

Integrating digital content into the Chinese curriculum at Marryatville High School, South Australia

Philip Wilson is a highly experienced teacher of Chinese language since 1982 and has been teaching Chinese for the past four years at Marryatville High School in South Australia. Philip enthusiastically supports the notion that introducing students to the principles which underpin the construction of Chinese characters leads to improved recognition, sensitivity to and understanding of the language. He believes that introducing these principles is fundamental to engaging learners in the concept of a non-alphabetic script, and that good learning arises from challenges to their thinking. He is determined that his students understand that Chinese is a logical writing system, not just writing with pictures; that rote practice of stroke order and form are not enough to engender an understanding that characters are a valid writing system. For him, the functions embedded in the interactive Character catalogue and the related TLF learning objects, which put these principles into game-like interactive learning tasks, are a real asset in supporting his pedagogical practice and student learning. Each learning object stimulates the students to think about form, function and internal structure and they are



excellent sources for further teaching and learning. Philip does not leave recognition and practice of the ideographic features of Chinese writing solely to the new digital activities however. He actively teaches and constantly asks his students to reflect on the form, shape, structure, stroke order, sound and meaning of the characters they see – both online and off line. The use of Chinese print dictionaries where students explore and practice these principles are also a regular part of Philip's classroom pedagogical practice.

The walls of Philip's classroom hold pictures, language charts and other cultural artefacts from China. Class sets of dictionaries and other texts are available for students and Philip uses a standard whiteboard and pen for writing directions, explanations, examples, etc. He also uses the whiteboard as a screen when he hooks up his laptop to the digital projector safely mounted on the ceiling. From his laptop he can access and screen relevant Chinese websites on the Internet, and, as of this year, the Character catalogue and the TLF Chinese learning objects stored on the school Intranet. He uses the classroom projection facilities for whole class demonstration of and discussion about online content, switching seamlessly to




the whiteboard for further illustration in writing if necessary.

Philip also books one of the school computer labs with 1:1 computer access when needed. In the lab environment, students either work individually or in pairs on a range of learning tasks – both using well chosen Internet sites for learning Chinese, and doing the learning tasks embedded in the TLF digital content. In 2007 students also will be able to access the digital content from their wireless-connected laptops in the classroom.


All of the TLF Chinese 'Cracking the code' series of learning objects have been loaded onto the school Intranet and Philip has asked his Year 8 students to work through them all at their own pace.

Cracking the code

Character catalogue

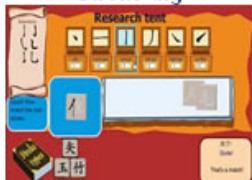


Matching characters




Years P-4

Stroke dig




Years 3-4

Radical hunt




Years 3-8

Stampede




Years 3-8

Quiz show




Years 3-8

Amazing characters




Years 3-8

Dragon temple




Years 3-8

Code breaker




Years 5-8

Font cubes




Years 5-8

Trailblazer



Years 9-10

Gourmet order



Years 9-10

The new material has given a soundly structured context within which students can develop as independent learners and can access the resources for their own purposes in accomplishing the aims of a range of tasks. The students recognise the complementarity of the content of the learning objects to the teacher-directed instruction in class. They enjoy doing the tasks, but as Philip warns, although the activities are relevant and fun, fun should not be the end game. The acquisition of new knowledge and understanding must remain fundamental when ICTs are used for teaching and learning. In this sense, the use of ICTs must be integrated into a planned sequence of learning and teaching.