I?, in the unit on *Me and My Family*, teachers can create their own Can-Do statements, using the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements as a guideline for appropriate tasks for the modes of communication and levels of proficiency. In an elementary school Chinese classroom in the United States, this would most likely be Novice Low to Novice High, with some aim at Intermediate Low. The set of Can-Do Statements for the unit might include, but not be limited to:

- I can identify my family members. (Presentational, Interpersonal)
- I can ask and answer questions about the people in my family. (Interpersonal)
- I can recognize family member words. (Interpretive)
- I can write a list of my family members. (Presentational)

These Can-Do statements are a learner-friendly way to incorporate backwards design principles; to teach with the end in mind. Knowing what the teacher wants the students to do at the end of the unit allows the teacher to design activities and lessons to teach the necessary content and skills. Most important, these activities and lessons should include "show me" opportunities that enable students to show what they can do with the language. For example, if the Can-Do statement "I can write a list of my family members" is part of the unit, the teacher gives students the opportunity to show that they can do this. This Can-Do statement can double as a daily learning target to focus the lesson for the students and the teacher.

Examples and Resources From STARTALK

STARTALK has produced numerous sample curricula, units, lessons, and videos, all available on its website (https://startalk.umd.edu/public/principles). Following are some examples that illustrate how the STARTALK-endorsed principles can be applied in the classroom.

A Sample Unit Design

An example for an elementary school Chinese unit as part of the Essential Question of Who Am I, on the topic of *Me and My Family*, illustrates a thematically focused unit, which is age-appropriate and relevant to the students. It allows students to activate their own background knowledge and natural interest in talking about their families and people close to them. Using the Backwards Design Model, the unit topic would include a broader essential question or set of questions that would serve to guide the lessons, activities, and assessments of the entire unit. Potential essential questions include:

- What is my family like?
- How do I talk about my family?
- What does family mean to me?

These questions are content-based and provide a context for the various lessons and activities in the unit. In this way, the lessons include vocabulary and language control points that are necessary for the students to participate in the unit, in order to meet the goal of being able to talk about their families.

A Sample Lesson Design

STARTALK-endorsed principles are applied throughout the unit in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. In order to help students meet this goal, the lessons must be designed carefully and executed thoughtfully, so that students are receiving 90% plus target language instruction and are engaged and participating. "We know that we acquire language in only one way: when we understand a message; that is, when we obtain comprehensible input "(Krashen, 2003, p. 4). "This is also known as i +1. We use our knowledge of the world and knowledge of a situation in order to move to the +1, in other words, context" (p. 4). Visuals are a very effective way to make input comprehensible to beginning language learners. The total physical response (TPR) method also plays a role in making input comprehensible. (Teachers give commands to students in the target language, and students respond with actions.)

Engaging and effective instruction that captures the interest of all students has been shown to minimize classroom management issues. If students believe that they have a role in their instruction, as in a learner-centered classroom, they will naturally be more engaged (Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003). Their engagement is key to building language proficiency. The daily lessons and activities are the center of the elementary school language program. This is where students and teachers interact on a regular basis with the language and the culture, taking steps toward becoming listeners, speakers, readers, and writers of the language.

Lessons are centered on the three modes of communication: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational. According to the *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learning* (2012), these modes of communication provide the organizing principle for describing language performance across the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Within a unit, students are always working toward building communicative strategies in each skill area. The lessons in the unit are designed to provide instruction and practice in these modes, so that students move forward on the proficiency scale. They need many opportunities to interact with the language in a variety of lessons and activities. In Figure 1, shown on the following page, we describe how this might take place in the unit on *Me and My Family.*

FIGURE 1. Lesson design with the modes of communication for *Me and My Family* unit: Novice Level

MODE OF COMMUNICATION	DESCRIPTION	SAMPLE ACTIVITY
INTERPERSONAL	Listening and speaking (conversation)	**Gap activity:** Person A has a picture of a family with names of the father, daughter, and grandfather missing. Person B has a picture of the same family with the names of the mother, son, and grandmother missing.
	Reading and writing (text messages)	
	Active negotiation of meaning	
	Two-way communication	
INTERPRETIVE	Reading, listening, or viewing	**Reading:** Students match sentences about a family member to the picture of the family member being described; "Jen is the mother" would be matched to a picture of the mother.
	Interpretation of the meaning of the message	
	One-way communication	**Listening:** Students watch and listen to a video about a family. They answer questions about the family.
PRESENTATIONAL	Writing, speaking, visually representing	**Writing:** Students write sentences about the people in their families.
	Creation of messages	**Speaking:** Students describe a picture of their family to the class or to a partner, naming the members of the family, listing, or using complete sentences.
	One-way communication	**Visually representing:** Students draw and label a picture of their family.

