

BREAK THE WALL

More cultural inclusion, less communication barriers



Thesis 2020
School of Visual Art
MFA Design for Social Innovation

Designed by
Kexin Lyu
Advisor
Esther Kang

TABLE OF CONTENTS



• Background	1
• Problem Framing	3
• Research	9
• Synthesize	11
• Intervention	12
• Co-creation	13
• Prototype	14
• Implement	19
• Learnings	22
• Special thanks	23

BACKGROUND

With the development of Chinese economy, and the expectation of studying in a more flexible environment, more and more Chinese students come to the U.S for study. The number of Chinese International Students(CIS) in the U.S has grown rapidly in the past 10 years. In 2019, the total number of CIS in U.S reached **369,548**, accounts for **33.7%** of all international students.

Terminology

LEP: Limited English Proficiency.

LEP Student: Student who have limited ability to read, write or understand English

CIS: Chinese International Students





Why I choose this topic

I am a member of this group myself. When I first moved to NYC, I found that there are large number CIS struggled with language barriers even though they had passed the TOEFL test and reached the minimum entry requirement of school. People with limited English proficiency can hardly communicate with local people, get access to social services and engage in the host community. According to the report published by New Oriental, **49%** of CIS mentioned they have language barrier in U.S. which greatly impact their academic performance, social activities, and even make them suffer from mental health problems.

PROBLEM FRAMING

In order to deeply understand how language barrier influence CIS's life and explore the root cause of this phenomenon. I conducted interview with staffs of SVA International Student Office.(ISO)

Research Goal: Understand how language barrier influence CIS's life

Participants: William and Tony (Staff of SVA ISO)

Insights/What I found:

- limited English skills prevent CIS from participating in class. Eventually, they will get bad grades or fail the course.
- language barrier makes CIS miss a lot of job opportunities.
- CIS feel disconnected and isolated when they can't fully express their perspectives in class. For American teachers, they also feel hard to build connections with Chinese international students, since they always keep silent in class.



Also, I invited some CIS who mentioned they were struggling with language problems at school.

Research Goal: Understand what's the contributing factors of Chinese international students' language barrier.

Form: Interview & Survey

Participants: SVA students



Insights/What I found:

- The neglect of spoken English in Chinese education system makes it more difficult for CIS to communicate in English.
- In China, students always passively accept the knowledge from their teachers. Teachers always require students to be silent in class. This Chinese teacher-centered system keeps CIS from interacting with teachers in the class.
- Chinese education system creates a unique competitive atmosphere. Parents and teachers always require students to do everything perfectly which makes them be more afraid of making mistakes.

After talking with CIS, I was curious about how many resources students can get from school to improve their English skills and how language problem influences their life at school. So I interviewed William and Tony again.

Research Goal: Figure out what role does the school play in solving this problem

Participants: William and Tony (Staff of SVA ISO)

Insights/What I found:

