

Progress of Younger Children Learning Chinese

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to find out how young children can learn, understand, and progress in the Chinese language. This study focuses on 13 students between two and three years old. The data collection methods used classroom observation, benchmarks, and parent questionnaires about at home behavior. The data analysis used is qualitative depending on student benchmark, class observation, and parents' descriptions of Chinese language use at home. The purpose of this research is to find how children improve and develop their foreign language skills. Findings include that through foreign language study, students' use of English improved, and students who attended class five days a week were more successful. All the students' pronunciation was great. There was not a difference between their accents and the accents of native Chinese speakers. My findings showed that the students who used Chinese language at home, had improved verbal English usage and that the child's personality affects the learning results.

Keywords: *Progress of learning Chinese, Chinese language, two-year-old foreign language education.*

Language: *Chinese*

INTRODUCTION

Studying foreign languages is important for children's future and has many benefits. F.T. Williams (2013) explains that for over nearly half a century research on language immersion education has heralded benefits such as academic achievement, language and literacy development in two or more languages, and cognitive skills. Children who learn foreign languages develop creative thinking, are more able to solve prob-

lems, and become open minded. Landry (1973) explained that second language learners score significantly higher on standardized tests than monolingual students. Second language learning not only provides children with the ability to depart from the traditional approaches to a problem, but also supplies them with possible rich resources for new and different ideas. Bialystok (1999) believes that bilingual children are more advanced than monolinguals in the solving of experimental problems requiring high levels of control. Also, children will learn about other cultures which will help them become global citizens. Educators feel that more than one language is necessary for children's future economic and social prosperity (Williams, 2013).

In the United States, there are 125 schools that offer Chinese language classes to kindergarten children. However, research on how to teach two-year-old children the Chinese language still needs to be developed. It seems no school provides Chinese language class to two-year-old children in the United States.

Hutchinson School, in Memphis, Tennessee, offers an early foreign language class called "Little Hive," which is for two-year-old children. These students are sensitive in developing language skill because they are already naturally learning English at this age. They can adopt sounds and speech efficiently. They can also respond well to the class songs, activities, and games and enjoy learning the Chinese language. They absorb Chinese class content naturally and comfortably.

Curtain (2000) believes that foreign language instruction is more important than ever as the nation's demographics and national security issues change and the world's economies become intertwined. Weatherford (1986) points out that when foreign language education begins at an early age, foreign language study can shape children's acceptance of others.

The study focuses on two-year-old children who are learning Chinese. I researched my students through observation and note-taking to show each child's progress and development. The study uses qualitative methods to analyze data by using cross-sectional survey designs to fill out questionnaire forms. The child's parents are asked to fill out questionnaires to learn what the parents have observed about the child's use of Chinese at home. Most researchers conclude that not enough studies have been conducted to provide insights from the child's perspective.

BACKGROUND

This research will study how 13 very young girls learn Chinese, how they retain the language, and how it influences them. Experts say the first three years of a child's life are the most intensive period of language and speech development, because this is a very important time for brain development. Language and communication skills are developed best in an environment that is rich with sounds and sights. Voice of America (2013), an organization that researches teaching English as a Second Language, says children should repeatedly hear the speech and language of other people. Strauss (2009) explains that the younger children are, the more comfortable they are in acquiring language. This research study will provide useful information on young children's development and education. Yoshida (2008) explains that "Results of previous studies vary according to research design and classroom context, as well as learners' age and language level" (p. 527).

The Voice of America (2013) explains that unborn babies, begin learning to recognize voices and inflections in spoken words and they are ready to begin learning spoken language as soon as they are born. Adults should help infants to develop their language skills by providing them with oral stimulation by talking to them and reading books to them. Echoing their nonsense

sounds is equally important. This ensures that they will develop the skills related to their later success in school and in life.

