

Christie Lao, PHD

STARTALK Student Program (San Francisco)

In the summer of 2010, Dr. Christie Lao, along with her team of secondary school teachers and San Francisco State University colleagues initiated on the West Coast, the US Department of Education program, called STARTALK. STARTALK's aim is to enhance and improve the teaching of languages of growing importance on the world stage, such as Arabic and Mandarin Chinese, in US public schools. At SFSU, Dr. Lao and colleagues designed, developed, and implemented a literacy-based, instructional technology, infused with high interest, aural and print rich Chinese materials for middle school students. Their aim is to develop learner's Chinese proficiency by incorporating recreational reading and listening into the curriculum. This approach was augmented in the STARTALK two week program to include presentations by pre-eminent scholars in the field of Chinese language learning from China, Taiwan and the US. These professors taught participants how to use drama to have students act out traditional Chinese cultural legends. They pointed out the importance of richly illustrated storybooks, often with surprising twists, to encourage learner's reading in the target language. Moreover, and perhaps most important, they showed teachers how to help students find their own voice in the new language by writing and illustrating their life stories in Chinese. In all, the program underscored how learning Chinese can develop a strengthened sense of identity in students, and enable them to increasingly take responsibility for their own learning. It is Christie Lao's life mission to provide cutting edge curriculum advances to learners of Chinese.

Qualifications for participating in the program involved a public school teaching credential, public school professional teaching experience, and of course being a native speaker of the target language. My qualifications in these areas were quite thin, but Christie Lao took a chance on me and let me join in. Such a rich experience for which I am deeply grateful!