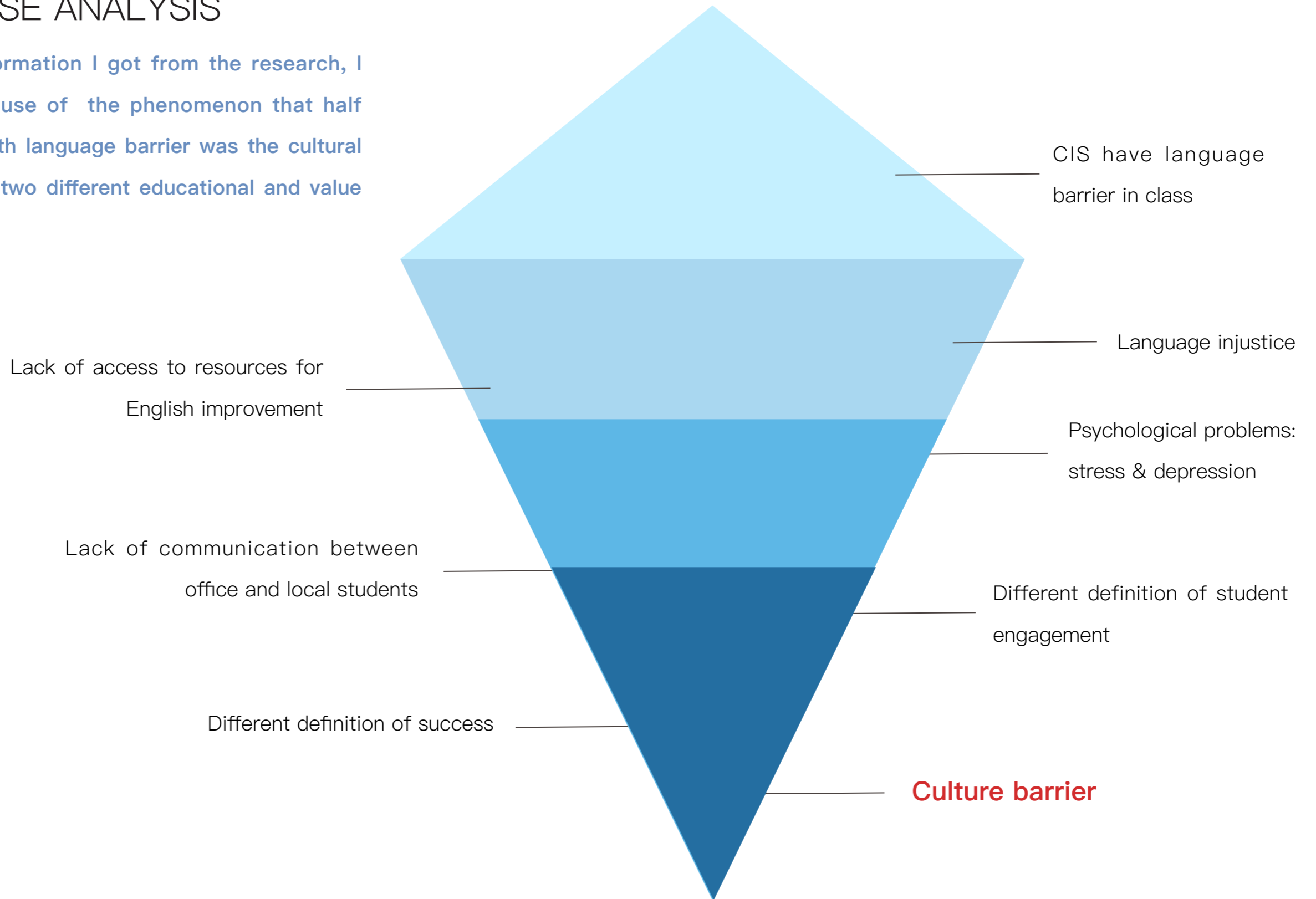
- The educational system of SVA is not inclusive enough for international students.
- Instructors and CIS are not standing on the opposite side. The instructor want to teach and CIS also have a positive attitude to learn. The problem is they don't quite understand each other.
- The way CIS and instructors experience the class need to be improved.
- Chinese international students are more likely to fail the course because of the '0' participation in the class.

“Many Chinese international students think teacher always stands higher hierarchy, so they often feel awkward and shy to communicate with teachers.”

–Tony

ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS

Based on the information I got from the research, I found the root cause of the phenomenon that half of CIS struggle with language barrier was the cultural barrier caused by two different educational and value system.



THESIS STATEMENT

After conducting the research and analyzing the difference between Chinese and U.S education system, I arrived at my point of intervention and come up with my thesis statement which is:

I am finding a way to change the current educational space in SVA to be more inclusive and conscious about multiple cultures by studying Chinese international students and their experiences.

