

Evaluation of a Community Chinese Language School using the CIPP Model

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In the summer of 2003 the author initiated a project to found a Chinese Language school in the town of Derry, New Hampshire. In the process of founding and beginning operations at the school, and in the role of the school principal, the author performed several evaluative tasks.

These tasks are described here in terms of the CIPP model (Stufflebeam, 2000):

- Context Evaluation: Preliminary Research, Audience Analysis
- Input Evaluation: Initial Planning Meetings, Materials Evaluation
- Process Evaluation: Submission of Lesson Plans, Adherence to Recommended Lesson Plan Structure, Adherence to Lesson Plans During Delivery
- Product Evaluation: Formative Product Evaluation, Summative Product Evaluation (forthcoming)
- Meta-Evaluation against CIPP model (forthcoming)

For reasons of brevity, only the formative aspects of the Product Evaluation phase will be described in detail, with the other phases summarized to provide the context in which the Product Evaluation was initiated.

The CIPP model was selected as a framework for discussing the evaluation activities because of its objectivist foundation and its commitment to an inclusive, democratic process. This model closely matches the principles followed during these evaluation steps, many of which began before the author studied the CIPP model. The stakeholders included in these evaluation activities included students, parents, teachers, administrators, and prospective funding organizations.

Context Evaluation: Preliminary Research

Before embarking on founding a new Chinese school, the author attended several regional Chinese schools and programs both as a student and as a parent of two students, participated in the school board of Chelmsford Chinese School (CCS), and helped establish a program for families needing “beginning” instruction in Chinese at CCS. During this time the author examined numerous existing language learning materials for children, and also referred to regional and national standards for foreign language study, including the Massachusetts Foreign Language Curriculum Frameworks (Massachusetts Department of Education, 1999). The author also researched other community Chinese schools and programs via the web and through participation in email lists related to Chinese adoption and language learning such as “CFOC” (Chinese for Our Children). The author’s analysis of existing Chinese programs was also informed by her background in Linguistics (B.A. UNH 1991) and her own prior experience in learning foreign languages.

Community Chinese schools are common in and around metropolitan areas in which substantial Chinese-American communities exist. For example, the Chinese School Association in the United States lists 9 schools in the greater Boston area (Chinese School Association, 2003), and additional programs not listed by the Association exist in Chinese churches and other community institutions. Most of these schools are founded by and intended for the children of Chinese immigrants, resident workers or visiting scholars, and it is generally assumed that the students speak a common dialect of Chinese already but need to learn the difficult Chinese writing system, in which a separate character exists for each word and one must learn approximately 3000 characters to read a newspaper. The community Chinese school also

provides a setting in which to celebrate Chinese holidays, learn traditional Chinese arts such as painting, calligraphy, and dance, and sometimes receive extra coaching in math or English as a Second Language (Cambridge Center for Chinese Culture, 2003.)

However, the common assumption in community Chinese schools of pre-existing skill in the spoken language is often unfounded. Many students do not come from families in which Chinese is spoken in the home. Perhaps only one parent is Chinese, or the two parents speak different “dialects” of Chinese, such as Mandarin and Cantonese, which are not mutually intelligible. Parents may not be first-generation immigrants, and may have lost the use of their ethnic language themselves during their childhoods. Increasingly, children from China are being adopted into American families in which neither parent is a native speaker of any dialect of Chinese.

The author envisaged the Derry Chinese School as a way to serve the needs of both children in Chinese-American families and Chinese children adopted into American families, as well as other children and adults interested in learning Chinese (whether of Chinese descent or otherwise). The intent was to form a school based on sound educational and linguistic principles that would place more of an initial emphasis on spoken language than on written language. The school would attempt to strike a balance between traditional Chinese community schools, which focus almost entirely on reading and writing, and “culture” schools, which include little language instruction. The programs would also be intended to be more interactive than programs in traditional Chinese schools, which often rely on rote recitation and drill.

The remaining evaluation activities represent attempts to determine the success of this alternative model of a community Chinese school as implemented in the Derry Chinese School.

