DEVELOPING INITIAL LITERACY IN CHINESE: WHAT ADMINISTRATORS NEED TO KNOW

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CELIN: Chinese Early Language and Immersion Network

CELIN seeks to connect with and provide resources for language practitioners, researchers, policy makers, parents, and advocates for language learning across the United States.

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We are affiliated with and supported by *China Learning Initiatives* at Asia Society, which has a strong track record in leading and supporting the Chinese language field.

CELIN's Mission

Support the growth and sustainability of Chinese early language and immersion programs in and outside the United States to ensure that students have opportunities to develop high-level multilingual and intercultural competency for advanced study and work in an interconnected world

CELIN BRIEFS

Discussion of ways to develop students' literacy and global competency through learning of Chinese language and culture

Purposes:

- Respond to an urgent need in the field of Chinese language education for research-based information; examples of best practices; and resources for administrators, teachers, and parents

- Address different aspects of Chinese language education; available in English and Chinese; applicable to elementary (K−8), middle, and high school, and even college Chinese language programs

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Developing Initial Literacy in Chinese: Topics Covered

- Chinese as a Character-Based Language

- The Basics of Chinese Character Structure
  - Strokes
  - Radicals
  - Semantic-Phonetic Compounds

- Simplified and Traditional Characters

- What is Pinyin? When and Why Is It Useful?

- Establishing a Solid Platform for Chinese Literacy Development

THE BASICS OF CHINESE CHARACTER STRUCTURE

Characters are composed of strokes

	diǎn	*dot*	六, 白, 立
	héng	*Horizontal stroke*	两, 十, 可
	shù	*Vertical stroke*	十, 不, 个
	piě	*Left falling stroke*	么, 人, 少
	nà	*Right falling stroke*	人, 是, 八
	tí	*Rising stroke*	我, 冷, 打
	héng gōu	*Horizontal stroke ending*	买，定, 卖
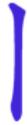
Strokes are written in a specific direction

`	**diǎn**	*dot*	*Left to right*
─	**héng**	*Horizontal stroke*	*Left to right*
│	**shù**	*Vertical stroke*	*Top to bottom*
╱	**piě**	*Left falling stroke*	*Right to left*
╲	**nà**	*Right falling stroke*	*Left to right*
╱	**tí**	*Rising stroke*	*Left to right, bottom to top*
⌐	**héng gōu**	*Horizontal stroke ending in a hook*	*L to R, hook slants L and down*

Characters are written in a specific stroke order

Characters are composed of recurring component parts (部件)

- 好 = 女 + 子
- 字 = 宀 + 子
- 湖 = 氵 + 古 + 月
- 想 = 木 + 目 + 心
- 哲 = 扌 + 斤 + 口
- 店 = 广 + 占
- 国 = 囗 + 玉

Recurring parts occur in fixed configurations to form characters

For example:

⊞ (left-right split)	她 他 好 们 昨 明 起 期	
⊟ (top-bottom split)	学 家 要 星 怎 男 易 各	
�III (three vertical)	湖 做 谢 哪 咖 班 辨 脚	
⊟ (top over bottom-split)	想 您 然 恕 契 架 怨 热	
⊟ (top-split over bottom)	前 筷 宿 森 荫 罚 符 茄	
⊡ (enclosure)	回 图 国 圆 园 因 困 固	

Recurring Parts are written in a particular order within a character

湖：氵 古 月

高：亠 口 冂 口

Some recurring parts are discontinuous:

国： 冂

玉

一

Types of Recurring Parts

Radicals (部首): Every character has one. Radicals are used to organize characters in a dictionary. Radicals often provide meaning clues.

Phonetics (声旁): 80%＋ of characters have one. Phonetics provide pronunciation clues.

Other recurring parts: Some recurring parts are neither the radical nor the phonetic in the character.