Bilingualism has positive effects on memory at all age levels. Cade (1997) believes second language learners have improved test scores, are able to think divergently, achieve in their first language, and attract and maintain parent involvement. Foster and Reeves (1989) argue, in particular, the students who had received foreign language instruction scored higher on tasks involving evaluation, which is the highest cognitive skill according to Bloom's taxonomy. By joining together thoughts and ideas from each of the two languages, bilingual children experience cognitive and memory benefits. Bilingual children can more readily solve social problems when working with their peers.

A study by Peal and Lambert (1962) found that bilinguals performed considerably better than their monolingual controls both on the verbal and on the nonverbal intelligence tests. Research supported the hypothesis that the mental abilities for the two groups differed with the bilingual group having a more varied set of mental abilities.

My research provides a look into how young children learn Chinese. The results of my research will support other educators that teach second languages to two-year-old children. I have seen how children feel safe and supported when they are in a positive learning environment. Through the effective arrangement of space and classroom equipment, learning experiences for young children are enhanced. Curtain (2010) said the following about preschool students (ages 2 to 4): "They respond best to activities and learning situations relating to their own interests and experiences. Preschoolers respond well to concrete experiences and to large – motor skill involvement in language learning" (p. 18).

Psychologists Hakuta & Bialystok (2003) wrote, "...a typical result was that proficiency scores declined with increases in age of initial exposure to the second language. The claim that there is an age-related decline in the success with which individuals master a second language is not controversial" (p. 35). Another researcher, Weatherford (1986), points out that "when beginning at an early age, foreign language study can shape children's acceptance of others" (p. 4).

Penfield and Roberts (1959) states, "early theorists held that younger, rather than older learners are better equipped to learn a

foreign language... optimal language acquisition happens in early childhood" (p. 42). Researchers who study children's language development are always discovering new things. They feel that learning a new language is a uniquely rewarding experience at any age. For obtaining natural-sounding, native-like accents children are always mimicking what they hear and are surprisingly good at it. They are uniquely attuned to slight differences in tone and sound. (Voice of America, 2013) This is good for my research, because I speak Chinese as my native language; I use the tones and accents associated with the Chinese language. Le-loup and Pontierio (2005) explain that young learners, use of authentic language, in context of high interest, and of familiar nature to the learner would seem to be the best bet for success. My students are able to mimic these accents, tones, and sounds as they echo my Chinese words and phrases.

When designing lessons for my "Little Hive" students, it was important to make sure that each student would be successful. After six years of teaching experience, I learned how to adapt each lesson so it could be used with different grade levels. For example, after reading a research article which said younger children below three years of age could not understand the abstract ideas of colors, I altered my teaching plans for my "Little Hive" students. Instead of teaching colors during the first semester, I waited until the second semester to introduce these color words. Most of my "Little Hive" children are now three years old or older. I have also created games, songs, and hands-on activities that allow the children to have extra movement and use of their large motor skills. This helps my "Little Hive" and pre-kindergarten students enjoy learning Chinese.

For English speaking individuals, the Chinese language is very difficult to study. There are major differences between Chinese and English. First, the Chinese pronunciation of sounds is completely different from English sounds. Second, the Chinese sounds have four tones. Third, when pronouncing the Chinese characters, the correct Pinyin is needed in order to read them as words (The symbols used are the same English a, b, c). Fourth, the shapes of the Chinese characters are square, making them hard to recognize and write. A *Chinese Dictionary- 辞海* (2013) explains that there are about 40,000-50,000 words. Only 3,500 of these words are used most commonly.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

I used a case study approach focusing on the 13 students in my classroom. Each student was assessed by collecting data for research. My students are very young; I try to do my research in a setting that is very comfortable for them. For example, how they counted numbers, greeted family members, and sang Chinese children's songs. Each student was given an accuracy score for benchmarks. Qualitative research methods were used when parents responded to inquiries on questionnaires. These questionnaires helped in collecting data about my students' learning from their parents' perspectives. One possible area of interest, for example, would be to find out what impact, if any, the child's participation in the program has had on the child's behavior at home. Other follow-up questions were also used. For example, "Do they sing the Chinese songs at home?" "Do the parents learn any Chinese words from the children?" I also asked the parents some simple questions like "Have you noticed any differences in your child's verbal behavior at home since she began "Little Hive"?" "Do you hear her speaking any Chinese?" The parents told me stories about their children's use of Chinese at home; I roughly transcribed the information gathered from the questionnaires, compared the answers, and looked for major themes. Each student's progress was compared with others in the class to track their usage of Chinese in daily life.