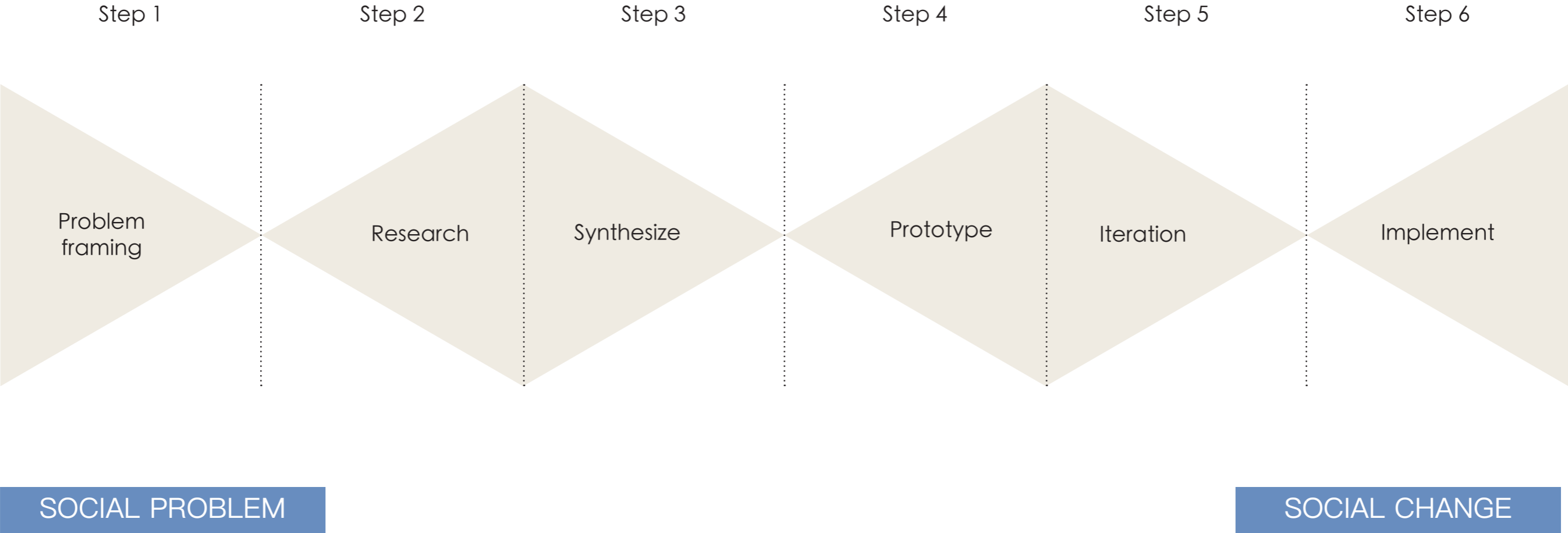
Target Audience

Chinese International Student

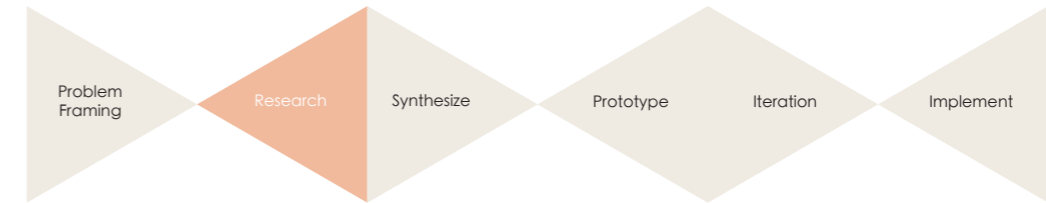
Partner

SVA Chinese Student Organization(CSO)

PROCESS OVERVIEW



RESEARCH

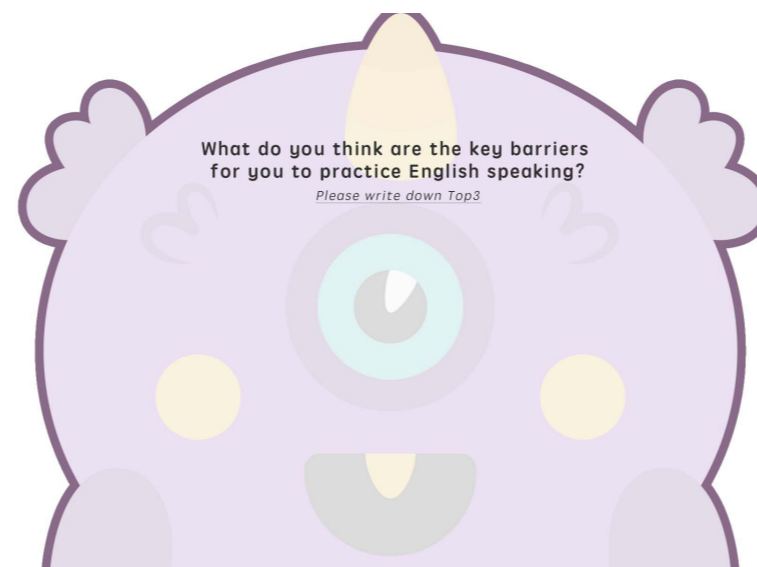


Goal: Figure out what are the key difficulties for CIS to speak out in class, what are the external and internal factors prevent them from practicing English.

Form: Workshop

Participant: 13 CIS who mentioned they have language barriers during their study in the U.S

How it works: I created a space for participants to share feelings and thoughts about their experience in school. We talked about the cultural difference between Chinese schools and U.S educational system. At the end of workshop, each participant was invited to fill a questionnaire.