Radicals (部首)

Some radicals are stand-alone characters, e.g.:

水 water, 山 mountain, 手 hand, 女 female, 木 wood

Often, radicals are a component part of a character:

扌 (The "hand" radical):

打 hit, 推 push, 拉 pull, 抓 grab

口 (The "mouth" radical):

吃 eat, 喝 drink, 吹 blow

and also in words that refer to language functions:

吗 yes/no questions, 吧 suggestions, 呢 rhetorical questions

The Phonetic Component (声旁)

Sometimes the pronunciation of the phonetic and the character are identical or very close:

青qīng: 请qǐng, 清qīng, 情qíng, 晴qíng, 静jìng

Sometimes their pronunciations are relatively close:

门 mén / 问 wèn; 各 gè／客 kè

But sometimes, the phonetic is not a reliable pronunciation clue:

各 gè / 路 lù

Composition of characters

Radical alone:

木 *wood*, 火 *fire*, 山 *mountain*, 水 *water*,

女 *female*, 人 *person*, 日 *sun*, 月 *moon*

Radical + phonetic: 清 qīng *clear* ＝

    氵 *water* + 青 qīng

Radical + non-phonetic component(s):

    冗 rǒng = 冖 mì + 几 jǐ

Radical + phonetic + non-phonetic component(s):

    湖 hú *lake* = 氵 *water* + 古 gǔ + 月

Additional types of characters

Approximately 10% of characters are of the following type:

Pictograms: 山 *mountain*, 川 *river*, 目 *eye*

Simple ideograms: 一 *one* 二 *two*, 三 *three*, 上 *above*, 下 *below*

Compound ideograms: 林 *grove* (2 trees), 森 *forest* (3 trees) , 休 *rest* (a person next to a tree)

Phonetic loan characters: A pictogram is used to write a homophonous but semantically unrelated syllable. In contemporary writing, these rarely exist. 來 mài *wheat* ℅ 來 lái *come*. *Wheat* is now written 麦.

Complexity of Chinese Characters (Hanzi)

- Hanzi = Chinese characters
- Cannot be sounded out
- Need to be memorized and reproduced
- Sound, meaning components, only provide some hints for readers
- Often in combination with other characters to form a "word"
- No space between words

Why Learning Characters is Important?

- Direct impact on reading fluency

- Direct impact on comprehension

- Direct impact on writing

- Cultural understanding

Characters are also Interesting

- Visual appearance of characters sometimes carry meaning:

  - 伞 (傘)

  - 散 (散)

  - （which one means umbrella?)

- Chinese characters sometimes have patterns

  - 猴 monkey、猫 cat 、猪 pig

  - 狗 (can you guess what this might be?)

Form "Words"

- Form "compounds" with transparent meanings: 书 book 店 store, 牙 tooth 刷 brush, 绿 green 茶 tea, 火 fire 山 mountain

- Form "compounds" with other meanings: 东西，点心

- Same Hanzi has different meanings: **右手，歌手**

Word Spacing, Context, and Meaning

我们要学生活得有意义。

- 我们要学 **生活得** 有意义。

- We want to learn [how to live a meaningful life].

- 我们要 学生 **活得** 有意义。

- We want [our students to have meaningful lives].

*Gan, et al., 1996. 'A Statistically Emergent Approach for Language Processing'
   (Provided by Claudia Ross)

