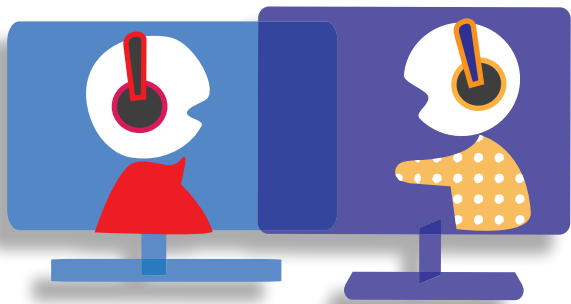# Chapter Two
The Hunter College
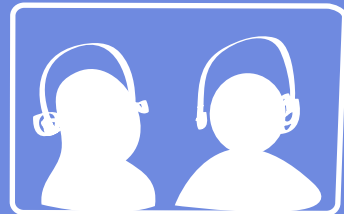# STARTALK Program:
A Case Study

Online Learning

* Design of the STARTALK Program

* Design of the Flagship K-12 Program

* Language Proficiency Outcomes

* The Retention Outcomes for Online Instruction

The proposed blended learning approach is a tested and proven model that has been implemented at the Hunter College STARTALK program for high school students as well as the two-year Flagship K12 Blended Learning Pilot project. It is our hope that more STARTALK programs would consider using this model.

Hunter started offering STARTALK programs in 2007. During the first year, we offered a 100% face-to-face intensive eight-week program to 24 high school students who had little or no previous experience in learning Chinese. Because there were many inquiries from parents and students who wanted to continue learning Chinese after the summer program, we began to think about ways to extend our program into the fall and beyond.

After extensive research on various program models, the program staff concluded that adopting the blended learning model by adding a post-summer online one-on-one instruction component would be the best solution. Hunter's first summer plus post-summer online blended learning program launched in 2009. For the past ten years, Hunter's program has been using a blended learning curriculum for grades 9-12, and students have consistently achieved or exceeded the targeted proficiency goals.

During the 2009-2010 academic year, the Hunter program collaborated with the CASL (Center for Advanced Study of Languages) program at the University of Maryland on a project to offer a nationwide, year-long online course in Chinese for STARTALK high school students who completed a face-to-face summer program. Students from New York, New Jersey, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Connecticut, California, Mississippi, Michigan, Maryland, and Pennsylvania STARTALK programs took this post-summer course. The design of the post-summer program presented in the Guidebook is to a large extent based on the online course design of the Hunter-CASL project.

This model was then used for the Hunter College Chinese Flagship program for college-level students in 2011, and for grades K-12 in a two-year pilot project (beginning in 2015) in which we partnered with a nearby school district in Jericho, Long Island, and with Hunter Campus Schools in Manhattan, New York.

Design of the STARTALK Program

Students who participated in the summer program were recruited to participate in the post-summer program, consisting of an hour-long one-on-one tutoring session once a week for 10 weeks. The post-session usually started around mid-September and ended before the winter break. Students were required to return to Hunter campus to take an end-of-program proficiency test (e.g. Standards-based Measurement of Proficiency or STAMP) and give a final project presentation. If students could not come back, arrangements were made to take the test with an on-site monitor or to send in a video of their presentations. The class performance, test results, and project were used for grading.

In addition to the student program, Hunter College also ran a side-by-side teacher development program during the summer face-to-face session. The teacher trainees were recruited to work as online instructors during the post-summer program, teaching for 4-5 hours per week. Teacher and student online course preparation began during the face-to-face session so as to provide teacher trainees ample time to become familiar with the online platform and the virtual classroom. Students and instructors got together to choose a convenient online class time, either after school or on a weekend.

The Hunter online instructional program design drew upon state-of-the-science best practices from Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory and online learning to help students maintain and continue to develop their proficiency. It ensures that learners receive sufficient input, have opportunities for output and interaction, receive both implicit and explicit feedback, and work within a task-

based framework. (See Chapter Seven for the Hunter STARTALK Program Curriculum.)