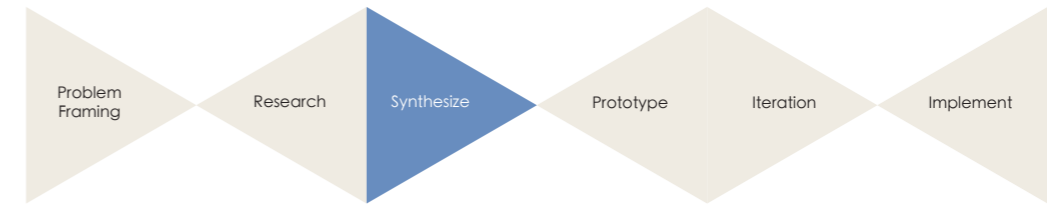
Key questions:

- What do you think are the key barriers for you to practice English speaking?
- What's your journey of practicing English speaking? Please create a journey map with difficulties you have come across.
- Which type of activity do you prefer to join in to improve your English skills?
- What do you want to learn during the activity? What do you want to take away?

Insights/What I found:

- Some usage of English words and expression CIS learned in Chinese class are different from the actual usage in U.S, so they sometimes feel confused in U.S class.
- The limited vocabulary accumulation is a barrier for them to express their feelings and perspectives.
- Students will gradually lose their self-confidence and choose to become silent after making several mistakes like pronouncing in a wrong way or using inappropriate words.
- Some program enroll too many Chinese students which makes CIS have less opportunities to speak with native speakers.
- The cultural difference is a obstacle for CIS to find an interesting topic to start a conversation with native English speakers or someone they barely know. They know less about the local idioms and communicating "rules"
- Students prefer the workshop which can help them learn something and meet new friends at the same time
- How to translate popular Chinese idioms into English, interview English, How to start a small talk with American people are the top topics that CIS want to learn during the activity.

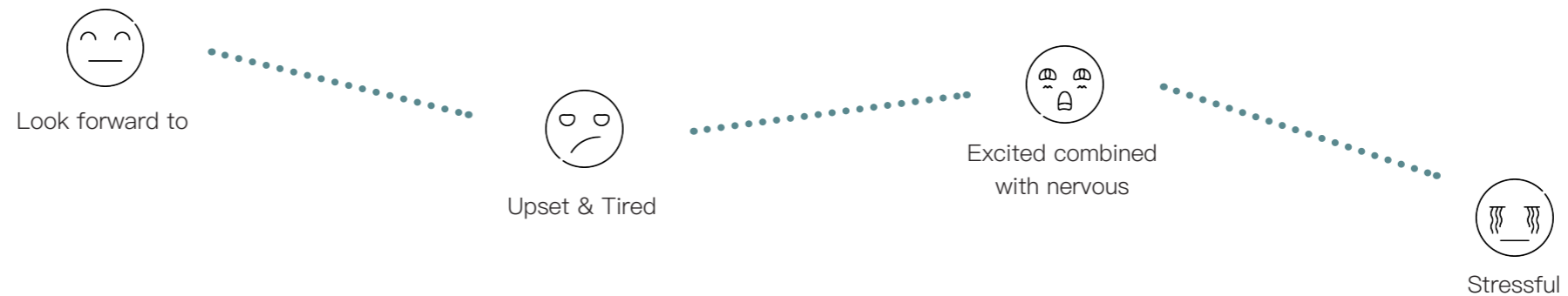
SYNTHESIZE



To sort out the main attributes of my target audience and confirm their core needs, I created the persona and journey map like this:

Process	In China	Travel to NYC	School Orientation	Start the class
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply for VISA Find apartment Book flight tickets Take English training courses Find resources (video, friends, articles) to know more about U.S. social environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find local Chinese organizations through social media platforms Apartment Check In Buy furnitures and daily supplies Open bank accounts Apply for American phone number 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet classmates and department faucties Get familiar with school locaiton and the commute route School tour Participate in a lot of bootcamps and parties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate in class accomplish assignments Join in the meeting of group work Communicate with professors Take exams Share opinions with classmates
Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can't search information on some U.S websites due to the Internet censorship in China Have less channel to know a real social environment in U.S 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unfamiliar with the service process like the apartment check-in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don't know how to start a conversation with local students Can't understand people who speak English with the accent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don't know how to accurately express personal perspectives in English Worry about making mistakes, so always remain silent in class Less resources to improve English skills, ESL course is not helpful

