

Increasing Student Success in the Chinese Language

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Abstract

This action learning project's goal was to increase Chinese language proficiency measured by an important Chinese proficiency test entitled the Hànyǔ Shuǐpíng Kǎoshì (HSK) Test. This test is required for anyone wishing to study in China and involves the mastery of 1,200 characters and basic Chinese language forms and functions. Immersion instruction however, focuses primarily on teaching core standards in math, science, social studies, and language arts in a target language. Language proficiency is a by product of the instruction and not necessarily the sole focus, as in a typical foreign language course. In order to maximize student language proficiency in the language proficiency test, the test vocabulary must be integrated into the core curriculum and instruction.

The project facilitated the integration of the HSK Level IV vocabulary and language form and function across multiple grade levels and curricular areas. The work began in the 2014-15 school year with the testing elements covered during 5th grade instruction. During the summer of 2015 these elements are to be integrated across the grade levels.

Base data has been collected. In the spring of 2014 5th grade students passed the HSK IV test at a 58% passing rate. The spring of 2015 results are still not available for review however the increased attention and integration of preparation should have a positive effect.

Vision: Students will increase their passing rate on the HSK IV test from 58% to 85%.

Background/Context: Parents enrolling their children in the Chinese Immersion Program do so for a variety of reasons. Some wish to give their Chinese heritage child the gift of their mother tongue, some wish them simply to become proficient in another language, while others want to give their child an advantage in more educational opportunities or help them in their future profession. Whatever their motivations, student opportunities involving proficiency in Mandarin are at the core of their reasoning.

Students wishing to study in China must take Chinese proficiency tests administered on behalf of Hanban and designed by Hanban. The two main tests used are the Youth Chinese Test (YCT) and the Hànyǔ Shuǐpíng Kǎoshì (HSK) Test. These are the only two tests recognized by Chinese higher education institutes for admittance. This is a very important point because many of the significant opportunities Chinese fluency offers, require study in Chinese Universities. Any student studying in China, regardless of the subject area, must take the HSK test for admittance and reach pre-determined proficiency levels. However what is not obvious is how these tests may be required for opportunities in the United States as well.

What we did:

2014-15 School Year , HSK Bi-weekly Instruction and Practice

The HSK-required linguistic strategies were divided into 15 bi-weekly lessons, including two listening skills lessons, two vocabulary strategy lessons, three paragraph structure lessons, three reading comprehension lessons, and four sentence structure lessons. Students were given a 50-minute lesson every two weeks, and were assigned skill-practice homework based on the given lesson.

HSK vocabulary

The HSK IV test contains 1,200 vocabulary words. The 1,200 vocabulary characters were divided into 15 vocabulary lists. Beginning in January, students were assigned 50-100 vocabulary words each week to review and practice the unfamiliar words. After reviewing all the vocabulary, students made flash cards to practice the hardest words on the HSK list.

Through these activities, most students improved both in their Chinese language and literature skills. The bi-weekly lessons helped students recognize grammatical phenomena that only exists in the Chinese language. Their reading comprehension skills and language usage skills were also improved by enlarged vocabulary and continuous practice.

Summer 2015

HSK curriculum expanding to grades K-5

Next year, the instruction will expand and improve our HSK integration into the curriculum to help all students be more successful on the HSK test. In grades K-5, the scope and sequence will be enhanced to integrate test material in all grades. For example, we will decrease one reading text and half of the spelling words from each lesson in the Singapore Chinese curriculum and add HSK vocabulary and reading practice into our daily teaching. The HSK vocabulary will be divided into six grade levels: Kindergarten will work on 50 vocabulary words, grades 1-3 will each work on 150-200 vocabulary words, grade 4 will cover 320 vocabulary words, and grade 5 will review the remaining 400 words plus a final review of all 1,200 vocabulary words before the test. Teaching slides, interactive word games and word lists will be developed to teach the HSK vocabulary.

What we found out: The results are still out and should be discovered soon.

Implications: If the strategies are successful they will be implemented district wide and will be improved upon over time. If improvement is not obvious test results will be analyzed and areas of strengths and weakness will guide new strategies.