A Study on Teaching for Chinese Language in Short-Term Summer Camp Programs for European and American Adolescents to China

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Abstract: *In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of overseas adolescents coming to China to participate in short-term summer camps for middle and high school students. This immersive linguistic and cultural experience represents not only an effective approach to language learning but also serves as a crucial medium for promoting understanding of China among foreign youth and for fostering the international dissemination of Chinese culture. This paper focuses on the teaching practices within such short-term summer camp programs. It explores effective Chinese language teaching methods and strategies for adolescent learners in this context, examining key components such as teacher arrangements, textbook selection, class organization, design of class activities, and the presentation of Chinese learning outcomes.*

Keywords: *European and American adolescents to China; short-term summer camp; Chinese language teaching; teaching strategies*

Introduction

China, as one of the ancient civilizations, possesses a long history, splendid culture and beautiful and melodious language; it has quickly developed its economy recently becoming the world's second largest economy. All these attract foreign students to learn Chinese. The number of Chinese learners worldwide increased from more than 30 million in 2003 to over 100 million in recent years. As of June 2019, there are 155 countries (regions) around the world established 530 Confucius Institutes, 1,129 Confucius Classrooms[1] and more than 5,000 teaching sites[2]. More than 60 countries have included Chinese language teaching into their national education system by law or decree, and more than 170 countries provide Chinese language courses or programs. An official from the Office of the National Leading Group for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language said that "the Chinese fever" has become a common phenomenon in the global language communication system. Besides university students and company employees having trade relations with China, more and more adolescent students in Europe and America are willing to come to China to experience Chinese language and culture. There are many short-term program classes coming to China every summer vacation to learn Chinese and experience Chinese culture. Content of short-term summer camps for adolescents mainly consist of learning Chinese, experiencing Chinese culture and travelling. A short-term summer camp in China has a short duration, whose teaching content is rich and diverse: They must include language courses training listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, add Chinese culture courses, and also organize performances, travel, study tours, graduation ceremonies, etc., involving many aspects. Though the learning time is so short, this kind of program class plays an important role in promoting Chinese language and Chinese culture.

1. Characteristics of Students

Most of the students attending our short-term summer camps in China come from Europe and America at junior high school or senior high school (age: 13-18). Senior high school students are a little bit more than junior high school ones. Students are optimistic and humorous, enthusiastic, eager for learning, fond of doing something new. Some students have learned Chinese in their own country. They can speak some simple Chinese and write some simple Chinese characters. Some students haven't learned Chinese yet, but they are full of interest in Chinese and China. They are very curious about this

new place and new language, hoping that they could speak simple and useful Chinese. Such as knowing how to greet others, how to introduce oneself and one's family, expressing interests and hobbies, buying things, expressing time, ordering food etc.. Besides language knowledge, they are more interested in Chinese culture. Wanting to eat Chinese food in China itself, make dumplings, practicing martial arts, experiencing traditional Chinese medicine culture in traditional Chinese medicine clinics, learn paper-cutting, making Chinese knots, watching Chinese song and dance performances, singing Chinese songs, dancing Chinese dances, playing the hulusi, playing the guzheng, wearing clothing with Chinese characteristics, etc. Some students think there is great development space in China in the future and also have the intention to study in China in the future; therefore, they learn Chinese and Chinese culture in order to engage in various jobs related to Chinese finance, trade, and so on in the future.

2. Categories of Short-Term Summer Camps in China

Types of purpose of learning in Summer camps. Mainly there are two kinds of summer camps that I have experienced: One focused on Chinese language learning and Chinese cultural experience; Another with Chinese language learning and Chinese cultural experience, but also has post-camp assessment after course learning. There are some special summer camps such as British student summer camp whose English name is Chinese Immersion Course Program comes to China only for 10 days. Besides experiencing Chinese culture, post-camp assessment after 10 days play a very important role; relevant teachers need to record audio files of students' Chinese proficiency test and send it back to the British Embassy for assessment. Instructors in the first kind of summer camp focus on cultivating students' interest in Chinese and Chinese culture. Instructors in the second kind of summer camp not only focus on cultivating students' interest in Chinese language and culture, they also need to focus on training students' ability to take Chinese examinations. How to realize both of them within a very short time? Most of the short-term summer camps in China are language and culture experiences, and a few include an additional post-camp assessment. From the organizer's perspective, there are also differences between government programs and language institution programs. Some are intergovernmental exchange programs, and other programs are from foreign language institutions. Usually, students who participate in intergovernmental exchange programs will pay less fee than those participating in language institution programs which need to pay at their own expense.

