Learning Chinese in the Digital Age

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Language education in the 21st century has reached an exciting point, where skills can be acquired and practiced in the real world, thanks to technology. Technology, computer use, and the online world are having a tremendous impact on language learning, in the almost instantaneous access that they provide to authentic materials and native speaker language partners, and the ways that they influence our pedagogy, learning standards, and outcomes. The digital age continues to evolve and grow, with a continuously new set of tools and online resources to support language learning and teaching. Students learning Chinese can now hone their language skills any time throughout the week or the year, anywhere in the world, starting with a home internet connection and expanding to an experience that requires a passport.

In order to teach effectively in this new age, teachers must plan carefully and use all available tools wisely. For an excellent language program and classes, the goal is not to identify the best technology tools to use but rather to build students' language proficiency, knowing that the tools themselves will not automatically create learner-centered classrooms.

This Brief describes frameworks that guide uses of technology in the digital age and connects the frameworks with day-to-day classroom practices that foster students' 21st century skills with digital tools. It provides useful suggestions and resources for designing activities with the best digital tools. It ends with a discussion of implications and considerations for applying digital tools in the classroom to support and transform student learning.

Three conceptual frameworks that can help teachers design and implement activities and assessments in their classes are described, with discussion of their significance and description of ways to implement them to foster 21st century skills:
- Bloom's Taxonomy
- The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge Framework (TPACK)
- The Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition (SAMR) Model

The Brief then describes online tools that can be used to implement the conceptual frameworks in instruction, with explanations of why the tools are helpful and how they can be used. Additionally, it introduces three useful resources for teachers to incorporate digital tools in their classrooms:

- Padagogy Wheel
- Personal Learning Network (PLN) tool browser
- Game-based and virtual reality learning

The Brief concludes with discussion of implications and issues that need to be considered:
- Selection of face-to-face, blended, and online learning opportunities
- Consideration of students' ages and language proficiency levels
- Understanding of the roles and limitations of technology in facilitating learning

The digital tools and frameworks described will allow teachers and learners to know how to incorporate them to support and transform opportunities for Chinese language learning. Examples include flipped classroom environments, project-based learning, design thinking, service learning, and collaboration with other school programs.

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of learning Chinese in the 21st century is the redesign of pedagogy away from a teacher-centered approach to a learner-centered paradigm that focuses on personalized learning through the use of digital tools in non-traditional "classroom" environments. Instruction is no longer dictated solely by prescribed, published materials taught within brick-and-mortar classrooms, but rather includes access to and implementation of resources available online to design learning experiences that develop critical thinking skills, foster collaborative learning, and provide engagement with real-world contexts. Learners more and more can take their learning into their own hands via online curricula, podcasts, videos, and increasingly, virtual reality platforms. The possibilities are endless.