Context Evaluation: Audience Analysis

Following the background research, the first step in establishing the school was to determine whether there was, in fact, sufficient interest in the greater Derry area to sustain a Chinese school, and if so, what learning objectives would be most important for the students of such a school. To gauge interest, surveys were distributed in the greater Derry area with announcements of an initial organizational meeting (Appendix A). Response was good despite the low Chinese population in New Hampshire (Kelsey, 2003). The organizational meeting used an open, inclusive discussion format combined with polling and consensus building to determine what kind of offering(s) would be appropriate based on the learner population needs. In general, participants offered enthusiastic support to the idea of a local Chinese school, and also expressed strong support for the non-traditional vision offered for the school. Three significant learner populations were identified: preschool children, elementary school children, and adults, with a possible fourth group of middle-school intermediate learners. (An additional group of mixed-age Cantonese learners was later identified.) The elementary and adult groups were mixed in level, but most were beginners and few had much written Chinese skill. Potential teachers and administrators also identified themselves during the meeting.

Input Evaluation: Initial Planning Meetings

With the level of interest, learner needs, and potential resources established, the group moved into an Input Evaluation mode to search for potential solution strategies and sources of support, define a budget, set the school schedule, and establish a staffing plan, in weekly volunteer Board meetings stretching over approximately one month. These meetings were open

and minutes were published via the school's website and an informational email list to which prospective students and other interested parties could subscribe (Derry Chinese School, 2003).

One area of concern that was not resolved during this phase was the pace of the classes and how to handle mixed levels of skill in each class. It was felt that the teaching staff would not be able to address this until the students had enrolled and the teachers had the opportunity to work with them to determine their level. With this in mind, preparation of formal lesson plans was deferred for the first few weeks of classes, after which teachers would be asked to evaluate the needs of their students and prepare plans.

The planning process culminated in an open house/registration event on October 4, 2003, at which 50 students enrolled in four classes. Adjustments to plans were necessary after the enrollment: the middle-school intermediate class could not be implemented due to low enrollment and lack of space, and the teacher who had previously volunteered to teach the Preschool class was unable to keep her commitment. The teacher who had originally volunteered to teach the middle-school class offered to teach the Preschool class instead. This change in personnel has led to ongoing problems, which will be described below.

Input Evaluation: Textbook/Materials Review

Some of the instructional materials initially selected by the Board proved to be unavailable by the time materials needed to be acquired for classes. The school's Chinese staff gravitated instead toward a textbook set (Zhongwen) used in more traditional Chinese schools, which covers only reading and writing, and which contains no English explanations or translations. This textbook set was not well received by the students and their parents, few of whom had previous experience with written Chinese and most of whom expressed a desire to

learn the spoken language first. A materials evaluation process (CIPP Input Evaluation) was initiated to select more appropriate textbooks for the Elementary and Adult classes, using the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for Foreign Languages, Level 1, as a reference. The books were examined by the principal and the teachers, as well as the students of the adult class (Appendix B). Based on this evaluation, the textbook “My First Chinese Reader” was selected for the Elementary program and is now in use. The textbook selection process is still in motion for the Adult class.

As part of the Derry Chinese School program, the Board also plans to continue a materials review process to recommend additional resources such as dictionaries, software, websites, videos, etc. to the school’s learners and to the Chinese learning community at large.

Process Evaluation: Lesson Plans

Although teachers were initially excused from developing lesson plans due to the unknown composition of the student body, once classes had been in session for several weeks, the principal asked teachers to begin to prepare and submit short lesson plans each week. (This formal process was triggered in part by some issues that had begun to be reported to the principal, as described in the Product Evaluation section below.) The principal provided a set of guidelines for the content and format of lessons (Appendix C). Teachers were asked to email lesson plans to the principal, who would evaluate the plans against the guidance given.

This process has had mixed results, with some teachers using the process to strengthen their class planning, and other teachers avoiding or ignoring the process. This has continued to impact class quality as noted in the Product Evaluation section below. The next phase in this

process evaluation will be to develop a tracking instrument for lesson plans and their use and to foster further discussion among the staff about the lesson plan process and the guidelines given.