The *interpersonal mode* includes the function of asking, understanding, and answering questions in listening and speaking. Activities in the interpersonal communication mode include tasks that require active negotiation of meaning among individuals. For this unit, interpersonal tasks can begin with information gap activities to practice vocabulary and can lead to students asking and answering questions to get information about each other's families. An information gap activity is "an activity where learners are missing the information they need to complete a task and need to talk to each other to find it" (British Council BBC, 2017). For example, two students might have a picture of a family, with some of the family members labeled in the target language. On one student's picture, there might be missing family member names, like the name of the father. One student would ask his/her partner, in the target language, who the father is and fill in the information. When students have practiced the vocabulary, they can move to using the language in more complex ways. For example, they can ask and answer questions using a single word, a short phrase, a sentence, and then multiple-sentence discourse. This activity can be done effectively in classes at the Novice level. (See *ACTFL Performance Descriptors*, 2012, www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/ACTFLPerformance-Descriptors.pdf, for more information about proficiency levels.)

A key function of the *interpretive mode* is comprehending main ideas and identifying supporting details in the skill areas of reading and listening. Activities for the interpretive mode require the learner to interpret what the author or speaker wants the receiver of the message to understand. For Novice-level learners, interpretive tasks might include looking at pictures of a family and reading sentences about that family. An interpretive reading task might be matching the sentence to the correct person in the picture. For example, "Jen is the mother" might be a sentence, and the student would match it to the mother in the picture. For interpretive listening, students can practice with the teacher in many informal quick checks. In the task mentioned above, instead of reading the sentences, students would listen to the sentences read aloud by the teacher. Interpretive listening might also involve watching a video of someone introducing themselves and their family in the target language, and answering comprehension questions in English based on the video.

The *presentational mode* is the presenting of information in the language in writing and speaking or by some visual representation. Tasks might include writing messages, telling a story, giving a speech, describing a poster, or creating a video. The presentational mode for Novice-level learners in the *Me and My Family* unit might include students listing the members of their family. Depending on their language level, they might use additional information, such as their names and ages. Students at the Novice level could also create a family portrait and label it as a writing and visual representation.

Within each lesson, there will be a focus on one communication mode, but throughout the activities, multiple modes may be touched on in order to maximize target language use and language learning. Planning activities within each mode is a way to differentiate and make the class more learner-centered.

Another key to each lesson is the *daily learning target*. The learning target clearly states what you expect students to know and be able to do at the end of the lesson. It should be appropriate for the students' levels of proficiency and include a language function that is based on the modes of communication. The learning target is very useful for providing a focus to the lesson. When posted in the classroom (English can be used for this purpose in first-year classes), the learning target also serves to inform the students what they are working on and what they will know and be able to do by the end of the lesson. It should include tasks, functions, and content that lead to the students reaching part of a larger goal of the thematic unit.

When students have a clear learning target set, they will be able to engage accordingly and work to meet it. For example, in the *Me and My Family* Unit, a daily learning target might be "I can name the members of my family." For that lesson, students know that throughout the activities, they are working toward using the family member vocabulary as it relates to their own family. They have a purpose for participating in the activities and will be engaged in the class as a result. This is important, too, for creating a context for the learners to use the target language in class. When students are aware of the learning target (for example, that throughout the lesson they are learning to name family members), they will already have a place in their minds to use the target language vocabulary. This will increase their comprehensible input and their language acquisition.

For more activity ideas for practicing vocabulary and grammatical patterns, go to the STARTALK website (https://startalk.umd.edu/public/system/files/resources/supplementalactivities_startalkmodellessonplans2017.docx). Many STARTALK teachers report success when implementing these activities in their classes.

