This paper examines the Canadian British Columbia Ministry of Education’s 5th grade Chinese curriculum. Particular attention is paid to the curriculum’s rationale (ideology and assumptions), the intended goals and learning activities.

**Curriculum Summary**

Mandarin Chinese 5 suggests instructional activities and assessments to build the following abilities: communication, acquiring information, experience creative works, and understanding culture and society. The aim of the Mandarin Chinese curriculum is to enable students to learn to speak and understand the language. The curriculum was developed by “specialist and generalist teachers to assist their colleagues”.

**Rationale**

Although they did not give credits to any curriculum ideology and educational philosophy we discussed in class, it is quite apparent that the curriculum designers hold a more Gardner’s educational approach when they state that

The goal of language learning is performance with language rather than knowledge about the language. Instruction takes into account individual learning styles and rates. Assessment reflects instructional goals and is performance oriented. The ability to perform with language is facilitated when students actively engage in meaningful, authentic, and purposeful language-learning tasks. Technology and textbook materials play a support role for language-learning goals; they should not determine curriculum. Teachers are qualified in the languages they teach.
There is also a quite bit of progressive ideology because they believe students’ active participation, authentic language use (Dewey), respecting multiple ways of learning (also Gardner’s educational philosophy), collaborative learning, and teacher’s role in curriculum creation.

They assume that different districts and schools may have different situations and needs. The curriculum is a suggested guideline for schools and teachers to use. They made this clear by stating in the curriculum plan that “Teachers are free to adapt the suggested instructional strategies or substitute others that will enable their students to achieve the prescribed outcomes.” Regarding the learning resources, the curriculum states “Teachers and school districts are encouraged to select those resources that they find most relevant and useful for their students, and to supplement these with locally approved materials and resources to meet specific local needs.”

This gives schools and teachers much freedom to implement the curriculum so that they can tailor the curriculum plan to meet their local needs.

**Intended Goals and Activities**

In general, suggested learning activities well support the intended goals. The curriculum suggests a corresponding learning activity for each learning outcome or combination of several learning outcomes. For example, one of the intended goals is that students can “introduce themselves and others, using appropriate family-relationship terms in the context of the immediate family.” The curriculum suggests a very effective learning activity to meet this learning outcome: “make several sets of four cards, each set
describing four family members. Include information about family members' education, jobs, languages spoken, and ages. Have students each select a card and walk around the class greeting others until they find their "families." The first family that unites wins a prize.” The activity is well-structured and organized effectively at least from its description. It can also engage students in learning.

There is an apparent alignment among learning goals, suggested learning activities, and assessments. They also suggest criteria for assessing the extent to which the prescribed learning outcomes have been met. Still take the “family-flinging” as an example, the curriculum suggests an assessment as follows:

During activities in which students assume identities or unite to form families, note the extent to which they:
- are able to speak, with support; use appropriate patterns;
- use appropriate family-relationship terms (e.g., shushu, gugu, bofu, bomvu); take risks to add details; use correct intonation.

Although the assessment is aligned with the learning goals and the learning activity, the implementation of the assessment might be a problem or needs teacher’s careful planning when the class is big, because it is hard for the teacher to pay enough attention to individual students and therefore cannot have a full picture of students’ performance.

The biggest strength of this curriculum is that the learning goals, suggested learning activities, and assessments are aligned by the theme of authentic language use – “the purposeful use of the language to perform authentic tasks, share ideas, acquire information, and enhance understanding of culture.” Activities are constructed to mimic
real world experiences. Students are asked to introduce themselves, describe their family, sing Chinese songs, etc.

There is an apparent weakness in this curriculum plan. It does not mention how the curriculum can be tailored and flexible to address the interests and learning styles of all students. Another possible weakness is that the curriculum does not specify exactly what knowledge and skills are expected for students to acquire. It just lists high-level learning outcomes.

In summary this is an interesting curriculum emphasizing hands-on, real world activities. A clear intention of the designers is that the content would be customized, as it doesn’t provide as much detail as to the day to day learning. In this sense, it is just a guideline for the learning goals, the learning activities, and assessment.

Reference:


