

## Concrete and Chinese

Our home has a balcony outside our main bedroom. It had a felt exterior carpet but that was being destroyed by the sun and weather, so I removed it. The surface beneath was not flat, making it difficult to remove snow or excess rain water. I took advantage of warm weather last Friday through Tuesday to apply a thin layer of a concrete resurfacing mix (cement and fine sand). I still need to do some work on the edge where the balcony attaches to the house, but that must wait for warm dry weather to return. It is now snowing outside.



I mixed the concrete powder (from blue box) with water in small batches and poured it on the floor. Then I smoothed it with the flat blade. I had a tank (green) of water for spraying the floor to make a wet contact. The watering can had water to add to the concrete powder. I mixed them in the white bucket.



On Wednesday afternoon I covered my work with a sheet of plastic to keep most of the water off during the rain and snow from the present weather system. That will help it dry faster so that I can paint the balcony floor when the weather improves.

Those of you who are language teachers may be interested in the article on the next two pages. It is from our local Denver Post newspaper a few days ago. It indicates an increasing interest in Americans learning Mandarin Chinese language and culture. Apparently some teachers are partly financed by the Confucius Institute. That helps for job security. At times of insufficient income the schools tend to cancel such special instructional programs.

Ed Holroyd  
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Fifth-grader Lucy Miller, 11, works on speaking Mandarin Chinese during class at Erie Elementary School. More than 60 schools in Colorado are offering Mandarin classes to help students get a foundation in international business. *RJ Sangosti, The Denver Post*

# Mandarin Chinese becoming first choice as second language

By Nancy Lofholm *The Denver Post*

Ivie Hunt was barely 6 last spring and had just finished kindergarten when she shocked the hostess at a Denver Asian restaurant by chatting comfortably in Mandarin Chinese.

"Here was this little blond, white girl having a full conversation with the hostess in Mandarin," said her mother, Ann Hunt, who admitted to being a bit stunned herself.

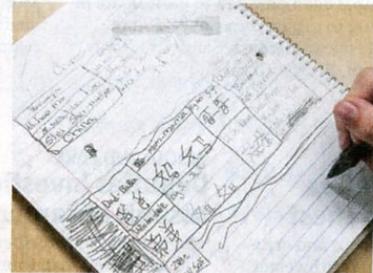
That kind of surprise may wear off as Mandarin Chinese becomes the first choice of a growing number of second-language learners.

More language students are saying *adios*

to the recent stampede to learn Spanish and *huan ying* — or welcome — to mastering a Chinese dialect now spoken by an estimated 100 million non-Chinese.

In Colorado, there are many Ivies — ages 3 to 99 — twisting their tongues and brains around the foreign concepts of Mandarin grammar, tones and characters.

More than 60 schools around the state — ranging from primary-level immersion schools to universities to private language enterprises — are teaching this most widely spoken language in the world. More online classes are popping up. Chi-



A fifth-grader takes notes during Mandarin Chinese class at Erie Elementary.

Photos by RJ Sangosti, *The Denver Post*

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# MANDARIN

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nese-language clubs are taking over tables in coffee shops. Chinese tutors are becoming a hot commodity.

The popularity of Mandarin has been driven by several factors: China's ascendancy in the global economy means anyone doing business on an international basis is likely to encounter Mandarin speakers. The spotlight on the 2008 Beijing Olympics increased tourism to China and heightened interest in Mandarin. Also, more Americans are traveling to China to adopt Chinese babies and want to be conversant with their children.

Speaking Mandarin has become a hot ticket on college applications as well as a starred addition to executive résumés.

"If you are going to get around in the world, you are going to need to speak Chinese. It's a language everyone is going to be speaking," said aviation consultant Mike Boyd, who studies Mandarin for one intense hour a week at the Colorado Chinese Language School in Denver.

That message may be catching the attention of the younger set — and their parents — the most.

It is no longer so unusual for preschoolers to be signed up for Mandarin instruction. At least one school district has dropped Spanish classes and added K-12 Chinese. Some charter schools are offering total immersion in Mandarin beginning in kindergarten. That's how Ivie could chatter in Chinese after one year at the Denver Language School without ever being anywhere near the Great Wall or the Ming Tombs.

And that's why Trinity Jones, 12, thinks nothing of having conversations in Mandarin while socializing with her classmates at the Denver Center for International Studies.

Trinity had the option of immersing herself in French, Italian, Spanish, Japanese or Lakota, but she was fixed on learning the language spoken by more than a billion people in the world.

"I knew it would help me in the future," said Trinity, who already has her sights set on being a government translator or working for a company such as Apple in China.

Mandarin has become such an important language around the state that the University of Colorado at Boulder has added a program called Teaching East Asia. It is geared toward training more Chinese instructors and furthering learning about China for more students. It is also aimed at getting a handle



Yun Luo teaches Mandarin Chinese to fifth-graders at Erie Elementary School.

RJ Sangosti, *The Denver Post*

this year on just how many Chinese-language schools and learners are out there.

The program uses funding from an initiative called STARTALK that was developed under President George W. Bush to promote teaching and understanding of "strategically important" languages.

Jon Zeljo with the Teaching East Asia program said one focus of the summer institutes held for teachers and students the past three years has been to make Mandarin classes sustainable by giving Chinese teachers more resources and to expose more students to Mandarin at a young age.

The Chinese government is assisting in this endeavor by funding half the salaries of Chinese teachers through Chinese Language Council International programs called Confucius Institutes or through a Chinese Ministry of Education program called Hanban.

Kuo Li teaches Mandarin and Chinese culture to 144 students

at Battle Mountain High School in Edwards with Chinese government help and said his students are learning much more than how to pronounce Chinese tones correctly.

"Chinese gives these students a larger horizon in their future lives," he said.

Amanda Sauer is principal at Erie Elementary in the St. Vrain Valley School District, which has embraced the teaching of Mandarin more than any other district in the state. Four Chinese-language teachers are half funded by Hanban.

Sauer echoes Li's statement. "Our district looked at how to prepare kids for 21st-century jobs — to help them have a global view," she said.

Students in kindergarten through second grade in Erie start out with sessions every other week that focus more on Chinese culture than on learning grammar. Students move on to weekly classes focused on writing characters and lan-

guage-building in third grade. They can then choose whether to continue learning Chinese in middle and high school.

Ann Hunt is pretty sure Ivie will continue her Chinese studies. She and her husband, Dr. James Hunt, have already decided their 2-year-old son will also have the chance to learn Mandarin. They have mused over what it will be like to eventually have two teenage children in the house who are fluent in a language that is a mystery to them and to the two older children in the family.

Already, they struggle with not being able to help Ivie with her Mandarin homework.

"Overwhelming is how I would describe it," she said. "Overwhelming but amazing."

Or, as her daughter might tell her, in Mandarin it is *jingren* — amazing.

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