To offer online instruction, the first challenges that we faced were to find an online Learning Management System (LMS) and virtual classroom that provided adequate resources for online language courses. After researching what was available, Hunter decided to design its own LMS, called Chinese For All, with a team of developers and teachers who volunteered their time and effort. This allowed us to customize functionalities for language teaching and learning, and to have a one-stop online learning platform that eliminated the need for multiple programs, platforms, and logins.

In terms of learning materials, Hunter developed a wealth of web-based multimedia and interactive materials that engaged students in multiple modalities. Students could use them independently or under the guidance of a teacher. The web learning materials were authentic and appropriate to students of different ages and target proficiency levels. They were used for asynchronous learning before and after the online weekly classes. The asynchronous learning materials also contain rich Chinese literacy foundation materials to help students learn to read and write characters and to read character-based texts. Hunter's tech team is in the process of developing learning apps and a version of the Live Classroom for mobile devices.

Design of the Flagship K-12 Program

This K-12 blended learning project was funded by The Language Flagship. This project allowed us to implement online instruction with students in grades K-2, 3-5, and 6-8, in addition to grades 9-12 and college level. We partnered with the Jericho School District in Long Island, New York for two years and Hunter Campus Elementary School for one semester. The enrollment was 87 students in year 1, and 160 students in year 2.

Similar to the STARTALK programs, students

attend a summer program before they attend the online one-on-one instruction during the academic year (30 weeks). We made adjustments in online instructional time for each age group. The project lasted for two years. During the first year, we provided some face-to-face instruction to complement the online instruction for students in grades 3 to 12. Grades K-2 students did not receive online instruction. During year 2 of the project we had to drop face-to-face instruction and instead provided online instruction to all grades from K to 12. Below are the weekly online instruction times for each group:

- Grades 9-12: 1.5 hours per week
- Grades 6-8: 1 hour per week
- Grades 3-5: 1 hour per week
- Grades K-2: 30 minutes per week

Students in grades K-5 were invited to attend optional monthly face-to-face meetings.

Language Proficiency Outcomes

Over a period of five years, the Hunter STARTALK program collected proficiency scores in speaking and reading from a total of 34 high school students without prior learning background. After studying Chinese in a summer plus online post-summer program for a total of 110 instructional hours, high school students with no background were able to obtain robust linguistic gains.

The proficiency outcomes demonstrate that 100% of the students reached Novice-mid (NM) or higher in speaking; more than 85% of the students reached Novice-high (NH) or higher. The proficiency results also show that compared to speaking proficiency, reading proficiency takes longer to develop. 59% of the students still remained at Novice-low (NL) when they completed the post summer program. Below is a chart showing various proficiency outcomes:

Proficiency Outcomes for Hunter STARTALK High School Students Without Background

N=34	NL	NM	NH	IL	IM
STAMP Speaking	-	12%	55%	27%	6%
STAMP Reading	59%	24%	8%	8%	-

It is clear that students learning Chinese via a blended and personalized instruction model can continuously increase their proficiency, and that the model can articulate well with college-level Chinese courses at various universities nationwide.

Our analysis of student proficiency scores in the **Flagship K12 Blended Learning Pilot project** further confirms that this innovative, one-on-one online instructional design can be applied to all age levels, not only for elementary grades 3-5, but also as early as grades K-2. Because there were no proficiency assessment tools available, we were not able to obtain proficiency outcome data for grades K-2 students, but the progress demonstrated by students in grades 3 to 12 with no previous background was strikingly promising. Below is a chart indicating their proficiency outcomes in speaking, writing, reading, and listening. Before the students took the assessments, grades 9-12 students received about 150 instructional hours (100 hours of face-to-face group sessions plus 50 hours of one-on-one online sessions); grades 6-8 received about 90 instructional hours (55 hours of face-to-face group sessions plus 35 hours of one-on-one online sessions), and grades 3-5 students received about 53 instructional hours (30 hours of face-to-face group sessions plus 23 hours of one-on-one online sessions).

