



# NICE Learning Newsletter

June 2007

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## Message from the Principal

Dear all,

Since the end of last year, we had been busy converting NICE Learning from my passion into a sustainable professional entity. I would like to communicate the progress so far and what's coming. As mentioned in my previous newsletter, I would like to make NICE Learning "The best Chinese Education Institution in Australia".

Since we rented the Artarmon premises in May 2006, we have been subsidizing the venue costs personally. I did not want to increase the number of classes too quickly because I would like to focus on closely monitoring how we can deliver Chinese Education to Australian children from various backgrounds. We had numerous meetings with teachers to discuss how to improve children's learning. The biggest challenges we had was children were only doing 2 hours per week, insufficient for language learning and the inability to hire full-time dedicated teachers. This year, our focus is to make NICE Learning sustainable in the long run and to implement a systematic teaching methodology to ensure consistent teacher quality throughout. This includes implementing teacher's assessment and training programs and the ability to offer full time opportunities to good teachers to build up a strong professional team.

One of the most effective ways of improving Chinese education quality to our children is for parents to understand how they can help at home. As a result, I have dedicated this issue especially with some points on how parents can help at home.

Setting up a formal school from scratch and bringing it up to world class level is not a trivial task under the restriction of limited funding and working at a part time capacity. I thank you for your continuous support. I have firm belief that this is an achievable task.

Susan Yu  
 Principal

Events 2007	2007
Summer Holiday program	Jan
2007 Semester 1 Starts (NICE Learning, Artarmon Public School, Hunters Hill Public School)	Feb
Parents Information Day (Artarmon)	Feb
Chinese New Year Celebration (Artarmon Public School)	Feb
Parents Information Night (St Ives North Public School)	Mar
Parents Information Night (Rozelle Public School)	Mar
Easter Holiday Program	April
New classes starting Term 2 (St Ives North Public School; Rozelle Public School)	April
July Holiday Program	July

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## Achievements so far

- Built a computer system to manage our student and billing records. I have to give my sincere thanks to my dedicated husband who volunteered his time and effort in helping us to build the system.
- I am really excited to announce that Miss Lily Liu is our full time Head Chinese teacher since February 2007. Lily is NICE Learning's first full time employee and I am truly blessed with her passion and dedication to delivering top quality Chinese education in Australia.
- I have also been blessed with the dedication and commitment from the following teachers to NICE Learning. (A brief introduction on the background of all the teachers will be put on our website later.)
  - o Sydney Ma
  - o Gina Guo
  - o Ye Jo
  - o Nancy Zhou
  - o Mary Huang
  - o Lu Jia

## What's coming (Term 3 2007)

- Student Assessment: All students (except playgroups) who have been studying for more than 2 terms will receive a student progress report at the end of Term 2.
- Parents survey: we will deliver a parents opinion survey on or before the second half of 2007 to get feedback on how to further improve our classes and school.
- Website will be updated in July: NICE Learning website will be updated in July, it will include the following new sections:
  - o Students section: there will be a new student section where teachers will put their term class plan, class objectives and weekly homework online. This will allow parents to get up-to-date weekly homework and term objectives whenever they want such as when the children miss a class.
  - o Feedback form: there will be a parents feedback section where parents can give us regular feedback and suggestions.
  - o Many more...
- Winter Holiday program (9<sup>th</sup> July - 13<sup>th</sup> July) is enrolling now: due to popular demand, we are continuing our Holiday Mandarin program. The immersion program aims at introducing children to all things Chinese in a fun and stimulating environment. It is a content rich program specially designed by our teachers for children from non-background speakers in Australia. This winter, we have invited a specialist Chinese Arts and Craft teacher to design some special Chinese Arts and Craft segment for our children.
- New Term 3 beginner classes
  - o Playgroup (3-4 years old): Mon - Fri 9:30AM - 10:30AM
  - o Preschool (4-5 years old): Mon - Fri 10:30AM - 12:00PM
  - o Kindy (5-6 years old): Wed & Fri: 3:45PM - 5:45PM
  - o My First Reader (7-9): Thurs, Fri: 3:45PM - 5:45PM; Sat: 10:00AM - 12:00PM

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- o Discovering Chinese (11+): Sun: 10:00AM - 12:00PM

- New Term 3 Background speakers classes

We will be starting special classes for children are background speakers to learn Chinese.

- o Beginner Chinese (6-8): Wed: 3:45 - 5:45PM
- o Beginner Chinese Level 2 (7-9): Sat: 3:00 - 5:00PM
- o Beginner Chinese (9+): Sun: 10:00AM - 12:00PM
- o Intermediate Chinese (12+): Sun: 9:30AM - 12:30PM

- New children Chinese Arts and Craft classes:

Due to the success of our holiday programs, we found that learning mandarin conversation through arts and craft is one of the easiest ways for children to pick up the language naturally. There will be 2 pilot classes for term 3. Content includes introduction to Chinese painting; Chinese calligraphy; Chinese arts and craft; Chinese abacus.

- o Wed & Fri: 3:30PM - 5:30PM

- NICE Learning in North Shore schools:

Due to the dedicated work of some of our NICE Learning parents, who have tirelessly worked with our school in the organization and planning, we had successfully rolled out NICE Learning classes to schools in the North Shore. So far, we have beginner classes in the following schools:

- o Artarmon Public School (My First Reader Level 3)
- o Hunters Hill Public School (My First Reader Level 1)
- o St Ives North Public School (My First Word)
- o Rozelle Public School (My First Word)

Following are new classes coming in Term 3:

- o St Ives North Public School (My First Reader Level 1)
- o Turramurra North Public School (My First Word)
- o More...

- NICE Learning for preschools in North Shores:

We will be trialing some playgroup classes on-site in local preschools. We will keep you posted on the developments on this front. If there are any parents with preschool children looking at assisting us, please contact our school.

- Adult Classes

- o We had started a beginner Adult Mandarin class for non-background speakers on Sunday 2:00 - 4:00PM.
- o We also have a few private tutorial classes for advanced speakers.
- o We will be starting a new beginner Adult Mandarin class for Cantonese speakers in term 3 at night (Mon & Weds: 7:00 - 9:00PM)

- New Adult Chinese Arts and Craft Classes

2 new adult arts and craft classes will be set up in term 3 (please refer to our website in July for more details.)

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- Adult beginner painting and calligraphy class
  - Adult beginner Chinese craft class

## End of Year Performance

We are planning our first NICE Learning year-end performance at the end of November. This will be a useful way to get children to apply all their learning for the year and get enjoyment and fun from using the language. Program concept includes:

- Chinese Songs and dance
- Mandarin Drama and Play
- Chinese Arts and Craft exhibition and demonstration.

I would like to call for parent volunteers to help get this idea going. Please register your interest to help with Lily. Thank you.

## How NICE Learning teaches Chinese?

### Fun and Literacy

NICE Learning aims to introduce young children to Mandarin language as a fun experience and establish a familiar yet stimulating environment for them to learn. Once they are comfortable with the language, our teachers will systematically develop their literacy skill i.e. their ability to read and write through a 4 years program. In order to ensure that the children can get maximum benefits from the program, I have compiled some hints and tips in how parents can help at home.

## How parents can help at home?

### 1. Creating a Mandarin language listening environment

One of the biggest challenges for children in Australia to learn Mandarin is their exposure to the language. No matter how we argue that we are a multi-cultural environment, you will not see a market place like those in Malaysia where stall owners will be switching among Cantonese, Mandarin, Hokkien, Malay, English and even Tamil. It is natural for adult and children to speak sentences mixing vocabularies from all the languages that were present in the environment.

The first step in learning a language is LISTENING. Children learn their mother tongue by spending their first 2 years of life listening to their parents communicating to them. They listen and listen and... when they listen enough, they start speaking.

We specially selected Better Chinese curriculum to address the listening challenge by allowing parents to bring the same language environment at school to home. As such, it is very important to play the audio and multi-media materials to the children as many times as possible. These materials include:

- music CDs
- My First words audio CD
- website online story time

The sooner we introduce audio mandarin stories and music to children, the better. It does not matter if they don't understand. Children's brain has the natural ability to decode language once they are exposed to it frequently enough.

### 2. Creating a Mandarin language reading environment

After children are comfortable with the sound, we would like them to get used to the character shapes. Chinese characters are symbols and they originate from pictures and drawings. Our

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teachers will systematically teach them the structure of characters and their stroke sequence. It will be fantastic if parents can help by drawing their attention to Chinese characters whenever you see any Chinese characters outside school e.g. in Chinese shops, packaging, paintings, newspaper...etc. If they can be exposed to various character structures in a natural environment, it will help them to recognize and remember the characters easier and faster.

Better Chinese' Magic Chinese words series of cartoons is one of the most powerful set of animation I found to get young children (between 3 - 9) interested in Chinese characters.

Better Chinese's Word Game Cards is particularly good to help young children to remember characters. There are 13 different games you can play with the cards. "Memory Game" is the favorite among young children.

For older children, singing Karaoke and watching Chinese movies with Chinese subtitles are two most effective ways to get them to remember Chinese characters in a short time.

