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Mini Project 2 Report

**Teaching Context**

This is a course project in which we plan to use CALL-related activities to teach Chinese idioms. It will be given in a college level Chinese class in a North American university, which means the students would have various backgrounds. But one clear benchmark for our target student is they need to be undergraduate students with a Chinese minor, and their Chinese proficiency falls in the level of intermediate high. We do not expect the class size to be too large; a size of ten students would be suitable for the upcoming activities and online interactions. As most of the university-level classes do, this course will last for one semester.

**Learning Objectives**

1.   To learn Chinese idioms that have story origins

2.   To use Chinese idioms in appropriate contexts

3.   To cultivate students' CALL-related self-learning ability

4.   To know more about Chinese history and culture

5.   To get immersed in reading, which could further improve reading comprehension and
      incidental learning

**Technical Prerequisites**

This course only requires an Internet access, a laptop/desktop with recording device. In addition, it does not have high standard of technical proficiency either for teachers or students. It only requires several simple skills: PPT making, basic online searching, basic corpus searching, online audio-recording, and use of social network interface.

**Task Description**

The flow of general instructions is elaborated on the TrackStar webpage of this course, and students could easily access it by typing in the tracking number. All the accesses to the CALL activities are also provided on TrackStar, so that students could have a field trip of this learning experience. The procedure is as follows:

| Content | Technology used | Procedure |
|---|---|---|
| Assigning idioms | Google Doc | · For every week, there will be three seats available for being a responder of a certain Chinese idiom. The signup sheet is shared via Google Doc<br><br>· Students will sign up for the idiom they like, and read through the story of the idiom they choose. We have a Chinese idiom story bank with carefully adapted stories tailored for students' current proficiency level<br><br>· Responders (students who sign up for an Chinese idiom in the current week) will make a brief summary of the story |
| Checking the pronunciation and meaning | Online dictionary<br><br>Vocaroo (audio recorder) | · Responders will consolidate their memory of the Chinese idiom by searching a video related to the idiom on YouTube<br><br>· Responders will record their own pronunciation of the idiom using Vocaroo |

| Learning with contexts | Corpus | · Responders will go to CCL Corpus and search for example sentences related to the idiom<br><br>· Responders will make up one original sentence<br><br>· Responders will locate one short episode of text where the Chinese idiom is used in the context |
|---|---|---|
| Sharing materials and thoughts | Microsoft PowerPoint<br><br>Yammer | · Responders will incorporate steps mentioned above into one PPT file and share it on Yammer<br><br>· All students will read through it and comment on the responders' posts, then make up one original sentence for every Chinese idiom, and post them on the "reply" box on Yammer |

**Theoretical and Pedagogical Considerations**

The main theoretical foundation of the project is Sociocultural Theory in which learners can develop their learning ability with mediational pedagogical tools. According to the students' current situation, the target content Chinese idiom is always a troublesome area that is difficult to acquire and internalize by themselves. Based on Vygotsky's ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development), the project we designed aims to provide appropriate pedagogical mediations so that learners can develop a better understanding of Chinese idioms as well as be able to use such formulaic expressions in certain context.

Building on the theoretical foundation, there are some key pedagogical considerations the project addressed. The first consideration is the selection of the target learning content. As a typical formulaic expression, Chinese idioms usually contain cultural and historical origins,

especially for those stemmed from ancient Chinese fables and stories, which makes them very

hard for students to understand the meaning even within contexts. Thus, choosing Chinese

idioms is due to the consideration of their needs to improve their reading competence through

idiom learning. Another consideration is to establish sufficient instructional scaffolding in idiom

learning. The use of Trackstar, Google Doc, PowerPoint as well as Yammer serves students an

efficient guideline and a resource sharing community so that they can explore and share the

target content creatively with the instructions they need. Meanwhile it makes peer scaffolding

available through the interactions in the learning community. Besides, the learning materials

used in the project is also sequenced from easy to more advanced so that students can acquire the

target content step by step.