Word Spacing, Context, and Meaning

- Example: *难过
  - 我们都很**难过**
    - 难过= Sad
  - 日子很**难过**
    - 难 过= hard to go by
    - Life is difficult
- **千万**：
- 他说他有三**千万** (10 M) vs. 你**千万**(absolutely should)别相信他。
- **我喜欢 一个人**
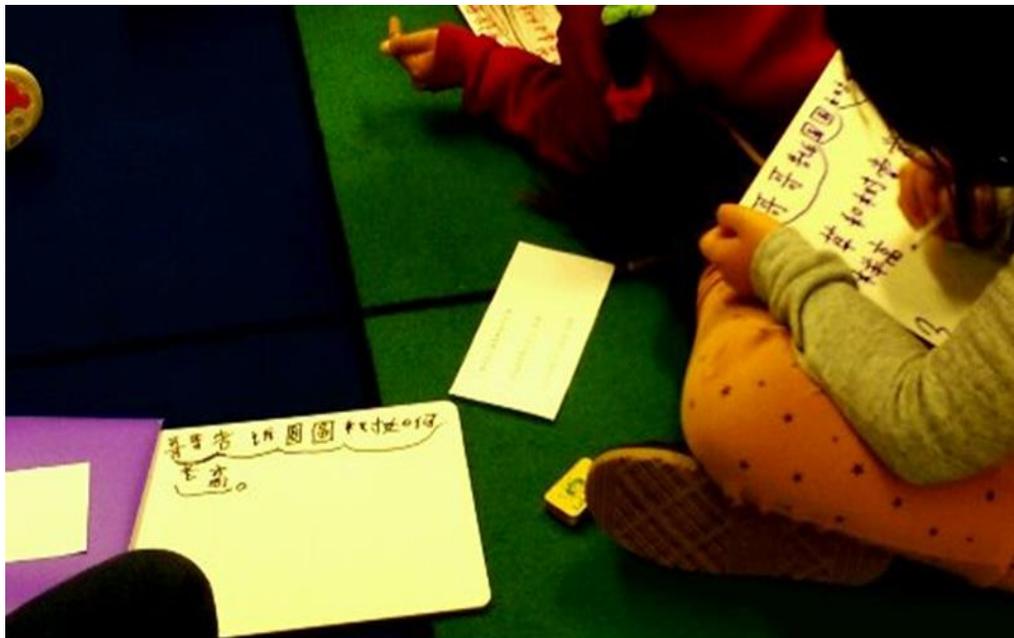
Progression of Chinese Characters 汉字演变

- http://www.lbxszx.com/uploadfile/2013/0718/20130718104856137.png

Two Scripts: Traditional and Simplified

車 (traditional)   车 (simplified)

傘   伞

鳥   鸟

Why Characters were simplified

- When: After 1949
- Who: People's Republic of China
- Why: To improve national literacy
- How:
  - Sets of radicals and other components
  - Some basic rules or patterns
  - Some exceptions

Decision Making

- Simplified: Primarily used in China and Singapore
- Traditional: Primarily used in Taiwan and Hong Kong
- Not all Chinese characters are simplified
- Need to invest time and mental processing to learn Chinese characters
- Recommendation: Start with one form

What Is Pinyin?

- Readers can sound out words in languages that employ alphabets
- Cannot sound out Chinese words in speaking and writing
- A Romanization system developed by China to help Chinese learners sound out words
- Not real "Chinese Words"

Why Use Pinyin?

- Impossible to read all Chinese characters
- Tools and symbols to note the pronunciation of the characters throughout history
- Taiwan uses another system
- Pinyin is most widely used
- Faster for learners who already know alphabets
- Helps reading and writing

Example: Use Pinyin for Note Taking

How is Pinyin Used?

- Depends on the stages and purposes of learning
- Use Pinyin to help acquire oral language
- Gradually replaced by Hanzi (characters)
- Use Pinyin as a tool to increase students' ability to read and write more
- Oral language first
- Directly exposed to Hanzi
- Pinyin as a tool

When to Teach Pinyin in K-5?

- A very controversial topic
- Arguments:
  - Confusion with English alphabet pronunciation
  - Need oral language as foundation
  - Need to establish solid Hanzi knowledge
  - Develop basic reading skills
    - Recognizing words
    - Recognizing language chunks

Establishing a Solid
Platform for Chinese
Literacy Development

Guiding Principle #1

Ensure that realistic literacy goals are aligned with the program setting and communicated clearly to the school community

Guiding Principle #2

Ensure that the curriculum is standards-based and that expectations are communicated in meaningful terms about what students should know and be able to do as they develop literacy in Chinese

Guiding
Principle #3

Situate
literacy
instruction
squarely
within the
curriculum

Guiding Principle #4

Integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in classroom activities and tasks in order to foster students' creative, communicative, and cognitive development

Guiding Principle #5

Understand that literacy development occurs in an environment where learners receive rich amounts of oral language input

Guiding Principle #6

Incorporate the handwriting of characters in the curriculum

Guiding Principles #7

Provide adequate classroom space for Chinese instruction

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