### 3. Home work

We have light homework given to children from 6 years old onward. It is essential for them to do their homework on a regular basis. Teachers are required to make sure that homework given can be done by children without parents help. However, it will be helpful if parents can show support that they are interested in their homework e.g. give praises on the beautiful characters that are written or beautiful colors on the exercise books. Homework is for the purpose of revision and consolidation. For My First Reader children, homework is particularly important to help them build literacy. If homework is not done on a consistent basis, they will not be able to build a literacy foundation.

### 3. Online Account

We would like parents' support to encourage children to go online on a regular basis. We notice a significant difference between children who go online on a regular basis and those who do not use the online account at all. The difference is noticed even when children use the online account once a week only!

### 4. Reading

This is a challenge for My First Reader level 2 or above students. Ability to read stories at their level is important for building their literacy skill. At the moment, materials parents and teachers can use are "stories" in the online account. We haven't been using this consistently yet. However, it is encouraged for students to read those stories at home as far as possible. We will develop ways to encourage children to read more extensively after they finish My First Reader series.

#### FAQ:

#### My children do not want to speak, what should I do?

This is very normal, children will only use a language when it is natural and they've mastered enough vocabulary for them to feel comfortable to express it. Generally, we notice that our children can listen and communicate during class in basic mandarin when they reach My First Reader level 3 or above. The most effective way to get them to speak Mandarin is to get them to interact with children that speaks mandarin only or get them to watch Mandarin movies or cartoons.

When choosing Mandarin cartoons, pick Japanese cartoon that is dubbed with mandarin conversation. They are better quality than the Chinese cartoon. Disney cartoons dubbed with mandarin are good also but children generally know that there is an English version for it and they will demand the English version.

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## My children used to speak before she goes to school but she is speaking Mandarin less and less now.

Do not force the issue. Just keep exposing them to the language and one day, they will speak. I did not speak Mandarin until I came to Australia. I understood when I was in Hong Kong because my parents spoke it at home but all of us refuse to speak. We found it was not natural. However, after I came to Australia and met lots of Mandarin speaking friends, I started using the language.

## How to encourage children writing?

Writing Chinese characters is an important step in helping them to recognize the characters. For young children, I find that Magnet-doodle board or small white board extremely useful to encourage them to write Chinese characters. They can write it big and because it is erasable, they can write many times without knowing that they have written many times. It is definitely more fun than dry-writing on paper.

## When should they write Chinese characters?

We find that different children develop their fine motor skills at different stages. Generally speaking, all children older than 7 years old should be ready to write beautiful Chinese characters. Children younger than 7 will be able to write but not necessarily have the correct form. This does not matter because it is part of development. Parents just need to encourage them to treat writing characters like drawing pictures. Ask them to imagine what the characters look like and if they look beautiful or not. Children are able to evaluate their own writing art work e.g. characters that looked like lying down; being blown by wind; very fat; very tall; body parts everywhere...etc.

## Billing for Semester 2 (Term 3 & 4)

We will be sending out billing for Semester 2 soon. Please confirm your enrolment for Semester 2 before end June so that we can plan resources for next half of year. Again, we will discount \$30 of online account fee if Semester 2 is paid in full before Term 3 starts.

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## Curriculum levels and objectives

Curriculum	Age	Class length	Duration	Outcome / Objectives	Parents tasks	Home objective
Playgroup	3-4	60 mins	1 year	Develop basic familiarity to mandarin language through games, songs and rhymes.	Mandarin time at least 3 times / week: o play music CDs	Develop language (hearing) sense.
Preschool	4-5	90 mins	1 year	Develop basic familiarity to mandarin language through games, songs and rhymes with objectives of mastering vocabularies on 12 topics relating to children's daily life. (Emphasis on listening and speaking).	Mandarin time at least 3 times / week: o Play music CDs or o Story time with audio CD or o Online time  <u>Holiday:</u> o play next 4 lessons	Develop language (hearing) sense.
Kindergarten	5-7	2 hours	2 years	Develop basic mandarin language skills with objectives of mastering 150+ vocabularies and 20 sentence patterns. (Emphasis on listening and speaking with character recognition and basic writing skill on selected chinese radicals.)	Mandarin time at least 3 times / week: o Play music CDs or o Story time with audio CD or o Online time  <u>Holiday:</u> o play next 4 lessons	Develop language (hearing) sense.
My First Reader	7-9 / 9-11	2 hours	2 years	Develop basic mandarin language skills with objectives of mastering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 650+ vocabularies</li> <li>• Pin Yin; basic reading and literacy development;</li> <li>• Sentence pattern development</li> <li>• Character recognition and basic writing skill.</li> </ul>	Mandarin time at least 3 times / week: o Online time or o Reading aloud (e.g. before bed) or o Home work  <u>Supplementaries:</u> o Mandarin movie or Mandarin Karaoke  <u>Holiday:</u> o Preview next 4 lessons	Develop language hearing and reading sense.

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