OBSERVATION RESEARCH METHODS

The use of assessments for each student in the "Little Hive," and the methods of the assessments used during each class period were of great importance. This was done through observation and note-taking in order to show each child's progress and development. I learned how to depend on my observations and notes to help me develop educational research on younger children who are learning Chinese. Through their participation in class and their application of skills learned in class, it became evident what teaching methods were most effective and which students were the most successful.

BENCHMARKS RESEARCH METHODS

After the first three months of school, my "Little Hive" students learned to count numbers, name and greet family members, sing songs, and follow simple commands (such as, please stand up, please sit down, and sing the Happy Birthday song.) All of these were done using Chinese words. Benchmark I was administered after three months that tracked progression.

Benchmark I:

- Numbers: one to nine in sequential order
- Family members: mother, father, younger brother and sister, older brother and sister (Younger brother and sister, and older brother and sister in Chinese have a different title).

One month after Christmas break, a review was given and students learned body parts. Benchmark II was given at the end of February.

Benchmark II:

- Numbers 0, 3, 5, 7, 9
- Family members: older sister and brother
- Body parts: hair, mouth, hands

Results are shown on the chart.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESEARCH METHODS

Parents' responses were used as a source of data for the qualitative research. One possible area of interest was to find out what impact, if any, the child's participation in the program had on the child's behavior at home. The following questions were included in the questionnaire given to the parents of the "Little Hive" students:

1. Does she sing the Chinese songs at home?
2. Have you, the parents learned any Chinese words from your daughter?
3. Have you noticed any differences in your daughter's verbal usage at home since she began "Little Hive?"
4. Do you hear her speaking any Chinese?
5. Do you have any stories about your daughter's use of Chinese at home?

This is the comparative data used for the qualitative research.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The research showed that the students use Chinese in daily life. They are unaware that not everyone speaks in Chinese. For example, they count numbers and sing songs with family members at home. In class, they understand directions given 100% in Chinese. Also, research found that the students who attend class five days each week are better at remembering learning content. These students scored over 80% on the benchmark assessments. Children's personalities affected learning results. The multiple articles I read were very helpful to my learning and improved my teaching skills in order to work with my students. I provided the best foreign language educational strategies for children to learn Chinese. The children used oral language skills to think, learn, and play with each other. Oral language develops naturally, so the more a child hears and

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is engaged in conversation, the greater the students' language skills will become. Children that feel engaged in class activities often gain educational depth. The "Little Hive" students were multi-language learners. They were learning Chinese and Spanish, and also learning English at the same time. From this research, I learned that two-year-old children were very successful in learning a second language. They progressed quickly in Chinese learning and English. Their parents said their use of Chinese at home improved their English verbal skills.

OBSERVATION RESULTS

From class observation, I saw the children's individual learning styles. The results of my research showed that the "Little Hive" students Abby, Margaret, Cate, Emma, Henley, Zofia, Addison, Tinsley and Ellie were motivated to participate in class activities and games, and were able to give correct and even insightful answers to questions. However, other students needed more listening time and more one-on-one time spent with the teacher practicing Chinese. Caroline, Ann, and Eliza Belle were quiet and had good manners. When I called on them, they readily responded. These three girls only attended school three days per week. When the time came for the second benchmark, Ann was out of school for one week, but she still did a good job. She did have some difficulty identifying numbers. Karlie attended class five days a week. She often played alone during Chinese class. She did not always pay attention in class, but she still progressed in her learning. Abby was a three day per week student. She was always eager to participate in class activities. She showed great progress in her benchmark exam. Two-year-old Addison was the youngest in the "Little Hive" class, but she always enjoyed Chinese class. She was the first student who said the Chinese children's rhyme, "Little rabbit, white color, ears up right, likes to eat carrots and vegetables, and jumps, jumps, so cute." When I said, "Two year old little friends, please stand up," she immediately stood up and said, "I am two-years old." Her mother said the parents have learned Chinese from Addison at home.