STARTALK Video Resources Illustrating the Six Principles

Facilitating a Learner-Centered Classroom

In the video, *Facilitating a Learner-Centered Classroom*, (https://startalk.umd.edu/public/principles/lcc) teachers demonstrate how they use age-appropriate and real-world themes to engage students and minimize classroom management issues. In a learner-centered classroom, the teacher:

- Acts as a partner with students in the learning process
- Gives learners voice and choice according to their needs, age, and abilities
- Makes instructional decisions based on learners' performances
- Engages learners in cognitively challenging real-world tasks
- Creates multiple opportunities for learners to interpret and express ideas about topics of interest to them
- Provides learners opportunities to collaborate while using language to accomplish a meaningful task
- Allows for ongoing feedback from a variety of sources to improve learners' performance

The teacher gradually releases control of the learning process to the students through the "I do", "we do", "you do" model. In the "I do" stage, the teacher provides input, and students engage with the content. They then move to the "we do" stage, where students begin to work with teacher support; the teacher then guides and supports the students as they engage in small-group activities that allow them to interpret and express meaning for real-world purposes. In the "you do" stage, students work independently, demonstrating progress toward their learning goals as the teacher monitors their work and provides feedback.

Applying this model to the *Me and My Family* Novice unit, during the "I do" stage, the teacher presents family vocabulary using pictures, movement, or other graphic aids

to allow the students to process the information. In the "we do" stage, students begin to use the information as they match family names to pictures and share through visuals or simple statements their family structures with another student. In the "you do" stage, the students apply the knowledge as they create a graphic organizer of their family engaging in separate activities of interest. At the end of this exercise, students have learned family names and how to share their family and their interests with others, but most importantly, they have actively participated in learning.

Integrating Culture, Content, and Language

To keep learners interested in learning Chinese, the content must be interesting to them and make connections to what they already know. While content related to families, pets, and play will interest elementary school students, high school students are more interested in making connections to and comparisons with the lives of teenagers in other areas of the world. They want to know how other students spend their free time, what subjects they learn, what music they prefer, and the friends they have. When this STARTALK principle is applied, students use language to identify, discuss, and compare products, practices, and perspectives of the cultures studied. They use content to build on and expand their knowledge of other disciplines while using the target language, and they use language in the interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational modes in a variety of situations and for multiple purposes. This integration of culture, content, and language results in meaningful communication: knowing how, when, and why to say what to whom (STARTALK, 2017). The STARTALK video collection includes a guided video that integrates these three elements in a science class for intermediate learners, along with teacher reflections on how they prepared for these learning episodes (https://startalk.umd.edu/public/principles/ccl).

Using the Target Language and Providing Comprehensible Input

This STARTALK principle challenges teachers most often, especially when they are working with Novice-level learners. How, teachers ask, can students understand the target language in the first few days of class? The STARTALK website provides extensive resources on this topic that give reasons for staying in the target language, strategies for doing so, and actual classroom examples with teachers using Chinese for instruction with Novice-level students.

The video, *Using the Target Language and Making Comprehensible Input,* startalk.umd.edu/public/videos/usingtargetlanguage considers two key questions -- Why is it so important to use the target language? and How do we make input comprehensible? -- and provides examples of using only Chinese on the second day of class to learn about the Spring Festival. Students are actively engaged in learning about the festival culture, foods, symbols, and traditions. Teachers reflect on the planning and resources that were involved in preparing for this lesson.

Developed by the Global Village Academy with STARTALK funding, *Making Meaning in the Immersion Classroom* is a five-part video series created to help immersion teachers understand the concept of comprehensible input and make language input clear to their students. The video provides valuable information about comprehensible input strategies: visual cues, context, and language: startalk.umd.edu/public/videos/MakingMeaningInTheImmersionClassroom?st=1

The STARTALK video collection provides a number of examples of strategies that teachers can use to make language comprehensible, monitor student comprehension, and make adjustments as necessary. For example, stories are an effective means for teaching vocabulary, especially with young learners. Interesting visuals accompany the story, and often natural repetition occurs. One video provides an example of how a simple Chinese story, The Chinese Cat Goes Fishing, is used to make new vocabulary comprehensible. These videos are accompanied by guides that specify learning targets for the lesson and provide questions for the viewer to consider while watching the video: startalk.umd.edu/public/resources/classroom-video-collection/rutgers-chinese?st=1

Another video provides an example of a teacher using the target language with comprehensible input during a demonstration at a STARTALK conference. The demonstration involved conference participants who had no previous knowledge of Chinese, but by the end of the short lesson, they were able to understand directions and sort pictures into living and inanimate categories. One can observe how the teacher effectively uses visuals, gestures, body language, and repetition to introduce vocabulary: startalk.umd.edu/public/resources/classroom-video-collection/rutgers-chinese?st=1

