

Exploring Chinese characters at Salisbury Heights Primary, South Australia

At Salisbury Heights Primary School, South Australia, Chinese is taught by two specialist teachers – Lynn Davis and Aun Hock Leow – to all 700 students in grades P–7. The students have two 45 minute periods per week and are brought to the Chinese specialist rooms for their classes. Lynn is new to the school this year and has been encouraged by the school to pursue her interest in the place of ICT for learning Chinese. Lynn, a very experienced teacher of Chinese at the primary level, has recently started to include Chinese digital content alongside a rich range of other resources she uses for teaching and learning. Previously Lynn held a role with the Chinese Language Professional Learning Service located at the

University of South Australia. This service was a joint project with the Department of Education and Community Services offering two-way professional learning opportunities for university staff and teachers.



In her position with the university she has worked closely with Andrew Scrimgeour and his team, which developed the principles on which TLF LOTE project 1 *Cracking the code* was built. She also has a thorough understanding of the Intercultural Language Learning approach which underpins TLF LOTE project 2 *Close encounters*.

Accessing the learning objects

For access to digital content, students use two stand-alone networked computers in the specialist classroom or a computer laboratory with a 1:1 configuration that Lynn books as required.

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With the help of Wendy Bailey, the school's ICT Coordinator, Lynn has established a space on the school network where students can easily find and use the digital content extracted from the TLF-provided LOTE CD. Each learning object has been linked from the Chinese class page.

 <h1>狗年</h1>	<h2>The year of the dog</h2> <h3>2006</h3>
<p>CHARACTERISTICS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible • Compassionate • Reliable • Honest • Persistent • Ambitious • Overworking • Busy 	<h2>二零零六年</h2>
<p>Character Program</p>	
<p>What is happening in Chinese?</p> <p>Amazing characters level 1</p> <p>Dragon Temple level 1</p> <p>Match A B-C</p> <p>Match D E 3-4</p> <p>Island Hunt</p> <p>Sushi Stampede</p> <p>Wheel of Discovery Level 2</p> <p>Balloon Stampede</p> <p>Code Eraser</p> <p>Back to this page</p>	<p>E-GTE</p> <p>Amazing characters level 2</p> <p>Dragon Temple level 2</p> <p>Pin and match B-C</p> <p>Pin and match 3-4</p> <p>School Hunt</p> <p>Wheel of Discovery Level 1</p> <p>Pick a box</p> <p>Bait Stampede</p> <p>Broke Egg</p>

Learning purpose

Student exploration of the game-like learning objects in the *Cracking the code* project was Lynn's purpose in the two weeks prior to and during the day of the observation visit. In this early exploration of the learning objects she was not expecting a systematic progression through the learning objects at designated levels of difficulty. She was more interested in how the students in Grades 3 to 7 would manage the range of mostly unfamiliar characters contained in these interactive, engaging contexts.

Lynn is aware that some criticisms of the *Cracking the code* project have been based on the view that the amount and difficulty of the characters are inappropriate for these young second language learners. In fact it became apparent to her, and to this observer, while the various grade levels of students were exploring the objects, that these concerns were not concerns for the students. In fact the game-like contexts encouraged 'reading' and thinking about character structures, components and meaning that would not have occurred otherwise without considerable input from the teacher in an instructionist manner. For example, when some Grade 3 students were asked the 'rule' behind the *Dragon temple* learning object they said 'you write characters left before right and top over bottom'. They did not know the meaning of the character, and were not expected to be able to write the characters, but could clearly identify and articulate the rules governing the writing of character components.

In another example, when using the *Quiz Show* learning objects in pairs, much discussion was prompted in English about not only the meaning of individual components, but how interesting it is that new, related words could be formed when components are joined together. In this case, the learning object served literacy learning in both English and Chinese.

These students, consistent with findings in other studies, find the learning objects fun and helpful to learning:

When I played the emerald lake it helps me with learning about Chinese characters.

They are fun and interesting too.

I like them. They rock!

Lynn is of the firm belief that by using the *Cracking the code* learning objects, her students – even the younger students – have more exposure to more types of characters with more complexities than she could possibly enable in the limited time she has available in the non-digital learning environment, and that this will have positive long term outcomes for their learning of Chinese.

Next year Lynn is looking forward to benefiting from the support ICT is being given by the school by having immediate access to another six computers adjacent to her specialist

classroom. She plans to rotate her students more frequently through digital and other activities which will allow self-paced learning for them, and provide her more concurrent time to work with smaller groups