Margaret was only two years and three months old when class began in the fall. She spoke only simple English words when she first enrolled in the "Little Hive" class. She told me her name and age when I met her for the first time. Even though she had a limited English vocabulary, she surprisingly, from the very first class, was able to echo me correctly in Chinese. After three months, she said in English, "My mother

said I was so brave when I had a doctor's appointment last week." This showed that her English skills had greatly improved in that short time period. Margaret, like all of my "Little Hive" students, was learning to speak English, Chinese, and Spanish at the same time when they began Chinese classes. After six months of "Little Hive" class, Margaret was able to say anything she needed in English. Her classroom teacher said they had seen great progress in Margaret's speech. When school began they did not know or understand what Margaret was saying. My research found, that even though my "Little Hive" students were young, they exhibited a natural ability for learning Chinese. They understood the teacher's simple sentences and body language. Their pronunciation was amazing and there was no difference between their accents and the accents of native Chinese speakers.

The students Cate, Ellie, and Henley have older sisters who learned Chinese at Hutchison School. Henley was three years old when she started "Little Hive" Her sister, Hannah, taught her to count the numbers one to ten before she learned this skill in her "Little Hive" class, and her parents said Henley tries to learn from her sister. Ellie sang the "Happy Birthday" song in Chinese at her birthday party when she turned three years old. Cate's parents said their daughters sometimes sang Chinese songs together. Students with siblings helped encourage and improve each other's skills as they learned Chinese.

As I observed students during class, an assessment was made on each student to determine their progress. For example, I taught body parts to my "Little Hive" and pre-kindergarten students. When I said the words: hair, ears, eyes, nose, mouth, and hands in Chinese, I also demonstrated each by pointing to each named part. My students followed me and pointed to each of these named body parts. I used different vocal tones and different facial expressions as I pointed. These demonstrations allowed me to make their learning experience fun. All of the students were so happy and laughed together, which enabled them to understand and learn more quickly.

BENCHMARK RESULTS

Results of this research had two benchmarks for these 13 early childhood students. The chart (see Figure 1) showed the names, ages, and ethnicity of my students. It also showed students who had an older sibling who had previously learned Chinese and possibly introduced the language to them earlier. In the comments section, "three

FIGURE 1: BENCHMARKS I AND II CHART

Name	Age	Sibling	Sibling learning Chinese	Ethnicity	Benchmark I	Benchmark II	comments
Tinsley	3	1	0	AA	53 %	70%	
Abby	2	0	0	W	87%	85%	three days
Margaret	2	0	0	W	100%	100 %	
Cate	2	2	1	W	80%	80%	
Emma	3	0	0	W	100 %	95%	
Caroline	2	1	0	W	33 %	20%	three days
Henley	3	1	1	W	100 %	100 %	
Karlie	2	1	0	W	74%	65 %	
Zofia	3	0	0	W	100 %	100%	
Addison	2	0	0	AA	80 %	95%	
Ann	2	1	0	W	80 %	60%	three days
Ellie	2	1	1	W	93 %	100%	
Eliza-Belle	2	2	0	W	73%	30%	three days

Note: W = White/ Caucasian; AA = African American;

days” means the girl comes to school only three days a week (They come to school on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. The chart shows the students’ success in benchmarks I and II, which are defined below:

Benchmark I:

1. Numbers: one to nine in sequential order
2. Family members: mother, father, younger brother and sister, older brother and sister (Younger brother and sister, and older brother and sister in Chinese have different title).