3. Teacher Arrangement

Importance of teachers of Chinese as a foreign language in short-term summer camps is very important. Good class organization by teachers and keeping the students' attention directly decide if the course can be completely successful. As regards teachers: teachers who teach summer camps must be patient and responsible; full of imagination and creativity; but not using traditional teaching methods all through the whole teaching process. Because most of the camp members are junior and senior high school students ranging from ages 13 to 18. As regards teacher arrangement, we recommend allowing more young teachers to take part in teaching. They should be confident and never think that students would regard themselves as inexperienced just because they are young. They should believe that as long as they work hard, they can get good results. As regards dress, they should pay attention to their image, wearing neat and formal clothes, smiling, being full of passion. Patience and sense of responsibility are indispensable qualities possessed by teachers of Chinese as a foreign language, while imagination and creativity are important factors for carrying out classroom innovation, holding the students' attention, and increasing students' interest in learning. Most of the teachers in the European and American short-term summer camp classes that the author has encountered are part-time teachers, mostly master's students majoring in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language at colleges and universities, aged around 22-25 years old. Their advantage is that they are interested in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language. When teaching adolescents coming to China, they can combine theory with practice. So they have a high sense of responsibility and professional dedication, like to study how to teach students well, positive, optimistic, creative, sharing many common topics with junior and senior high school students aged 13 to 18. For example, when teaching, these teachers have designed some activities such as teaching students to dance the Xinjiang dance "Dance of Youth", playing the game Eagle Catches the Chick, setting up a flea market to sell products with Chinese characteristics, eating Chinese food with students, making dumplings, teaching students to play mahjong etc., getting good teaching results. Shortcomings of master's students majoring in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language serving as teachers for European and American adolescent summer camps is that because

their main working part-time during the summer, teachers are highly mobile, which is not conducive to the long-term stable development of the programs. We need to conduct relevant teachers professional training on Chinese teaching in short-term summer camp classes, so as to further optimize teaching effectiveness.

4. Textbook Selection

Choosing textbooks: Students of summer camp are adolescents, they don't have much learning time; their Chinese proficiency varies greatly – which textbook should we choose? The first group focuses on cultural experience, Learn Chinese with Me (Volumes 1, 2, 3, and 4), published by People's Education Press is a very good series of textbooks. All the pictures in this book are in color layout, after every lesson there are songs, riddles, tongue twisters, etc., its content and topics suit the interest and feature of the adolescent students, it has accompanying teacher's books and student workbooks, teachers can flexibly choose what students are interested in based on students' characteristics. Second type of students who needs to give performances and take exams, teachers need to compile their own teaching materials according to specific examination requirements and the syllabus. For example, for the British summer camp where students study Chinese language and Chinese culture in China for just 10 days and at the end need to give a program performance presentation and take an examination, I quickly wrote a script including the vocabulary and grammar points of the examination syllabus and also had a storyline, songs, and dances. Content is a romantic comedy story set in ancient China. I assign each of my 15 students in the class a role, make them learn Chinese language knowledge through the story, and at the same time provide a script for performing a program in Chinese within a short period. Teachers can adapt from Journey to the West or from some famous fairy tales like Snow White, in which these students are relatively interested. For textbooks for adolescent short-term summer camps, the author suggests that teachers can interview students, according to students' learning purposes and combined with local characteristics, compile textbooks that better conform to learners' characteristics and local characteristics. Take Kunming, Yunnan, as an example, when compiling textbooks for short-term classes for adolescents from Europe and America coming to China, the content might be basic vocabulary and grammar about shopping, ordering food, traveling, etc.; dialogues or short passages could be Yunnan specialty foods such as Crossing-the-Bridge Rice Noodles and Grandma's Mashed Potatoes, Yunnan tourist attractions such as Dali, Lijiang, Shangri-La, Tiger Leaping Gorge.

5. Classroom Organization

Function of classroom in short-term summer camps for adolescents: Firstly, regarding the number of students in the class, small class teaching (the number of students from 6 to 8), has better effect. Small class gives every student many chances to speak in class which improve the efficiency of learning. Class size of 6 to 8 is conducive to group practice, enhancing the liveliness of classrooms. Regarding the organization of the classroom, teachers must take it seriously and do preparation work well. Choose activity-based teaching, game-based teaching, multimedia-assisted teaching etc., to enhance the interest of classroom teaching; We suggest that instructors try their best to win students' affection and trust in the first class. Moreover, teachers should have a strong sense of time, not be late, start and end classes on time, check homework promptly, so that students can feel the teacher's sense of responsibility and principles. For those students who come late for class or don't finish their homework, teachers should ask them concerned about what problems they have, if they need help, and so on. Teachers should care for and cherish students, remember the requests students make to them, fulfill their own promises in a timely manner, enthusiastically help students, so that students feel that the teacher values them highly. Some children with unique personalities will appear among the junior high school or senior high school students participating in the summer camp. Teachers should communicate with them in a timely manner, treat them patiently with an inclusive attitude. Regarding the use of classroom language, we recommend that teachers use Chinese in an immersive manner throughout the class as much as possible, so as to cultivate students' perception of Chinese pronunciation, speaking speed, tone, and so on.

6. Teaching Methods

In terms of teaching methods: Different teachers have different methods and different teaching styles. In summer camp class, teachers need to teach according to students' characteristics. The

European and American middle school students have a strong thirst for knowledge, like novel things, like to participate personally in learning activities, they are willing to show themselves. Teachers can combine experiential teaching with practical teaching; student-centered teacher-guided, adhering to the principle of combining practicality, interest, and communicativeness, fully mobilizing their enthusiasm and participation, make the classroom lively. Here the author lists some cases of classroom activity implementation for reference.

Course Title: Comprehensive Chinese

Teaching Participants: 7 high school students in an American summer camp, staying in China for 21 days.

Textbook Used: Learn Chinese with Me, Volume 3[3].

Teaching Time: The entire program consists of 36 class hours in total, with 2 class hours arranged for each text.

Selected Texts: "She Comes from Hong Kong"; "How Much Is a Plane Ticket?"; "The Color of a Wedding"; "Which Kind of Dish Do You Prefer?"; etc.

Classroom Activity for "She Comes from Hong Kong": The teacher asks students to describe a student in the class and lets everyone guess who he or she is.

"After learning the text, teachers give them some destinations with telephone numbers so that each student can call an airline to book a plane ticket (such as Beijing to Xi'an; Kunming to Beijing)." "Teachers prepare real objects like fruit, books, jewelry and stationery for students to buy and sell things."

"Color of a Wedding" Classroom activity: After reading the text and doing simulations, pick out one male and one female student as the groom and bride respectively. Make props in advance by the teacher(e.g., clothing) such as a suit for the groom, a red dress or qipao for the bride, wedding candy, red envelopes, the Chinese character for double happiness, flowers worn on the groom and bride, flowers on the bride's head, wedding music, etc. Students are asked to do a Chinese wedding.

Classroom Activity: "Which Kind of Dish Do You Prefer?" Students learn about Chinese dishes through pictures displayed in class; students create their own Chinese menus. Once they have learned how to order dishes, the teacher will ask students to go to a restaurant to order dishes on their own and eat together at noon.

Some of my ideas and practices during the teaching process aimed at increasing the interest of classroom learning, attracting the attention and awareness of activity participation that yield good results when teaching European and American high school students how to communicate with Chinese immersion in real scenarios and personally participating in activities like Chinese weddings and experiencing Chinese culture.

7. Display of Teaching Achievements

Displaying Chinese learning achievements Besides classroom teaching and learning, there is a farewell party every summer camp; showing off students' Chinese learning achievements at the farewell party is what students look forward to. Displaying Chinese learning achievements is of great importance during the summer camp party. All the students hope that the performance which he/she takes part in will be recognized by everyone (the most interesting/humorous/best looking/best sounding). When organizing performances for this purpose, teachers must fully utilize his/her imagination and organization skills. Students are all very creative. They will have great interest if we give them an opportunity to show themselves while rehearsing and performing the programs. We should trust our students' ability to express themselves in Chinese within a short time. Those students taking part in performances will find many ways to memorize Chinese: they write down the words they need to say on the props they carry with them or on their hands after the performance is over, etc. Teachers can also reward students with artworks with Chinese characteristics like fans, Chinese knots, Chinese dictionaries and paper-cutting artworks.

Programs for showing Chinese learning achievements: It is better if Chinese features can be shown in those programs, all students will wear clothes with Chinese characteristics during performances. Ancient opera, stage plays, songs of ethnic minorities, dances of ethnic minorities, kung fu, etc. Clothing with Chinese characteristics like Hanfu, qipao, ethnic minority clothing, etc., costume is very

important. Students who wear traditional Chinese clothing will be interested in the programs. Teachers can recommend suitable clothing according to the content of particular programs to students. Stage play is what most students most want to perform at summer camps. Many students feel that their spoken Chinese can be trained when rehearsing a stage play. Of course, teachers can combine stage plays, dances, and singing into one program for rehearsal so that students do not only practice their spoken Chinese, but also learn Chinese dances and songs. Time allocated to rehearsals of programs is about the last 30 minutes of the last class every day (because after about two hours of language classes, students are relatively tired). Besides, the schedule of the summer camp is quite tight, there is usually no time for rehearsal after class. Once we allocate roles to each student, teachers should let them practice by themselves after class. At the closing ceremony, Chinese language teachers should also take care of their clothing besides organizing and arranging programs. They should wear relatively formal clothing, because foreign students generally dress relatively formally.

Summer Camps in China for Adolescents allow foreign students to learn Chinese immerse, experience China's excellent traditional culture and Chinese local customs and practices; It has a great significance on the promotion of mutual exchange and understanding between China and other countries. The way how to conduct teaching activities for youth summer camps in China by arranging teachers, choosing textbooks, organizing classrooms, carrying out classroom activities, showing Chinese learning achievements etc., can better help foreign junior and senior high school students learn Chinese, strengthen exchanges between Chinese and foreign young people, and promote the external dissemination of Chinese culture.

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