

Teach Overseas Chinese Children Chinese in an Informal Learning Environment

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Project Rational

The purpose of this project is to help overseas Chinese parents to teach their children age 5-7 to learn entry level Chinese at home. The assumption is that at least one parent is fluent in Chinese and is willing to teach children Chinese on a regular basis.

Needs Assessment

Because of the culture heritage and blooming Chinese economy, most Chinese parents in American want their children to learn Chinese. Because the time and location of Chinese schools may not be feasible for all families, many decided to teach children Chinese at home. For example, there is only one Chinese school within 40 miles radius of Lehigh Valley (“Huaxia Branches”, n.d.). Among the 11 families I interviewed in this area, only two send children to the Chinese school, the rest teach children Chinese by themselves or by friends. The main concerns of these families are if they can get similar results as formal schools, and if they can adhere to the goal on long run.

These families need help to use existing education materials to teach and assess their children systematically, and need a supporting system to motivate them to stick to the goal.

Project Goal

This project is part of a large mission – to teach children Chinese in an informal learning environment and getting the same result as formal education. Learners are expected to pass different levels of Chinese Proficiency Test (HSK), and form a lifelong interest in Chinese language and culture. In the scope of this project, learner will know basic sentences and phrases and build a foundation for further Chinese learning.

Instructional Strategy

The classes will be taught face to face in an informal learning environment. Routine classes will be held at home by parents, other activities will be arranged by the parents when appropriate.

The classes can be short and flexible. Learning Chinese character, especially writing from memory, requires lots of practicing and drilling. Phrases, sentences, reading and comprehension can be taught with fun games, and incorporated in authentic activities in a situated environment.

Some sample activities are listed below:

- Writing cards or letters to relatives in China (practicing writing)
- Play date with fellow learners (motivation, learn from peers)
- Skype with relatives and friends in China (spoken language and culture)
- Chinese flashcard iPad apps (vocabulary)

In summary, the instruction can be very flexible and creative. The instructors (parents) can respond immediately to learners' feedback; parents and children together can create an autonomous learning style that fits their personal need and interest.

Objectives and Assessment

The learners are expected to gain basic Chinese competence equivalent to HSK level one in one year. The details are listed below (“HSK Basic”, n.d.; “HSK One”, n.d.):

- Know 150 common phrases
- Know simple grammar
- Understand simple sentences and express simple ideas
- Capable of simple communication in daily life
- Understand short articles

Reading, understanding and oral presentation will be assessed by observation. Everyday language will be taught and assessed in authentic activities. Vocabulary and writing skills will be assessed by quizzes. When the learner reaches level one, he/she will take a formal HSK level one test.

Delivery and Evaluation

This project will use a website to provide information and guidelines to help parents to teach children Chinese at home. The website will have two main functions, one is to organize and recommend education materials, and the other is to form an online community. In the information section, user will find book recommendation, case study, HSK exam guideline, Chinese school curriculum, games and videos, and links to other Chinese learning websites. The online forum section is for parents to share stories and tips, and for kids to communicate and post their works.

The website creates an auto-correct system which goes through continuously iterations. At the family level, the parents adjust their approaches according to their children's feedbacks or based on the ideas they learned from the web. At the community level, the web reflects participants' experience dynamically when the families post their ideas on the web. The participants then learn from the updated website, and in turn generate more feedbacks and adjustments.

Task Analysis

Learning contents will be divided into units; in each unit, five to eight new characters will be introduced. After the learners master the new characters, they will then learn new phrases, sentences, paragraphs and short stories, which contain the words they have just learned. The work flow of learning a unit is shown in Figure 1. The steps to learn a new character is shown in Figure 2.