One month after Christmas break, review was given and students learned body parts. Benchmark II was given at the end of February:

Benchmark II:

1. Identify numbers: 0, 3, 5, 7, 9.
2. Identify family members: older brother, older sister.
3. Identify body parts: hair, hand, mouth.

Tinsley, who was close to three years old when school started, had learned a lot of Chinese. She could count and name family members, but when she was assessed for Benchmark I, she missed almost everything. She mixed up many concepts. One day in class, she independently said the Chinese words for the song, “Where Are My Friends?” This was odd because the students had only been learning this Chinese song during the last few months. It was not easy for this little girl to say, in Chinese: “One, two, three, four, five, six, and seven.

Where are my friends? My friends are here. My friends are in Hutchison.” By the time she completed the Benchmark II assessment, she understood how to use her fingers to count numbers and answer questions. The children learned to use their fingers and sang a number song as they counted. Tinsley was the only student who successfully used her fingers as she counted. She used abstract thinking to arrive at the answers, as opposed to other students who only memorized the correct answers.

Caroline and Eliza-Belle both paid attention in class and did not talk to other students, but because they only attended class three days a week, their benchmark results were not as high as the five day a week students. The questionnaire responses from Caroline’s parents showed that she enjoyed learning Chinese at home with her family. Students reinforced and furthered their knowledge of other disciplines through learning a foreign language. The introduction of the Chinese language and Chinese culture provided students with successful learning experiences. Students played, talked, and mixed English and Chinese in the classroom. They were learning concepts, but not all students were able to recall the concepts quickly. Progress and development was different for each individual.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Out of 13 parents’ questionnaires, I received nine back. The feedback from the nine parents was very positive. They shared

that their daughters sang the Chinese songs at home. The girls often times mixed Chinese and English words in sentences. The students also tried to teach the parents to say simple Chinese words such as one, two, three, and hello. Parents observed improved English usage as well as skills using Chinese.

The following were results from the parents’ questionnaires.

Children use Chinese at Home

Research found that students used Chinese outside of the classroom. Caroline’s parents said she sang Chinese songs and spoke Chinese at home. Cate’s parents said she sang the “Happy Birthday” song and the numbers song. She also spoke a few numbers and greetings in Chinese. Cate and her older sister loved singing the songs together. Karlie’s parents said, “She said hello in Chinese to us. She sang the Chinese song and spoke Chinese at home.” Emma’s, Zofia’s, Henley’s, and Tinsley’s parents said they sang the Chinese songs and spoke Chinese at home.

Children Mix Chinese and English

One student’s parent said that their child used Chinese and English together. Cate’s parents said, “She mixed English and Chinese in the same sentence and I had to ask her to repeat.” The students were not necessarily aware that their parents could not speak Chinese.

Children Try to Teach Parents Chinese

Many parents stated that their children took on the role of the teacher. Caroline’s

parents said they learned Chinese from her. Cate's parents said, "We learned a few Chinese numbers and greetings." Karlie's parents said, "She requested that we sing ABC's in Chinese whenever we sang and then she tried to correct us for not singing correctly." Emma's parents said, "She pretended she was Ms. Li teaching us at home. She corrected our pronunciation when we did not repeat the word correctly. She held up a book and stood in front of us. It was very cute!" Emma taught her parents to count from one to five. Tinsley's parents said, "We learned the first three words." The questionnaire did not explain what those words were, but they were most likely one, two, and three. Zofia's parents said, "She taught us hello and goodbye. We also learned to count from one to five." Ellie's parents said, "Ellie tried to teach us to count in Chinese." Essentially, the students took an interest not only in Chinese, but in teaching it to others.