**Sustainability**

| Sustainability | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Trackstar | Google Doc | PPT making | Audio-recording | Online dictionary | Corpus | Yammer |
| Low tech requirement | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Easy to replicate | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| Abundant resource | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | |

The technology used in the project is sustainable in the sense that it can be used for

various objectives, in various contexts, with rich online resource available, and low technical

requirement. As resource sharing tools, Trackstar, Google Doc, PowerPoint and Yammer can be

easily adapted to other language learning contexts. Online dictionary and corpus provide students

with abundant linguistic data students can refer to in their self-study. Besides, a common and

noticeable characteristic of all the technologies used in the project is of low technology

requirement, which increases the practicality of a technological classroom.

**Encouragement of Learning Strategies**

In terms of the encouragement of learning strategies, the most remarkable one of this

project is the promotion of students' self-study ability with the help of the high sustainability of

the aforementioned technologies. Also, the employment of technologies, a Chinese idiom

learning community is established which encourages students to explore the target content by

themselves with multimodality as well as to share their knowledge with their peers. Besides, as

for the idiom field trip that students are assigned to do, the appropriate difficulty control of the

materials provided by teachers helps students to build their confidence in self-learning. Last but

not least, the sentence-making and extended reading encourage students to learn and use the

target content in meaningful context as well as provide potential learning opportunity.

**Evaluation**

In this section, we will evaluate our CALL activity, by using the six criteria that Chapelle

(2001) proposed, namely, language learning potential, learner fit, meaning focus, authenticity,

positive impact, and practicality.

The language learning potential of CALL tasks values the number of opportunities for

learners to focus on form. In our activity, learners were exposed with the target words for

multiple times, by creating their own learning PowerPoint, looking up through dictionary,

searching on corpus, extensive reading, making their own sentences, and reading other peers'

replies. A plethora of opportunities are presented for the learners to focus on the linguistic form.

Other than focusing on linguistic form, focusing on meaning is another criterion when

evaluating CALL tasks. Our tasks for learning Chinese idiom put a huge amount of emphasis on

meaning focus. Starting from the original story, videos explaining the story, explicit explanation

in the dictionary, to understanding the idioms in the context in corpus, students are able to understand the meaning of the idioms from various angles.

In terms of the learner fit, it involves with the number of opportunities for learners to engage in language learning under appropriate situation. In our case, the level of difficulty and complexity of the idiom stories in the bank was modified by the teacher, so that learners can understand the stories. Besides, the search function in CCL is designed in the way that learners can choose a genre that they are interested in with appropriate level of difficulty. In addition, the tasks that learners need to accomplish fit their generation traits. Making PowerPoints and browsing through social networking are what this generation often encounter.

This also reflects the authenticity of the CALL tasks, what learners do during the learning process meets what they need and what motivates them to learn this language. Looking up in dictionary, reading short stories, extensive reading, and eventually improving their understanding in Chinese idioms, and Chinese literacy, culture and history in general are what learners expect in the course of studying Chinese.

Knowing more about Chinese culture and history also brings positive impact to the learners. It enhances their cultural awareness, and helps to form their learning identities. However, one defect of this CALL activity is that it does not provide students with enough opportunities to practice the idioms, and therefore, is lack of the chances to foster their pragmatic abilities.

The last criterion involves the practicality of the CALL tasks. All of the tasks only require access to computers, usage of PowerPoint, Internet, and some basic search skills. The technical requirement is low. Most universities in North America are capable of and willing to support these CALL tasks.

**Reference**

Chapelle, C. (2001). *Computer applications in second language acquisition*. Cambridge

University Press.

**Appendix**
1. Signup sheet and story bank
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FKUbVsqIVDpGV1lIunq21fc-MJ1wr1FjFyhwej42Lw8/edit
2. Idiom Meaning Checking
http://www.hydcd.com/cy/
3. Search for Video
www.youtube.com
4. Pronunciation Recording
www.vocaroo.com
5. CCL Corpus
http://ccl.pku.edu.cn:8080/ccl_corpus/
6. Yammer
https://www.yammer.com/psu.edu/#/home
7. Sample PowerPoint of Idiom Flashcard
https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1uhhzwGZT2X5VM6Ux09NixwG3apFfPyWRq8lAj8daMss/edit?usp=sharing