Product Evaluation: Formative

In addition to concerns about the textbook set, students and parents have approached the principal and assistant principal with a variety of concerns about the content and methods used in classes. In general these concerns fell into three categories: the organization level and pace of the adult class, the emphasis on reading and writing content and lack of interactivity, especially in the preschool class, and behavioral distractions in the Cantonese class. Parents and students felt that these issues were impacting the quality of outcome of the program. The principal also observed that several of these issues might be addressed by improving school processes.

When these concerns were discussed with the teaching staff in email and in a board meeting, some teachers expressed skepticism of the proportion of students with concerns. The adult teacher maintained that an informal survey in her class had indicated that only a small minority had a problem with the pace, and she was reluctant to slow the class down for a minority. The preschool teacher, though she agreed in principle with the need for higher interaction during the classes, seemed unable to reformat her classes to meet the expectations of the parents, who are accustomed to American preschools rather than traditional Chinese schools. All teachers resisted emphasizing spoken over written language, probably in part because of their own school experiences as speakers of Chinese as a first language.

After an adult student called the principal in the fourth week to cancel his enrollment, citing the pace and lack of a textbook as his primary concerns, the principal initiated a CIPP Product Evaluation to provide more objective information from which the board could act. (This

was also the point at which the principal began to institute a formal lesson plan process, as described above.)

At this point the methodology chosen for further information-gathering was influenced by several factors: the need for objective, inclusive data which would allow all participants to respond without pressure from teachers or classmates; the need for data which would be considered reliable and authoritative by the teaching staff; and the need for timely data, as students were already threatening to withdraw and changes would need to be implemented quickly. These factors pointed to the use of a paper-based survey with both forced-choice and open response questions, followed by additional parent, student, and teacher discussions as feasible.

The survey was designed using simple language and graphics considered appropriate for both adults and elementary school aged students (Appendix D). The items on the survey attempted to bring more focus to the specific issues the students and parents had raised. The survey was distributed and collected in the same day by three teachers, with results returning the following week for the fourth class (Cantonese). Most of the surveys (66%) were filled out by students, with the remainder being filled out by parents. (The preschool parents and most Cantonese parents had been present during class sessions and so were able to give detailed and accurate feedback on the classes their children were enrolled in.)

The survey results were entered into SPSS and subjected to chi-square analysis as appropriate, though low counts in some categories made some of the results questionable. The results were summarized and forwarded to board (including teaching staff) with recommendations for changes (Appendix E). At the next board meeting (that week), the results

were discussed by the board. Most teachers accepted the results and recommendations without further protest. The preschool teacher, who has had difficulty transitioning from the middle-school class to the preschool class, was less willing to accept the guidance of the principal and Board. The principal and assistant principal have continued to work closely with this teacher to monitor class activity and to discuss the class with the parents.

The issues that prompted the formative product evaluation point to a lack of sufficient context information about the school's audience. The Board plans to collect more advance information about students' background and objectives in future registration processes in order to focus the school's programs more accurately on the audience's needs next semester.

The Board will also want to conduct more regular objective assessments of the learning objectives as currently agreed. Teachers will be encouraged to use the results of such assessments formatively, to guide pace and explanations.

Product Evaluation: Summative

The Process and Product Evaluation efforts described so far have been formative, in that they have been intended to help the Board improve the programs currently in progress. Summative activities are also planned, including exit surveys, objective assessment analysis, a budget analysis, and additional parent-teacher meetings. The school's most substantial summative evaluation activity will be a "report" to our external stakeholders – parents and community sponsors – in the form of end-of-semester and end-of-year open house events in January and June. The school will provide examples of students' durable work, such as written assignments or cultural craft projects, and short demonstrations of performances, such as spoken language, song, and dance. Students and teachers will demonstrate some of the school's learning

activities to visitors. These displays will allow students' parents, prospective students, and other members of the community to evaluate the school for themselves. The Board may also provide aggregate information about students' progress toward program goals, as measured by objective assessments, as well as survey results, for example at a "School Administration" booth. During that event, members of the school staff will be on hand to discuss the school with members of the community, and accept comments and suggestions. The Board hopes this will offer an engaging way to provide the value of a summative evaluation to the community.

CIPP Meta-Evaluation

This document represents a preliminary draft of a meta-evaluation of the Derry Chinese School's evaluation activities against the CIPP model. Preparation of this document has helped to point up weaknesses in the implementation of the CIPP model to date, such as insufficient Context Evaluation during the planning stages and weak Process Evaluation during program operation. An additional Meta-Evaluation should be conducted as part of the summative evaluation efforts in June 2004.

Preliminary Evaluation of Merit and Worth

Based on the in-class surveys and interviews, most students and parents feel the current programs have both merit and worth. In particular, the elementary and Cantonese programs were rated very highly by students and parents for both their effectiveness and overall satisfaction. However, there remain problems impacting the merit of the adult/teen class, which are hopefully being addressed, and of the preschool class, which are still unresolved. Participants have expressed that both of these classes, if delivered in an effective manner, would have high worth. It remains up to the Board and teaching staff to improve the merit of these classes.

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Chinese for Our Children CFOC electronic mail list, archived at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/CFOC/>

Derry Chinese School dcsboard electronic mail list, archived at <http://www.DerryChineseSchool.org/cgi-bin/mojo/mojo.cgi?f=list&l=dcsboard>

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Zhongwen Student Textbook (1998, June). Beijing: Jinan University Press.

中文学校 - Derry Chinese School Survey

We are trying to find out how much interest there is in starting a Chinese School in Derry this fall. If you are interested, please answer the following questions:

1 - How many members of your family would attend a Chinese School Program? How old are they?

Number	Age
	Preschool (2-5 years old)
	Elementary (6-11 years old)
	Middle/Junior High School (11-13 Years Old)
	High School (14-18 Years Old)
	Adult

2 - What goals do you have for a Chinese School? (Check all that apply)

Important	Very Important	Goal
		Chinese Culture (Games, Songs, Dance, Crafts, etc.)
		Mandarin Spoken Language
		Simplified Character Reading/Writing
		Connection to a Chinese-American Community
		English as a Second Language
		Other:

3 - What level of skill do the potential students in your family have? (Check all that apply)

Number	Speaking Level	Number	Reading/Writing Level
	None		None
	Basic: some words and phrases		Basic: Knows pinyin or zhuyin, can read and write some characters
	Intermediate: Simple sentences		Intermediate: Knows many characters, can write simple things, can read short stories or simple books
	Advanced: Conversational		Advanced: Can read books, can write paragraphs or short stories

4 - Do any members of your family currently attend a Chinese School, or have they previously attended a Chinese School? Where do/did you attend? What grades were the members of your family in?

5 - When could members of your family attend Chinese School? (Check all that apply)

Day/Time	Could Attend	First Choice
Weekday afternoons		
Weekday evenings		
Weekend mornings		
Weekend afternoons		
Weekend evenings		

How many days per week would your family like to attend Chinese School? _____

6 - We will need teachers, a board of directors, and a principal. Salary will be based on tuition set by the board of directors. Would you be interested in serving any of these positions? Please provide your name, phone number or email, and resumé if so.

Position	Name	Phone # or Email
Teacher		
Board of Directors		
Principal		

Organizational Meeting:

We will have an organizational meeting on **Wednesday, September 3, 7:00 PM** at the Derry Library, to decide if there is enough interest in starting a program this fall (October). For further information, please contact Elizabeth Dalton at 437-9182 or emdalton@comcast.net. There is also a MeetUp topic for Chinese Language Learning: the next meeting is Sunday, September 7 at 1:00 PM. See <http://chinese.meetup.com> for more information.

Please send your completed survey to:

Derry Chinese School Survey
 94 Redfield Circle
 Derry, NH 03038

Please return all surveys by September 1, 2003.
 Thank you for your interest!