Children's Verbal English Skills Improve

Caroline's parents said "Caroline completed sentences, said new words every week, and suddenly asked good questions." Cate's parents said, "Cate was verbal when she started "Little Hive." I also observed that she was very talkative and interested in class. Karlie's, Tinsley's, and Emma's parents said that their English usage at home improved. Henley's parents said, "She seemed to talk a lot more." Ellie's parents said, "She was enunciating much better." Zofia's parents said, "She definitely progressed quite a bit with her speech." Margaret's parents said, "Margaret's verbal skills definitely improved. She was forming 'sentences' when she spoke and answered questions in a way that made sense. Her verbal skills really took off and we could not get her to stop talking." Learning Chinese drastically improved their English, putting them above others of their age group.

DISCUSSION

These findings for the "Little Hive" research group could also be applied to other young English-speaking children learning any foreign language. These students at this young age were natural learners and quickly grasped the techniques involved in speaking other languages. Their pronunciation skills were excellent and there was not a difference between their accents and the accents of native Chinese speakers. In theory, through repeated language patterns, they stimulated brain development that greatly increased their learning. According to the parents' feedback on the questionnaire and

the verbal responses they shared, the "Little Hive" students began to teach their parents Chinese by singing songs and speaking Chinese at home. Most of the students' families spent time with the children reviewing what they had learned in class. Parents observed improvement in English verbal usage in the classroom as well as at home. Research using children's stories was valuable because of their reactions to their experiences as they learned Chinese at school and at home. The research results, gained from the parent's questionnaires, showed that the learning begun in the classroom was enhanced and expanded by the learning continued at home. For example, my student Caroline is so shy and a quiet girl. Her parents said "I know she sings the Chinese songs at home, but not frequently enough for me to know which one." Her parents also said "the very helpful lesson sheet, take home papers (I gave my "Little Hive" students lessons sheet after taught them new content) have the Chinese words written out for us to read. Caroline sings the "my friends at Hutchison song." She holds her fingers up counting. I can tell she enjoys Chinese.

The varied active and interactive games from other teachers, books, and online enabled my students to enjoy learning Chinese. When I taught new words or simple sentences, I paid attention to students who were good at grasping new content and who answered questions or responded first. I called on those children first to answer; other children copied from them and learned more quickly. Leloup (2005) explained that students connected knowledge with real world experiences, which caused them to be more interested in learning a second language. I have learned how to work successfully with my "Little Hive" students. I created information sheets to share with the parents so they knew what my students were learning in class. This enabled my young children to successfully talk with their parents and express what they were learning. For example, I created an information sheet that showed Chinese number characters with numbers inside a Chinese flag. I also had another information sheet that showed a map of China and pictures of Chinese dolls. By using these information sheets, the children were able to read the characters to parents as well as share all they learned in class about the Chinese flag, Chinese map, Chinese number characters, and Chinese dolls. As well as learning about the information from the sheets, they were also learning about the Chinese culture. Gilson

and Shrum (2005) discussed that culture should be integrated at every level of study, and the target language should be utilized fully.

This researcher used three ways to collect data. Researchers Brewer & Hunter (1989) express that researchers should collect multiple data using different strategies and methods in a way that when used together result in showing strengths and weaknesses. According to the parents' feedback from the questionnaires, and the stories that they told me, the "Little Hive" students taught their parents Chinese as they sang Chinese songs, and spoke Chinese words and phrases. Most students' families engaged in activities with their children that enabled them to learn Chinese.

An all-family activity: many families have very busy lives. Spending time as a family learning a language can be a very beneficial use of time for all members of the family. It can be done in your own home and not require you to spend time driving from place to place. When this activity is started early, it can become a building block for many years to come. As your family learns more word and phrases, and becomes more skilled in fluency of the second language, they will begin to find opportunities to use what they have learned. Your family may have opportunities to travel to countries where the language is spoken. Your children may choose a future vocation where this skill is used. The possibilities are limitless (Voice of America, 2013).