Proficiency Gains for Jericho Grades 3 -12 Students Without Background

	NL	NM	NH	IL
STAMP Speaking	Gr 3-5: 7.6% (n=39) Gr 6-8: 5% (n=21) Gr 9-12: n/a (n=20)	Gr 3-5: 48.72% (n=39) Gr 6-8: 38% (n=21) Gr 9-12: 20% (n=20)	Gr 3-5: 25.6% (n=39) Gr 6-8: 33% (n=21) Gr 9-12: 35% (n=20)	Gr 3-5: 17.9% (n=39) Gr 6-8: 24% (n=21) Gr 9-12: 45% (n=20)
STAMP Writing	Gr 3-5: 17% (n=41) Gr 6-8: 18% (n=22) Gr 9-12: 0% (n=20)	Gr 3-5: 56% (n=41) Gr 6-8: 18% (n=22) Gr 9-12: 15% (n=20)	Gr 3-5: 22% (n=41) Gr 6-8: 36% (n=22) Gr 9-12: 60% (n=20)	Gr 3-5: 4.8 (n=41) Gr 6-8: 27% (n=22) Gr 9-12: 25% (n=20)
STAMP Reading	Gr 3-5: 83% (n=47) Gr 6-8: 50% (n=24) Gr 9-12: 24% (n=21)	Gr 3-5: 8.5% (n=47) Gr 6-8: 42% (n=24) Gr 9-12: 57% (n=21)	Gr 3-5: 2% (n=47) Gr 6-8: 8% (n=24) Gr 9-12: 5% (n=21)	Gr 3-5: 6.4% (n=47) Gr 6-8: 0% (n=24) Gr 9-12: 14% (n=21)
STAMP Listening	Gr 3-5: 64.4% (n=45) Gr 6-8: 38% (n=24) Gr 9-12: 20% (n=20)	Gr 3-5: 27% (n=45) Gr 6-8: 29% (n=24) Gr 9-12: 25% (n=20)	Gr 3-5: 4% (n=45) Gr 6-8: 25% (n=24) Gr 9-12:15% (n=20)	Gr 3-5: 4.6% (n=45) Gr 6-8: 8% (n=24) Gr 9-12: 40% (n=20)
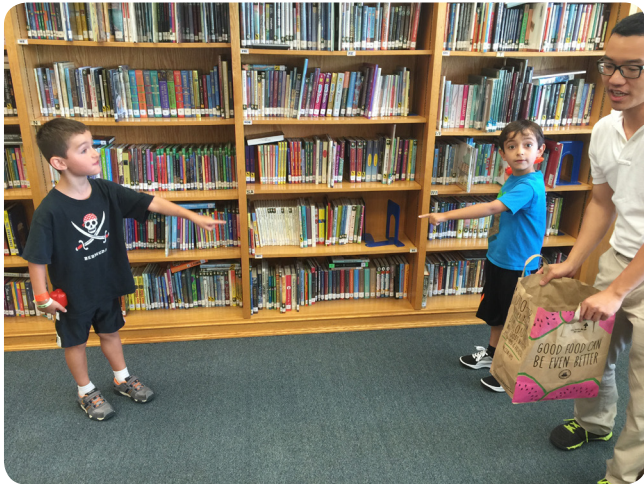
for language learning activities. STARTALK elementary school students can take advantage of quality post-summer online language instruction to learn languages quickly. The virtual class meetings, supplemented with the carefully designed weekly assignments, will produce amazing language acquisition results to maximize learning outcomes for both elementary and secondary students.

The proficiency results indicate that the majority of the students were able to reach NM or higher in speaking and writing after completing a summer-plus-post-summer program. High school students seemed to adapt to online instruction especially well, because they were able to reach NH or higher in speaking. The results also show that for students at all grade levels, reading and listening skills take longer to develop.

The Retention Outcomes for Online Instruction

Another important success indicator is the student retention rate for the program. One recurring criticism about online instruction is the high attrition rate. However, the data shows that the retention rate for STARTALK programs for high school students has been consistently at or near 100%. For our K-12 two-year program, the retention rate was 90%. The high retention outcomes for online instruction strongly indicate that if the instructional design is adequate and if students find it useful, they will continue to study Chinese from one level to the next.

The American Academy of Arts and Sciences 2017 report *America's Languages: Investing in Language Education for the 21st Century* advocates world language instruction to elementary school students because younger students are more likely to acquire native-like pronunciation. In addition, students at