

# Chapter One

## Introduction



- \* Purpose of the Guidebook
- \* Sustainment in Language Learning is Critical for Developing Proficiency
- \* The Need for Post-Summer Programs
- \* Challenges of Organizing Post-Summer Programs
- \* Post-Summer Design: Offering Weekly Online Personalized Learning
- \* Other Considerations When Designing Post-Summer Programs



## Purpose of the Guidebook

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This Guidebook, compiled by the Hunter College STARTALK team, will show how to expand a STARTALK summer face-to-face program into a summer-plus post-summer program by incorporating an online instructional component. The instructional model that combines face-to-face instruction in a classroom setting with online instruction in a virtual environment is widely known as blended learning. This Guidebook will provide comprehensive step-by-step instructions on how to prepare and run a post-summer online program. The Guidebook also summarizes the lessons we have learned during our decade of experience implementing summer and post-summer online programs at K-16 levels. We believe that this will be useful for all STARTALK programs, no matter what language is taught.

## Sustainment in Language Learning is Critical for Developing Proficiency

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Cultivating the foreign language skills of Americans is critical in today's interconnected world. Since STARTALK inaugurated its first summer program in 2007, it has grown to be one of the most significant federally-funded projects in critical foreign language education for American youths. Numerous world language experts have worked as program team leaders and evaluators to promote STARTALK instructional principles and methods in teaching, curriculum design, and assessment. As a result, STARTALK programs have set a national standard for quality language instruction for thousands of students.

If we look at the 2017 programs, it is evident that the majority of the programs are summer-only programs. Even though thousands of students have benefited from the summer programs, after the summer programs end, many students are not able to continue to study their STARTALK languages in their home schools. These students will likely have difficulty maintaining their language skills, and may even forget what they learned during the summer. Even if a student's



school does have foreign language classes, instruction very often does not follow STARTALK principles, and class curricula are rarely articulated with the STARTALK curriculum.

One solution to address this issue is to offer a post-summer program that consists of both synchronous and asynchronous online learning, using a personalized and proficiency-based approach. Synchronous learning refers to real time instruction via a virtual classroom with a trained language teacher or a conversation partner who possesses the requisite Chinese language proficiency. Asynchronous learning refers to students working online with self-paced, authentic, multimedia instructional materials that are task-based and meaningful in real life situations. Personalized learning means that students are provided with a personalized study plan that addresses the interests and needs of each individual learner. Proficiency-based learning means that the curriculum specifically indicates proficiency targets and that the goal for instruction is to push students to the next higher proficiency level in all four modalities. After the post-summer session ends, students will be assessed to see if they have achieved the proficiency targets. The proficiency assessment results will be shared with teachers and students to plan for future instruction and learning needs.

Post-summer learning should be regarded as an integral part of the STARTALK summer programs. Therefore, the personnel, curriculum, and standards of post-summer programs should follow the same principles and standards as the summer programs. Learning outcomes of

post-summer study should be tracked and documented, with post-summer program performance being evaluated in the same manner as summer program performance. Teacher programs should consider including online teaching standards and practicum opportunities when training online instructors for their post-summer programs.

## **The Need for Post-Summer Programs**

Finding ways to keep STARTALK students learning and increasing their proficiency levels after the summer is especially important for STARTALK languages, because these languages are known to be challenging and time-consuming for English speakers to acquire. For example, languages such as Mandarin Chinese, Korean, and Arabic require approximately 2000 hours of instruction for a student to reach advanced level proficiency, and Russian, Hindi and Urdu require 1500 hours. In contrast, more commonly taught languages such as Spanish or French may require as few as 500 hours. Therefore, finding an approach to make quality STARTALK language instruction available for students after the summer is critical. Establishing post-summer programs is necessary so students can continue to receive the best quality of instruction through the fall, winter, and spring.

Having a post-summer component can ease the instructional burden of teaching both conversational skills and literacy skills in the summer program. For example, research has shown that it takes longer for students to develop literacy skills in Chinese than it takes them to develop speaking skills. Because of the limited instructional time, many summer programs focus almost exclusively on teaching conversational skills. Post-summer programs could provide students with more language input and exposure to reading and writing. As a result, teachers in summer programs can use their face-to-face time to focus on activities that require interactivity and personal contact. During the post-summer session, students can review to maintain their conversation skills and work on improving literacy skills. This design will ensure that students develop skills

in all four modalities in a balanced way.

Post-summer STARTALK programs can facilitate the transitions from one grade level to the next. This is especially helpful for high school students who would like to continue learning critical languages in college. Students are often asked to take placement exams to test their proficiency before being placed in a higher-level course. College placement exams are based on the course materials used at the institution, and they focus on conversation, reading, and writing skills. It is common for high school students whose language instruction focuses only on conversation skills to be unprepared for college placement exams. Moreover, many college Chinese language teachers find students entering college programs to have “Swiss Cheese Syndrome,” or “holes” in their linguistic competencies, particularly regarding tones, characters, and grammar. As a result, many students with decent speaking skills fail placement exams because they cannot read or write at a high enough proficiency level. It is discouraging to ask these students to start learning Chinese from scratch, beginning with Chinese 101, which can demotivate students to the point where they drop out of Chinese language learning altogether. Post-summer one-on-one instruction, therefore, is an ideal opportunity for STARTALK high school students to complete college-level beginning Chinese course requirements so that they do not have to waste time repeating course material in college.

## **Challenges of Organizing Post-Summer Programs**

Running a post-summer program that offers face-to-face instruction has several issues and challenges that need to be considered. The biggest challenge is scheduling. Unlike summer time, students are busy with school work as well as extracurricular activities. Therefore, a post-summer program will most likely not be able to maintain the same level of intensity as a STARTALK summer program. Furthermore, students in a summer program may attend different schools during the year, making it

# Post-Summer Program



**Summer Program Only**

difficult to get students together at a post-program site. Given these constraints, flexibility in scheduling and space is essential to ensure that participants will be able to enroll in a post-summer program.

Another challenge is to find experienced teachers familiar with STARTALK instructional principles to teach during the academic year. The teachers who teach in the summer programs may have day jobs, or they may be hired from out of state or even abroad. During the academic year, it is unlikely that the same teaching team will be available to teach post-summer instruction. To confront these challenges, it is recommended that STARTALK post-summer programs adopt online tutoring.

### **Post-Summer Design: Offering Weekly Online Personalized Learning**

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The proposed post-summer program featured in this guidebook adopts a weekly online one-on-one synchronous instruction design. This means that a teacher and student will meet online to engage in real-time of language teaching.

Offering one-on-one instruction online minimizes the challenges of scheduling and space effectively because online sessions are scheduled based on students' and instructors' availability. There is no space issue because classes are conducted in cyberspace. Furthermore, our experience demonstrates consistently that language learners prefer one-on-one sessions to all other instructional formats. The reasons are very simple – students get 100% of the teacher's attention, can work at their own pace, and can focus on their own needs. With internet technology and the advancement of tele-conference tools, it has become technically much easier to offer online instruction. As long as students have an internet connection and equipment such as a computer and a headset, students can access quality language instruction anytime, anywhere. The blended learning design allows students to continue learning a

*I like that it is just student-to-teacher so I can learn what I need help with quickly and my teacher can help me with it.*

*- Student Participant*

language even when they are not on campus, such as during long breaks or periods of travel.

Personalized instruction is a powerful way to learn a new language. With technology, one-on-one instruction can be easily integrated into the curriculum. Learners learn at different speeds and vary in their strengths and weaknesses. Personalized instruction adapts to the learning style and cognitive development differences of individual learners, and thus is crucial for language learning success.

Students' language backgrounds are another important factor to consider when adopting online one-on-one instruction. For example, some students of Chinese heritage know how to speak conversational Mandarin Chinese but cannot read or write. Some speak a Chinese dialect at home. Some have studied Chinese for one or two years in school. Even though heritage speakers are an untapped national resource, in a "one-size-fits-all" curriculum, heritage learners' needs have too often not been appropriately addressed. The blended learning and personalized instruction model allows heritage students who have learned how to speak, but not read or write, a critical language to follow a personalized curriculum to work on literacy development.

### **Other Considerations When Designing Post-Summer Programs**

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There are other considerations for program directors to keep in mind when designing a post-summer program. For example, it is recommended that programs run face-to-face sessions before the online sessions for the following reasons: 1) it is more effective to

teach pronunciation in a face-to-face setting because students need to watch their teachers' mouths to learn how to pronounce a word; 2) face-to-face group instruction helps STARTALK students to bond with each other in a community.

One word of caution: Even though online instruction has many advantages, it cannot completely replace face-to-face instruction. Furthermore, online instruction is not for everyone. For younger students such as grades K-5, online instruction should only be used when it is the only way for students to continue learning. Teachers must determine if their students are ready for online learning and must enlist their parents' support. It is also advised that if online instruction is chosen for younger learners, monthly face-to-face meetings should also be offered during the academic year so that students can get together for collaborative learning. Like face-to-face instruction, the online

using authentic materials. Assessment focuses on how well students perform in completing language tasks, linguistic accuracy, and social and cultural appropriateness.

*I definitely like how we can move at my pace. If I need more time on one subject, we can focus on that. If I can move quickly through something, we can move quickly. I think it is also really great. Also, my family doesn't need to be troubled with driving me to school since I have a computer at home. Plus, computers are everywhere! I really enjoy the online sessions!*  
*- Student Participant*

instruction design should ensure that learners receive sufficient input, have opportunities for output and interaction, receive both implicit and explicit feedback, and work within a task-based framework. In this model, students work with their online instructors to practice language tasks that are meaningful in everyday life situations