Foreign language education should begin at an early age and continue throughout all educational levels. Students taught a second language at an earlier age are usually more likely to continue language study later in life (Gilsan & Shrum, 2005). The "Little Hive" students began learning two foreign languages, Chinese and Spanish, at a very young age at Hutchison School. This learning opportunity continues until they finish high school. It is such an important skill for them to have throughout their lives.

I found that it was very important to use interesting context in my lessons. I used activities and methods of learning that connected to real experiences. This helped relate their learning not only to the Chinese vocabulary but also to the Chinese culture. The researcher Harris (2013) shows that by tying in the lessons as much as possible with other academic subjects, it allowed my students to begin to apply what they were learning in Chinese with what they were learning in their every-day classes. By us-

ing body behavior, speaking simple Chinese sentences and repeating words many times the students are more likely to understand. They followed my Chinese dictation to play games. After learning to count numbers, they learned to introduce themselves and tell their ages. Teaching the Chinese language sometimes includes teaching Chinese culture. The “Little Hive” students were able to recognize a map and flag of China. They watched a Chinese New Year’s program and as a Chinese New Year gift, they each received a “red envelope” containing a ten-cent piece of Chinese paper currency to use as a bookmark. The students observed a demonstration on how to make a paper lantern during the Chinese Lantern Festival this year. Each of these culturally related activities were incorporated into the curriculum because language activities encourage students to play and increase their excitement and motivation for learning.

The “Little Hive” students can understand basic Chinese directions. During instruction, Chinese is spoken 100% in the classroom. I show the students numbers and Chinese characters, and then ask in Chinese, “What is the number?” They immediately answer. I show them family members. They can identify each family member and say, “I love father, mother, older sister, younger sister, older brother and younger brother.” I point to body parts and they respond. When I say, “Sing the Numbers Song, Where Are My Friends? Song, or the Happy Birthday song,” they know which song they should sing. In Chinese, I say, “Two year old little friend (or three year) please stand up.” The three girls, who are only two years old, know to stand up and say in Chinese, “I am two years old.” When I call the color (they learned three colors) red, blue and white, they can find and point to that color. Sometimes they are able to tell me their dress colors.

Bialystok (1997) found that bilingual children understood better than monolingual children did on the general symbolic representation of print. The older Chinese-English bilingual children also showed advanced understanding of the specific correspondence relations in English print. All of my pictures and teaching materials are always done in Chinese characters. This way it lets students see Chinese words all the time. This enables them to be familiar with print and storybooks in both languages. It also allows them to observe how print refers to language. As of right now, all of the children can identify some printed letters and

their sounds, but they are not able to read them independently.

It is becoming more important for adults to be proficient in a second language and have intercultural skills as they look for employment possibilities. High-level, high-paying jobs will demand fluency in more than one language. In the United States, second-language abilities are increasingly important to national security, growing our economy, delivery of health care, and law enforcement. Knowledge of other languages enriches travel experiences and allows people to experience other societies and cultures more meaningfully. Besides access to foreign media, literature, and the arts, bi- and multilingual people can simply connect and converse more freely. Becoming bilingual leads to new ways of conceptualizing yourself and others. It expands your worldview, so that you not only know more, you know differently (Williams, 2011).

The “Little Hive” students Addison and Margaret are the youngest in our class, but these two students always pay attention, enjoy learning, participate in all games and activities, and are extremely motivated to learn. Taylor-Ward (2003) explains “Research shows that students who are motivated are more likely to learn. In contrast, students who are not motivated to learn the target language or feel vulnerable or anxious in their learning environment experience a heightened affective filter” (p. 42). Addison and Margaret have memorized the Chinese children’s rhyme. “Little rabbit, white color, two ears up right, like eat vegetable and carrots, Jump jump, so cute.” They can also introduce themselves with their age and name. Their motivation has improved their Chinese retention.