Chinese School Evaluation Appendix B

Excerpt of textbook evaluation spreadsheet

Book Name	Chinese for Children	My First Chinese Reader, Vol I	Far East Chinese for Youth
Book Type	Textbook	Textbook	Textbook
Age Range	5-8	6-10 years	10-15 years
Number of Pages	198 (3 vols)	90	177
Number of Lessons	60	16	30
Dialogues	sentences, more dialogues starting in vol 2	y	yes
Vocabulary	y	y	yes
Grammar	in back	some	yes
pinyin, zhuyin, or both	pinyin	pinyin	pinyin
Explanations in English	in back	no	yes
Character instruction (traditional or simplified)	no	yes, choice	no (see character book)
Illustrations (color, b&w, none)	color	color	color
Class/Group Activities (games, songs, etc.)	songs	no	yes
Stage 1 topic coverage	79%	43%	79%
PreK-12 STANDARD 1: Interpersonal Communication	86%	71%	93%
PreK-12 STANDARD 2: Interpretive Communication	63%	50%	100%
PreK-12 STANDARD 3: Presentational Communication	50%	50%	92%
PreK-12 STANDARD 4: Cultures	86%	21%	43%
PREK-12 STANDARD 5: Linguistic Comparisons	20%	10%	60%
PreK-12 STANDARD 6: Cultural Comparisons	50%	0%	100%
LEARNING STANDARD 7: Connections	50%	0%	0%
PRE K-12 STANDARD 8: Communities	0%	0%	0%
STANDARD TOTAL	53%	27%	63%
Glossary - pinyin, zhuyin, hanzi, English	P, H, E	P, E, H	P, E
Index - pinyin, English, both	pinyin	Pinyin	both
Textbook available	yes	y	yes
Workbook available	no	n	yes
Teacher's Book available	back of books	n	yes
Practice Media Available (Tape, CD, CDRom)	Tapes	online, but advanced	tape
Cost	\$39.95	\$14.95	\$24.95

Excerpt of Lesson Plan Guidance

Lesson plans don't have to be long or highly detailed. A half-page to a page per week is fine. Please include the following elements in each week's plan. If an element doesn't apply to your group or to that week, just put "N/A" (not applicable). (For example, we wouldn't expect to see a grammar or reading and writing section in Preschool, and not every week might have time for a cultural connection activity, etc.) If you see a category you seem to always put N/A for, ask yourself if it would be possible to include that category for your students some of the time, to balance your class.

CATEGORIES AND DEFINITIONS:

Categories:

- A: Vocabulary
- B: Oral Communication
- C: Grammar & Comparisons
- D: Reading and Writing
- E: Practice Activities
- F: Cultural Connection
- G: Assessment
- H: Enrichment

Definitions:

A: Vocabulary - What words will your students learn this week?

B: Oral Communication - What kinds of sentences will your students learn to say this week? How do you plan to teach sentences? (e.g. a dialogue, a conversational topic, repeat after the teacher, etc.)

C: Grammar & Comparisons - What grammatical concepts do you plan to teach this week? (Explanations of sentence structures and new concepts like questions, counters, negatives, etc.)

D: Reading and Writing - What pinyin, zhuyin, tone markers, character strokes, radicals, or whole characters will your students learn this week? How do you plan to teach these? (e.g. demonstrate on board, handouts, page of textbook, etc.)

E: Practice Activities (non-traditional songs or games used to teach the concepts of the week, or other activities like flashcards, worksheets, workbook, etc.)

F: Cultural Connection (a Chinese song, traditional game, story, or craft) This activity may be conducted in English to help students learn about Chinese history and culture. Most classes should probably try to do this at least once a month.

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G: Assessment (Formal ways of determining the skill of each individual student. These may be used as additional homework assignments, as well, especially for more advanced students. There should be a gradable assessment at least every 4 weeks, and grades should be tracked and reported to students and/or parents.)

H: Enrichment (additional vocabulary, character stroke orders, references, etc.) This could be extra handouts, recommended readings, websites, tapes or CDs to listen to, suggestions of TV shows or movies to watch, etc. These are optional for students to pursue on their own.