Emotions

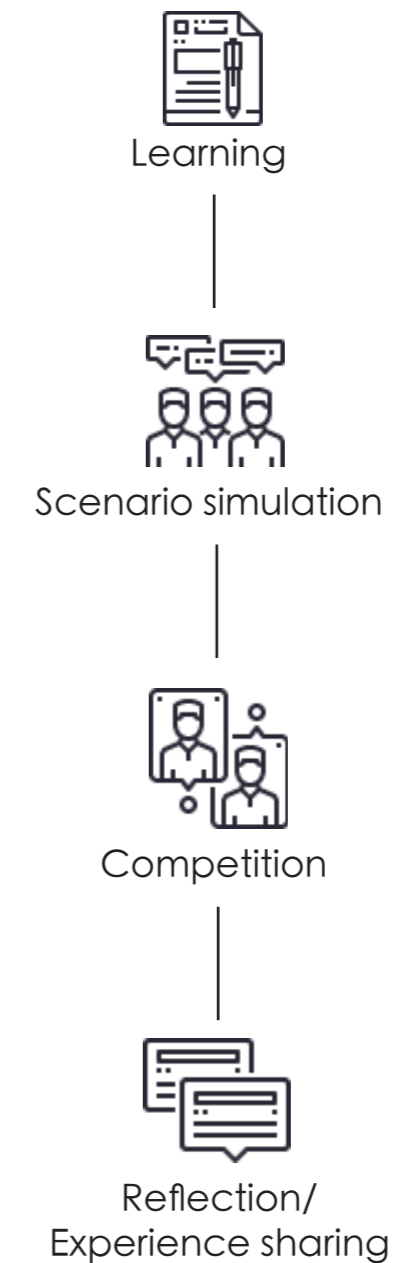


INTERVENTION

First intervention idea:

My first intervention idea is a series of workshops based on different learning topics which can help CIS easily communicate with local English speakers and quickly engage in the host community. During the workshop, students can practice speaking English in various scenarios like daily talk, class discussion, parties etc. They can use the given scenarios or create their own story. There is a competition among each group. Students vote for the best performing group. Plus, at the end of the workshop students can record something important for them and make a “Learning Card” to review the knowledge they learned during the activity.

Process Design



CO-CREATION

Goal: Share my first intervention idea(workshop plan) with students and ask their feedback. Co-create a refined workshop plan with them

Participant: CIS from SVA, manager of CSO

Feedback/Suggestions:

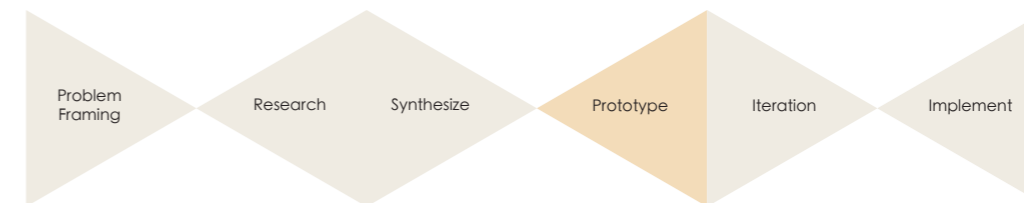
- If all participants are Chinese students, it's hard to avoid them using Chinese during the activity. They are likely to speak Chinese consciously or unconsciously. If the goal of the workshop is helping them practice English, this situation might become a barrier. So it's necessary to make some rules.
- Making the "Learning Card" is a creative activity, but a physical card is difficult to save for a long time especially at the time most people use mobile electronics everyday.
- At the beginning of the workshop, participants just meet someone they barely know, using face expression to describe their feelings could make them feel embarrassed or awkward. It's better to let them say something rather than keep silent.

Results/Output:

A refined workshop plan



PROTOTYPE 1



Form: Workshop

Target Audience: SVA Chinese International Students

Topic	Type	Content
How to translate “有缘份” in English	Translate Chinese idioms into English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's fate that brought us together. • Being in the right place at the right time. • What are the odds? • I think someone really hope us to see each other/come across this thing today.
How to translate “默契” in English	Translate Chinese idioms into English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We really get each other. • We are totally at the point where we can understand each other's feelings. • We have a strong bond of understanding between us. • We have this connection between us.
How to translate “太客气了” in English	Translate Chinese idioms into English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aww, you shouldn't have • That's so sweet of you • Are you for real? I wasn't expecting that
How to translate “我要崩溃了” in English	Translate Chinese idioms into English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am about to lose it • I am freaking out • I have a panic attack • This is all too much to me, I don't know if I can take it • I am reaching the breaking point
How to express “excited” in different ways	Express emotions	<p>In Chinese English class, “excited” is the only word that are mostly used by students. Here are a list of words that can also express the same feeling of “excited”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pumped (up) • Stoked • Thrilled • I can't wait any more
How to express “I feel wronged”	Express emotions	<p>When misunderstanding happens, you might feel wrongly accused. In this situation, you can express your feeling in these way:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I felt like I was unfairly treated • I feel disrespected, I believe I need to leave now • I can't believe you would accuse me of such things. Is that what you think of me? • You don't know me at all • That's so unfair. • This is a false accusation
How to answer “Thank you” in English more local	Daily English	<p>What we usually learned in Chinese English class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You are welcome <p>Except that, you can also say/actually most American would say:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No problem • No worries • Nothing • You got it • My pleasure
How to answer “What's up” in English more local	Daily English	<p>What we usually learned in Chinese English class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's up <p>Except that, you can also say/actually most American would say:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not much, just busy • Just life • I'm just going to... • Good/Nice/Great
How to answer “Sorry” in English more local	Daily English	<p>What we usually learned in Chinese English class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doesn't matter <p>Except that, you can also say/actually most American would say:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's OK • No, you are fine, don't be sorry • For what? • Don't worry about it

Teaching Guide

With the help of some professional English teachers from New Oriental, we co-created the teaching guide based on several topics that students mentioned they are interested in.

Workshop Plan

Part 1: Warm up (5min)

Students are encouraged to:

Tell a story—Going around and take it in turns to add three words to the story stem.

Part 2: Learning (15min)

Teach students how to express in English for a specific situation or topic.

Part 3: Scenario/Conversation Simulation (20min)

Students can find a partner and pair up. Then, each group have to use the English words or sentences they learned in part2 to design a specific scenario or conversation which is funny or interesting. There will be 15 minutes for them to create and practice.

Part4: Performance (20min)

Each group perform their scenario or conversation to others. Finally, everyone voted for the most interesting one. The winning team will receive a special gift.

Part5: Ending (10min)

Last but not least, students are encouraged to sit together to share their feelings of the entire activity. After the workshop, all the participants will receive a document with a summary of key English skills they learned from the workshop.

Co-creation/Feedback

Your name:
Major:
Year:

Which part of the workshop do you like best? What do you think is a good design?

Which part of the workshop should be refined or modified?

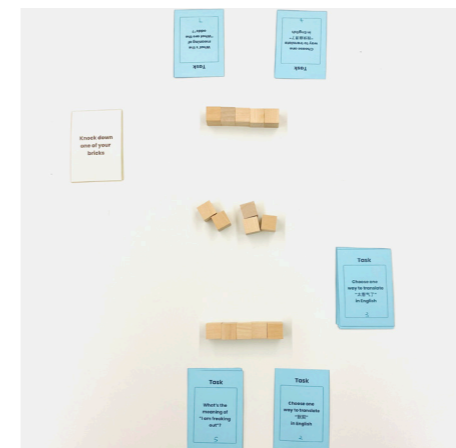
Test Feedback:

- Creating and performing a story is a way to practice English. But, if some participants are not good at making stories or performing, this activity might give them too much pressure and weaken their interests in this workshop.
- Games can bring a lot of happiness to people, and it's an activity that everyone can easily join in. Why not create a game to help participants practice what they learned in the workshop.

Iteration: Since I am creating a series of workshop, it's crucial that the workshop can continuously attract the student to participate. Thus, based on the feedback, I created a card game to make the workshop be more interesting. Considering that most participants are Chinese students, card game is one of the most popular game in China and allows multiple people to play together. Eventually, I made a card game and added it to the workshop plan.

Results/Output:

A prototype of a card game that can help students practice and consolidate the English skills they learned in the workshop.



PROTOTYPE 2

Form: Workshop+Game

Target Audience: SVA Chinese International Students

Game Rules

1. There is a "wall" in front of each player, which consists of a certain number of bricks. Players need to finish the task on the card task to knock down the bricks. The player who first knocked down all bricks wins the game.
2. First, the player take a [Task Card] in order. If a player successfully finish the task, he can knock down one brick off his wall. If not, move on to the next player.
3. [Task Card] is one-time use. There will be two areas for placing cards in front of each player, which are "Finished" and "Unfinished." Players should place their card to the corresponding area after use.
4. To make the game more interesting, there are also some [Superpower Card] "hide" in the game. [Superpower Card] is one-time use as well. Players can put them aside after use.
5. The player who first knocked down all bricks wins the game.