A variety of instructional strategies are used in the curriculum. Hands-on activities, visual aids, and many more concrete objects are incorporated in the lessons. The Chinese instructor always cares about students’ emotions and creates a natural learning environment. This allows all students to have positive experiences during class and also stimulates positive results. Throughout the research, I realized the younger students were learning to copy Chinese words and phrases, but they were not thinking in Chinese. They did not know how to use abstract thinking. When I saw “Little Hive” students on the Hutchison campus I said hello or I love you in Chinese. All the children did in response was smile. By the end of the school year, the pre-Kindergarten students were the first to say in Chinese,

“Hello,” in response.

When I assess my classes, I see the importance of adjusting lessons, classroom materials and activities, for the benefit of the learners. As I assess materials taught, I look to see if they are too complicated for the students to understand in only one lesson. This way I can adjust the teaching curriculum by including student feedback. This allows me to tailor my classroom lessons on a more personal level rather than at a general level. This will benefit my students more educationally and emotionally and will lead to a positive dynamic in the classroom. Before Easter, I tried to let the “Little Hive” students count colored eggs. I showed them the eggs and asked each student to count the eggs of a certain color. I realized that the younger students could not do two things at the same time, such as count and identify colors. One of the research benefits gained through assessing students in my classroom individually and then as a whole, was that I was able to see which materials were understood more easily when presented by the teacher to the students.

CONCLUSION

The deficiencies of this study are that the study included only girls because Hutchison School is a private girl’s school. Other limitations would be that they learn Chinese only during the nine months of school each year, which is a short time period. Also some of the children do not attend school five days each week. School breaks also greatly affect the retention experienced by the students.

How can teachers use limited time to provide efficiency for children learning a second language, and make the program successful? The teacher should positively interact with and support students to make them interested in learning the Chinese language. Teachers have to provide opportunities for students to learn a second language and speak the target language 95% to a 100% of the time.

Educational research adds to our knowledge, and suggests improvements for practice (Creswell, 2012). These study methods could be used to research other grades or by researchers interested in explaining second language learning. Through positive reinforcement, the “Little Hive” and pre-kindergarten students gain a sense of achievement. Positive reinforcement motivates students to participate in class and therefore, they are eager to learn. Through my studies of early childhood foreign language education, I hope to learn how to im-

prove my teaching methods with younger children. I also hope to make my research available to others who desire to teach early childhood foreign education.

I have observed that the 13 students have different ways of learning. Zofia is quiet most of the time and will not speak up on her own, but she can answer all the questions. In Benchmarks I and II she earned 100%. Margaret is the youngest in the “Little Hive” class and she has been able to follow the teacher in speaking Chinese from the first class. She is always motivated to learn. Caroline, Eliza Belle, Ann, and Abby were three day a week students and only Abby received an 80% for both benchmarks. Three day a week students only study for 15 minutes on the days they attend, and cannot remember all of the content. Curtain (2010) said “Learners of different ages from one another in significant ways: individuals may learn best through listening or reading, they may require heavy visual reinforcement or learn better through verbal explanations, or they may respond better to a sequential activity or to a random organization of materials or experiences. Each learner’s experiences differ from those of class peers in a variety of ways” (p.14).

The nine parents said that their children have improved English. Their spoken language is much better and their frequency of speaking has progressed since the “Little Hive” class began. Rhodes (2013) believes that the more children learn about a foreign language, the more they understand about their own language. Learning a foreign language has many benefits, and is very good for young children. Kessler & Quinn (1980) explain that a well-organized bilingual program where children learn two languages can make the positive interactions of cognitive functioning and language development more successful. Being able to converse in a foreign language will give them more options in education and life. Researchers have found that learning other foreign languages can help to improve conversation skills and literacy in English, as well as benefit students’ performance in other subjects. Foreign language study in the lower grades helps students acquire English Language arts skills (Rafferty, 1986). By the “Little Hive” learning the Chinese language, it will provide cross-curricular opportunities that develop critical and creative thinking skills, and effective oral and written communication.

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