

K-12 Chinese Language Programs: The Ohio Model

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The Ohio State University K-12 Chinese Flagship Program

With China emerging on the global stage and growing Ohio exports to China increasing (\$1.3 billion in 2006), Chinese language has finally caught the attention of secondary and even elementary schools throughout Ohio. A couple of years ago, only a few schools in Ohio offered Chinese language instruction. Because of the joint efforts of schools/districts, the OSU K-12 Chinese Flagship Program and Ohio Department of Education (ODE), K-12 Chinese has witnessed a significant growth in Ohio schools. According to an OSU survey, the number of schools offering Chinese and their enrolled students in the 2007-08 school year has almost tripled over that of last year. This paper describes the past successes and future plans of the OSU partnership with K-12 schools in offering innovative and effective Chinese programs.

The OSU K-12 Chinese Flagship Program

The Ohio State University is the first college in Ohio to offer Chinese and the only institution nationally that offers a Ph.D. in Chinese language pedagogy. OSU is home for the National East Asian Languages Resource Center. In 2005, the Chinese Flagship Program was established with National Security Education Program (NSEP) funding to enroll M.A. combined degree (BS/BA-MA) for the advanced study of Chinese, preparing them to work in China-related professional careers. Because of the success of this program, the NSEP funding was increased to add the K-12 component in October 2006.

The OSU K-12 Chinese Flagship Program is developing partnerships in Ohio and beyond to achieve objectives that include: developing performance-based curricula; providing teacher support and professional development; and creating a technology support system. The ultimate goal of the program is to help more Ohio students to be proficient in Chinese language and knowledgeable about Chinese culture. This will not only broaden the students' career possibilities and benefit Ohio's economy, but also improve our national security and international relations. For more information about the OSU K-12 Chinese Flagship Program, please visit <http://k12chineseflagship.osu.edu>.

Range of Ohio Schools Offering Chinese

According to a survey by the OSU K-12 Chinese Flagship Program, the number of Ohio schools/districts offering Chinese language has increased from 17 in 2006-07 to 48 in this school year. Meanwhile, the number of students enrolled in Chinese increased from 777 in 2006-07 to more than 2,000 in regular language programs (taking 3-10 sessions each week) in the current school year. (In addition, more than 3,000 students are enrolled in Chinese exploration programs, taking 1-2 sessions each week.) More high school students are learning Chinese through the individualized distance learning and the summer programs at OSU for college credits.

The Ohio schools offering Chinese are concentrated in and around metropolitan areas (e.g., Cleveland and Columbus), but they represent a wide range:

- Public (including charter) and private schools; and
- Urban, suburban and rural schools.

In terms of the way Mandarin Chinese is delivered to Ohio students, there is also a wide variety:

- Classroom instruction (for most schools);
- Distance learning for students at multiple sites;
- Distance learning of individualized instruction for college credits;
- Summer programs (e.g., Regents' Chinese Academy);
- Exploration learning for special education students; and
- Full language programs (3-10 sessions per week, usually in high schools) vs. exploration programs (1-2 sessions per week, usually in elementary schools).

The phenomenal growth of K-12 Chinese programs in Ohio presents great opportunities for us, but it also creates tremendous challenges, particularly in the areas of curriculum and teacher development. The OSU K-12 Chinese Flagship Program has worked with partners in fostering the opportunities and overcoming many of the challenges.

The Ohio Model: Innovations for Effective Programs

The goals of the NSEP funded Language Flagship programs for critical languages are innovation and effectiveness, and then diffusion of the innovations. (For more information about The Language Flagship programs nationally, visit <http://www.thelanguageflagship.org>.) The reason OSU is awarded the NSEP funding is because of its innovative and effective Chinese programs. Under the leadership of Professor Galal Walker (who is also the director of the National East Asian Languages Resource Center), the OSU Chinese Flagship Program is known nationally and in China for its effective performance-based pedagogy and high performing graduate students. In the last two years, two of its M.A. students became the only Americans who won the first place awards in the "Chinese Bridge"- Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students.