Card Introduction

- Task Card

Each card corresponds to one piece of knowledge. Its contents are changeable. Workshop planners can set the content in advance according to the topic of each workshop. After setting up, planners should number those cards and record the knowledge piece corresponding to each card. It aims at helping players clearly know which part of the knowledge they are not firmly mastered through the number of cards in the "Unfinished" area.

- Superpower Card

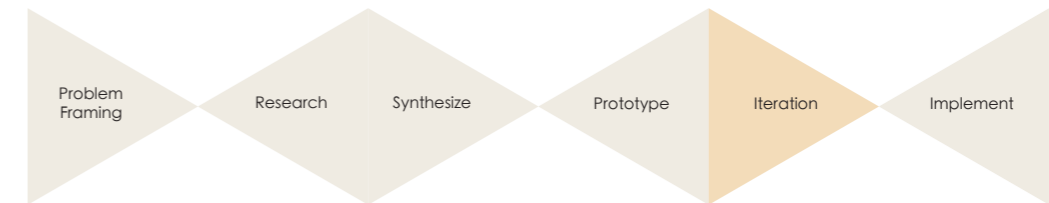
Players can choose one person to use this card. It can be used once in each round.

Type:

- Knock down one of your bricks
- Choose one player and add one brick to his/her wall
- Freeze one person (He/She can't do anything in this round)

Others

Starting number of bricks: it can be determined according to the amount of knowledge mentioned at the Workshop. If the amount is large, planners can set more bricks. If the amount is small, planners can choose fewer bricks



Test Feedback:

- The game is fun. Card games are very popular among Chinese so many Chinese students would like to play it.
- It's important to let students remember the English words and sentences they learned in the workshop. Why not set a timing in the game. Players should answer the question at limited times which can stimulate them to better remember and use knowledge and make the game more exciting as well.

Iteration: An exciting game usually bring some tension to players. Therefore, after the test workshop, I used the idea of setting a timing. Each players are required to answer the question on task card in limited time like 15 seconds or 30 seconds. Also, we found that setting a specific time can make this game be more fair to every player.

Results/Output:

A refined version of the card game. Polished the game card.

CARD SAMPLE

TASK

Use 2 ways to translate this Chinese idiom in English:

有缘分

BREAK THE WALL

The task card features a clean white background with blue decorative elements. At the top right, there is a small blue square and a vertical blue bar. Below the task text, a light blue circle is positioned to the left of a central blue rectangular box containing the Chinese idiom '有缘分'. At the bottom left, there is a vertical blue bar, a small blue square, and a larger blue circle. The text 'BREAK THE WALL' is centered at the bottom.

SUPER POWER

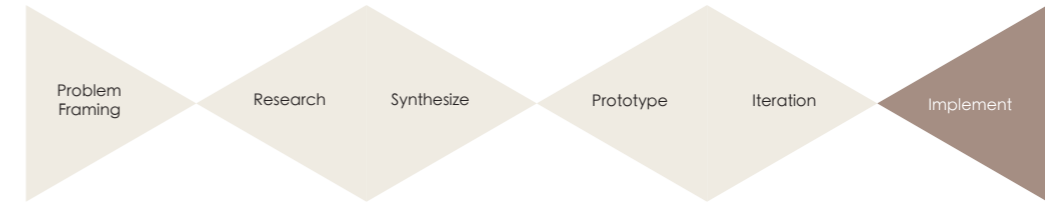
Congratulations! You get the super power!