Model Curricula

The three principles addressed above center around the use of a standards-based and thematically organized curriculum. STARTALK programs are generally conducted during the summer over a period of two to seven weeks, for as long as six or seven hours per day. Developing curricula for these unusual circumstances was particularly challenging during the first years of STARTALK. Few STARTALK teachers had experience with developing curricula, especially curricula that would keep students engaged for up to seven hours a day. To facilitate the development of curricula at the program level, STARTALK commissioned curriculum developers to create model curricula, which could be adapted to any of the eleven STARTALK languages. The curricula are focused around two common themes used in programs -- travel and identity -- and demonstrate how these themes can be used with different age groups and proficiency levels. The purpose is to offer samples of learning experiences, with the understanding that teachers would adapt these samples to meet the various linguistic and cultural requirements of their individual classes. (https://startalk.umd.edu/public/model-curricula?st=1)

Understanding the U.S. and Chinese Education Systems

A critical factor to keep in mind when designing and implementing effective programs is the knowledge and background that the international Chinese teachers bring to the program. (See also the CELIN Brief, *Guide to Supporting International Chinese Language Teachers in U.S. K-12 Programs,* for more information.) Based on STARTALK data from teacher programs, 62% of Chinese teachers in the programs list Chinese as their native language, and many of them are foreign-born and educated. As a result, many of these teachers are not familiar with the structure and practices of the U.S. education system. The following are some of the more salient differences and similarities between the two systems (Dalian, 2007).

Class sizes are quite large in China, often with over 50 children in a class. U.S. classes often range between 25 and 30 children in a class. The teaching load for a teacher in China is usually two classes per day, where a full-time U.S. teacher typically teaches five classes per day. Both Chinese and U.S. teachers use their preparation time to correct student work and plan for upcoming classes.

Student movement. Chinese students often stay in a classroom with their peers for all of their classes, with the teachers coming to them for each different class, regardless of grade level. Students tend to move with the same students from level to level, and this cohort concept is carried into the university level as well. Students in U.S. elementary schools usually stay in the same classroom all day except for extracurricular or special activities. Often, by sixth grade (middle school), they move to a few different classes during the day. By high school, they move to a different classroom each period throughout the school day.

Teacher roles and status. The concept of head teacher, "banzhuren 班主任," is important in the Chinese education system. This person takes on the responsibilities of delivering instruction, supervising classes, and reaching out to families. Some U.S. school systems have head teachers or department supervisors, who have more program management responsibilities and sometimes are responsible for supervising teaching staff. The Chinese believe in merit pay and in basing teacher evaluations on students' test scores. This is not a common practice in the United States, although some groups have advocated for a merit pay-based system (i.e., Teacher Advancement Program, TAP, launched by the Milken Family Foundation in 1999).

Student discipline in Chinese schools is different than in American schools in that there is minimal student supervision between classes and during lunch. U.S. teachers are assigned duties and are responsible for being hallway monitors, especially during passing time and free time, as this is when disruptions are likely to occur.

Respect for teachers. Chinese students stand when the teacher or a guest enters the room and when they are called upon to recite. This practice was once observed in some public and private U.S. schools but is no longer followed. Children in China wait to be called on, while U.S. children may speak up in smaller class settings or raise their hands to respond. While U.S. students may have fond memories of a favorite teacher and occasionally reach out to them once they have graduated from the school, it is not a common practice. Chinese students, on the other hand, tend to be more exalting in their praise of former teachers.

School maintenance. It is a common practice for Chinese students to help to maintain a clean and organized classroom. In the United States, teachers and students may pick up items in the classrooms at the end of the day, but

building maintenance is the responsibility of the custodial staff.

Textbooks. Students in China are expected to purchase their books annually, for a minimal cost. They make heavy use of notation and highlighting. Typically, U.S. students in public schools are issued a textbook, which they are not allowed to write in and must return at the end of the semester or school year; or more often today, an electronic device, such as an iPad or Chromebook.

Curriculum. Curriculum in China is standardized across the country, and students have few elective choices. In the United States, each state works autonomously and provides individual input to the public education programs across the state. Funding varies from state to state, as well as teacher certification requirements, contracts, and salaries. Elementary school Chinese language curriculum varies from district to district within a state and throughout the 50 states.