Again, the purpose of this lesson planning is just to show what you plan to teach each week. Plans can change. You might not finish your lesson one week, and might complete it the next week before starting the next lesson, or you might decide the students aren't ready for something you planned to teach and leave it for later. But having a plan helps keep the class moving and improves the quality of the teaching.

Derry Chinese School Class Survey

This is the first year of the Derry Chinese School. We are working hard to improve our school. We need your help! Please answer these questions:

1. Which class are you in (or is your child in)?

- a. Preschool b. Elementary Mandarin c. Cantonese d. Adult/Teen Mandarin

2. Are you a student or a parent?

- a. Student b. Parent

3. How well did you (or your child) know Chinese before you started at Derry Chinese School?

- Speaking/Hearing:** a. None b. Some c. A lot
Reading/Writing: a. None b. Some c. A lot

4. How is the pace?

- a. Too slow b. Just right c. Too fast

5. How are the teacher's explanations?

- a. Not enough explanations b. Just right c. Too many explanations

6. How are the practice and activities in class?

- a. Not enough practice in class b. Just right c. Too much practice or activities

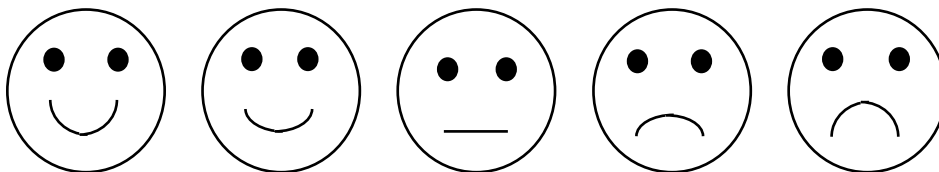
7. Are the textbook and study handouts helpful?

- a. No b. Sometimes c. Yes d. The teacher has not provided a textbook/handouts

8. Is the homework helpful?

- a. No b. Sometimes c. Yes d. The teacher has not assigned homework

9. Overall, how happy are you with the class so far?



10. Please let us know if there is anything we can do to improve your class:

Formative Product Evaluation Survey Results and Recommendations

Though the majority of the respondents described themselves as “happy” or “very happy” with their classes, nearly 30% selected “neutral” or “unhappy.” Further analysis of the data revealed that respondents for students with no prior reading and writing skill were significantly more likely to choose “neutral” or “unhappy” than respondents for students who described themselves as having “some” or “a lot” of reading and writing skill. Over the entire student population, more often than not, respondents were satisfied with the pace, teacher explanations, practices and activities in class, textbook, and homework. But in the individual classes, though again the low survey participant counts make the results uncertain, certain patterns emerged. The satisfaction level with the Preschool class was much lower than the other classes, with 71% of survey respondents choosing “neutral” or “unhappy.” Respondents in the Preschool class indicated in significant numbers that they considered the amount of activities and practice to be too low. Students in the Adult class were markedly unhappy with the pace, with 50% of the students choosing “too fast”.

These results were echoed in the open text questions, which repeatedly cited the need for more activities in the preschool class, and the problematic makeup of the adult class, which had an unexpectedly large number of intermediate students, even though it had been advertised as a “beginner’s” class.

Based on these results, the following recommendations were offered to the Board:

- Slow the speed of the Adult/Teen Mandarin class
- Pick a textbook for the Adult/Teen Mandarin class as soon as possible, and use it to guide spoken dialogues and exercises

Chinese School Evaluation Appendix E

- Explain more to the Preschool class, and direct explanations primarily to the children, not their parents
- Include more hands-on activities and practices in the Preschool and Elementary classes. Purchase or borrow more toys which can be used in language activities for the Preschool class, and include more learning games in the Elementary class.
- Work first on speaking and listening language skills, and second on reading and writing, and strictly limit or eliminate reading and writing activities in the Preschool class, which consists primarily of pre-writing students.
- Plan to divide future classes by prior skill, especially reading/writing skill.