

Learning Chinese characters through peer storytelling  
Ya Ping (Amy) Hsiao  
Lecturer of Chinese, Language Center, The Tilburg University

Learning Chinese characters is a difficult and solitary process. Some of the difficulty comes from the sheer number and similarity of characters and the relationship between the basic components that make up a character. Having to remember all these characters requires a lot of solitary work by students. To solve these problems, I have developed a peer storytelling activity based on the 'Heisig method'. According to the principles of this method, students first learn a key meaning for the basic components, and then create an imaginative story to associate all components with the meaning of the entire character.

In peer storytelling, students work in pairs. One week before the lecture, students get information about the basic components. During the lecture, the pairs test each other's knowledge and make stories for the meaning of the entire character. This arrangement not only makes it much easier for students to remember, but also increases their motivation to learn characters.

1. Title

Learning Chinese characters through peer storytelling

2. Name and surname of the presenter(s)

Ya Ping (Amy) Hsiao

3. Function of the presenter(s) (for example 'teacher' or 'coordinator' etc):

Lecturer of Chinese

4. Affiliation of the presenter(s)

Language Center, Tilburg University

5. A short biography of the presenter(s), maximum amount of words = 50

MSc Ya Ping (Amy) Hsiao is a lecturer of Chinese in the Language Center at Tilburg University. She is also working on her PhD project in the Welten Institute at the Open University of the Netherlands. Her research interests include peer-assisted learning, networked learning and cognitive load.

## 6. The summary of the presentation

Learning Chinese characters is a difficult and solitary process. Some of the difficulty comes from the sheer number and similarity of characters and the relationship between the basic components that make up a character. Having to remember all these characters requires a lot of solitary work by students. To solve these problems, I have developed a peer storytelling activity based on the 'Heisig method'. According to the principles of this method, students first learn a key meaning for the basic components, and then create an imaginative story to associate all components with the meaning of the entire character. In peer storytelling, students work in pairs. One week before the lecture, students get information about the basic components. During the lecture, the pairs test each other's knowledge and make stories for the meaning of the entire character. This arrangement not only makes it much easier for students to remember, but also increases their motivation to learn characters.

## 7. How can the presentation be related to the theme of the colloquium: taalvaardigheid in het hoger onderwijs (language teaching in higher education)? Or, how can your presentation be of use to a language teacher in higher education?

This presentation not only introduces how to deal with the complexity of Chinese characters based on a storytelling method but also demonstrates how peer students can co-construct meaning to remember characters. This presentation shows that learning characters can be both creative and effective in an interactive learning environment.