Exams. The examination system is very regimented in China, and student results determine which university a child will attend, if at all. Testing is uniform across the country, and children spend all of their waking hours, for months, preparing for these exams. In the United States, we also have high-stakes college entrance exams, the SAT and the ACT, which are both well known as readiness assessments for college admission and placement. The more prestigious colleges and universities still look at the scores from the SAT and ACT tests to determine appropriate cut off levels for entry, but many institutions are now putting more weight on the college essay and the face-to-face interview.

Conclusion

"Effective language learning experiences must be carefully orchestrated by a teacher who builds relationships with students, works with them to create an environment in which they can flourish, and plans courses, units, and lessons that are standards-based and embed high-yield learning and teaching strategies" (Teacher Effectiveness for Language Learning, TELL, 2014).

STARTALK programs have been running since 2007. Since then, over 150 resources have been created that are online and available to the public. All of the resources have been developed in support of one of the six principles. As a result of the intensive training available to STARTALK teachers, these principles are implemented in STARTALK summer language programs and regular academic year program classrooms, and, when present and observed, program stakeholders have rated the programs as successful.

Over the past 11 years, 56,000 students have participated in the STARTALK summer language programs. Surveys of these students taken at the end of their summer experience indicate that over 70% of them intend to continue to study the language that they learned in the program. Some find that the STARTALK languages are taught in their schools. Some plan to attend community colleges and heritage language programs, while others plan to continue their study online. This enthusiasm and commitment are a result of the engaging experiences that have been provided by their teachers and programs.

This Brief explains the principles of and provides suggestions for building on the principles and strategies learned from STARTALK to design and implement effective elementary school Chinese language programs. STARTALK resources are available to the public and provide many examples of authentic, culturally rich lessons. Resources on the website, from languages other than Chinese, may also provide ideas for your teaching. One can locate curriculum and units for all ages and levels of proficiency, along with lesson plans, to support those units. Upon review of these documents, activities and strategies can be applied to your own lessons.

With the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* (ACTFL, 2015) as a foundational document, and the *NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements* (2017), along with the *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners* (2012), educators can expand what has been learned from STARTALK to build a proficiency-oriented Chinese language classroom.

In conclusion, we offer some final notes of advice for educators in Chinese early language programs:

- Among your goals should be to plan learning experiences that address the unique needs and interests of your students.
- Following the Backwards Design Model, develop essential questions that reflect thematic unit design to guide culturally rich content-based instruction.
- One cannot underestimate the power of using the target language, the single greatest factor to building student proficiency.
- Student engagement in authentic and age-appropriate real-life experiences will result in powerful evidence of successful student performances in the target language that demonstrate increased levels of proficiency.

It is our hope that this Brief provides both guiding principles and classroom strategies for immediate use and ideas and information for further exploration for effective language learning and teaching.

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Additional Resources

A. CELIN Program Profiles

See the CELIN program profiles for descriptions, photos, and videos of some exemplary Chinese language programs. http://asiasociety.org/china-learning-initiatives/program-profiles

B. Summary of Professional Resources for Planning Instruction

RESOURCE	DESCRIPTION OF CONTENT	LEVELS ADDRESSED	PURPOSE/HOW USED
World-Readiness Standards for Language Learning (2015) Overview video: www.actfl.org/publications/all/world-readiness-standards-learning-languages Chinese Standards and Learning Scenarios	Descriptions of what language learners should know and be able to do in 5 C goal areas, stressing application beyond the school setting in the global community Contain sample indicators of progress and sample learning scenarios	Novice-Superior	To guide instructional planning, instructional delivery, and assessment in grades PreK-16
ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012	Descriptions of what individuals can do with language in terms of speaking, writing, listening, and reading in real- world situations in a spontaneous, non-rehearsed context	Novice-Distinguished	For evaluation of functional language ability in academic or workplace settings
ACTFL Performance Descriptors for K-12 Learners https://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/actfl-performance-descriptors-language-learners	Descriptions of language performance: how well students meet the World–Readiness Standards in instructional settings	Novice-Advanced	To guide instructional planning and goal setting in K-12 programs
NCSSFL/ACTFL Can-Do Statements https://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/ncssfl-actfl-can-do-statements	Can Do statements for learners indicating what they can do in each mode of communication	Novice-Distinguished	For learner self-assessment in the modes of communication, in grades K-16 For setting instructional goals
STARTALK Resources www.nflc.umd.edu/projects/language/startalk	Sample Unit and Lesson Plans Video Resources Illustrating the Six Principles		To guide instructional planning