Steps to Learn a Unit

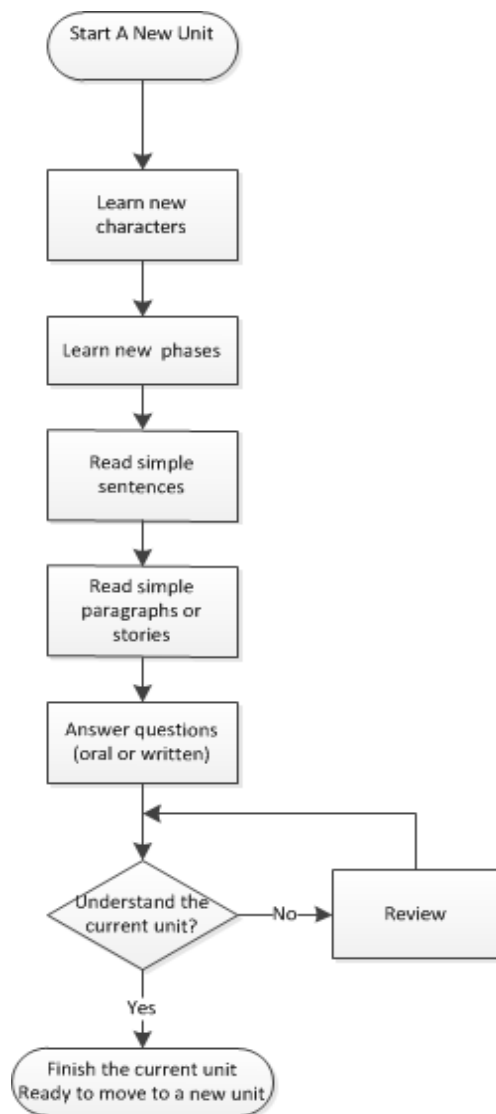


Figure 1

Steps to Learn a Character

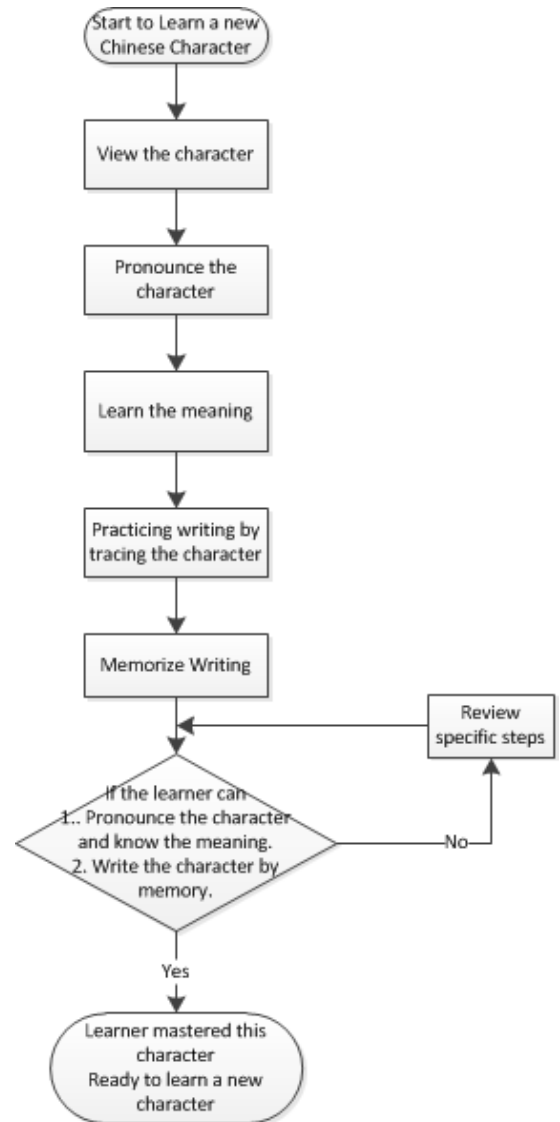


Figure 2

Conclusion

Overseas Chinese families already have small authentic environments consists of families, relatives and friends to learn mother language. Technologies like internet make it easier for families to access more education materials, and reach for larger supporting communities.

Reference

HuaXia Branches. (n.d.) Retrieved April 22, 2012 from <http://www.hxcs.org/>

HSK Basic. (n.d.) Retrieved April 22, 2012 from http://www.hsk.org.cn/english/Intro_hsk1.aspx

HSK One. (n.d.) Retrieved April 22, 2012 from

<http://www.chineseathome.com/images/stories/cours/New%20HSK%20level%201.pdf>