The OSU K-12 Chinese Flagship Program is less than one and a half years old, but it has made significant impact on the development of Chinese language programs in Ohio schools. Unlike the Oregon K-12 Chinese program which is focused on a partial immersion model within one school district, the Ohio model has a statewide approach, providing technical assistance to any school that operates or plans to offer Chinese language programs. Meanwhile, we work with a selected number of "partner schools" to develop model programs. In the current school year, we have three partner schools in the Cleveland, Columbus and Dayton metropolitan areas. The number of partner schools will grow each year. We also facilitate partnerships between partner schools and local Chinese heritage schools, which have a wealth of language and cultural resources.

One of the biggest challenges to Chinese language programs is a lack of teachers who are competent to raise the students' language proficiency levels and their functional ability in the real world. This is partly because most of the Chinese language teachers in Ohio are new in the field, and the training they receive minimally address Chinese language specific pedagogy in American K-12 classrooms. We are working with Dr. Mari Noda (Chair of the OSU Department of East Asian Languages and Literature) to create continuous professional development for Chinese language teachers.

By working with schools and partners, we have largely met the needs of growing interests of Chinese language programs across Ohio. During the last 16 months, the OSU K-12 Chinese Flagship Program has made significant achievements for Ohio schools and teachers, including the following support and services:

- Two statewide conferences for school administrators on how to start and maintain successful Chinese language programs (each time attracting about 200 participants and it will become an annual event in December);
- Site visits to most of the 48 schools/districts currently offering Chinese;
- Class observation of most of the current 54 Chinese language teachers;
- Development of the first phase of K-1 curriculum kit and lesson plans for 9-10th graders (draft version);
- Professional development workshops for Chinese language teachers;
- Resources to schools, teachers and other citizens through daily communications and website (<http://k12chineseflagship.osu.edu>);
- Building a global classroom that can be connected with other classrooms in Ohio and in China; and
- Facilitating a partnership between the Columbus Metro High School and Ohio Contemporary Chinese School.

As the demand increases, we are planning on more support to schools and teachers. While we continue to support more schools starting Chinese language programs in the future, we want to focus on helping the existing programs to maintain quality and expand overtime. Some of our tasks in the next twelve months would include:

- Accelerating the development of K-12 curricula;
- Intensifying professional development for current teachers;
- Supporting the creation of a statewide association of Chinese language teachers;
- Increasing the number of partner schools;
- Facilitating partnerships between all partner schools with local heritage schools;
- Helping more partner schools to build global classrooms;
- Strengthening our statewide efforts in promoting Chinese language through coordinated projects (e.g., StarTalk funded summer camps);
- Providing more web-based resources for teachers and administrators;
- Better planning for program development by visiting all schools with Chinese programs and observing classes of all teachers; and
- Developing corporate partnership to generate mutually beneficial support.

Opportunities and Challenges Ahead

With more funding and support available (including guest teachers), Chinese language programs are growing like wild fires across the United States. This is certainly good news for educators who have advocated for Chinese in K-12 schools for many years. However, the trend also presents significant challenges. For example, almost overnight, there appears an overflow of Chinese textbooks for K-12 schools, but what is needed is a common curriculum that is proven to be effective in measuring the students' performance in stead of how much is taught. In many states, there is a heavy reliance on guest teachers form China. These teachers usually need more training and time to adjust to the American environment, but many of them are leaving after one or two years of service. And the whole guest teacher program will last only a few more years.

Ohio is a typical example with both opportunities and challenges in K-12 Chinese programs. It is an ideal place to test how to take advantage of the opportunities and overcome the challenges. The OSU K-12 Chinese Flagship Program is determined to work with all partners to help Ohio schools succeed in mainstreaming Chinese language in K-12 schools.