Add one brick on one player's wall

BREAK THE WALL

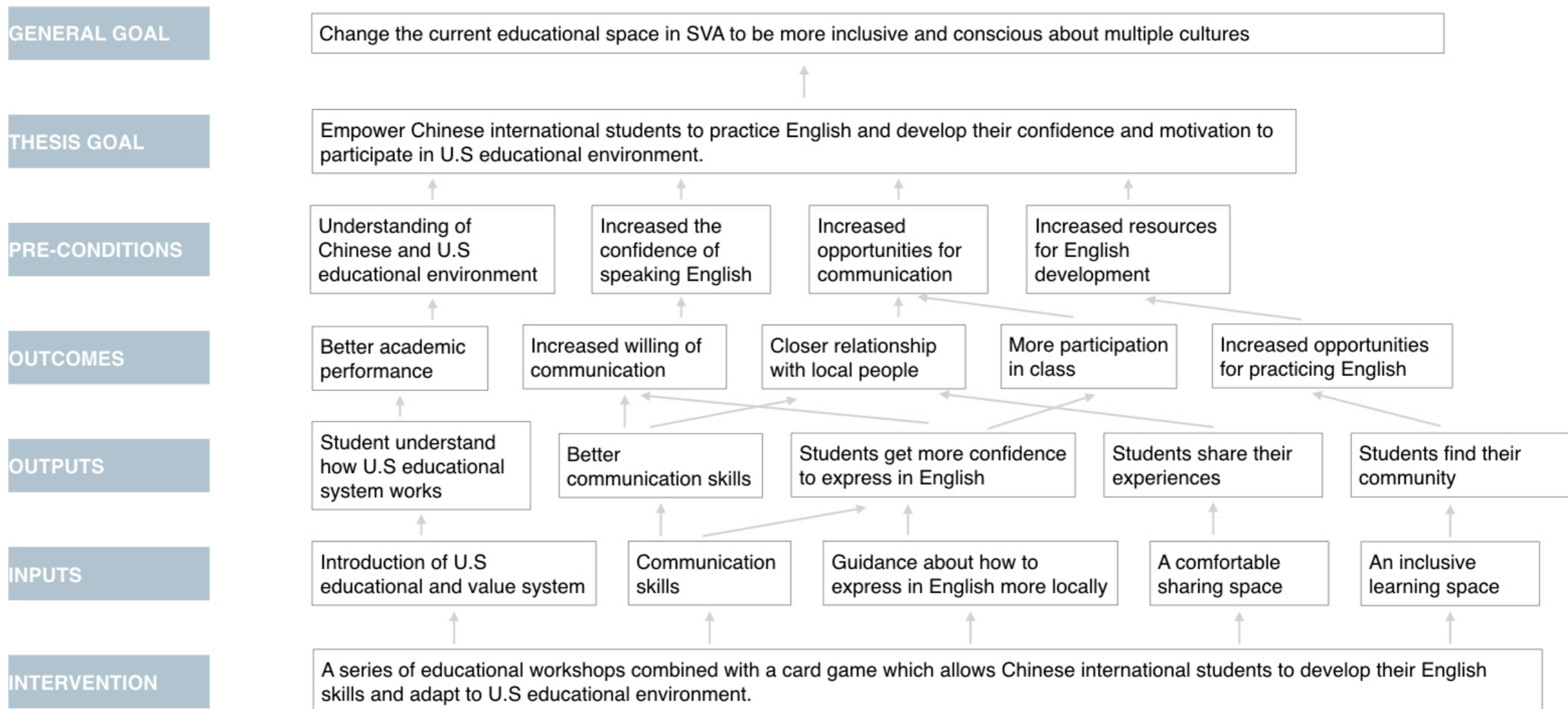
The super power card has a white background with orange decorative elements. At the top right, there is a small orange square and a vertical orange bar. Below the title, a large orange circle contains the text 'Add one brick on one player's wall'. At the bottom left, there is a vertical orange bar, a small orange square, and a larger orange circle. The text 'BREAK THE WALL' is centered at the bottom.

IMPLEMENT



THEORY OF CHANGE

How my intervention solve this social problem step by step.



LOG FRAME

How I conduct my intervention and what results I am looking forward to.

INPUTS	PROCESS	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES	IMPACT
<p>Human Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> English Expertise Workshop hoster Activity propagator Student organizer Manager of SVA CSO Manager of SVA ISO <p>Financial Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rent for the space Budget for making game cards(Paper, Printing...) <p>Equipment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Laptops Cell Phones Printer Paper, writing supplies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Come up with ideas Build relationship with school office and student organization Co-create the content of the workshop (teaching guide) with partners Check the accuracy with English expertises Confirm the topic of each workshop Make game materials Promote the activity Make posters Find and training volunteers Gather the feedback and share with SVA CSO and SVA ISO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executable workshop plan Polished game card A good relationship with school office and student organization Plan for the long-term collaboration Different type of English learning topics A team that can organize the event together Sustainable development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased skills of facilitation Increased availability and accessibility of resources for English improvement Increased participants More partnerships Students feel empowered and supported Students find their communities More communication between school and Chinese international student group Improved ESL courses and teacher training programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refined multicultural settings in higher educational space Increased inclusion in multicultural education system Decreased obstacles for international students to engage in the U.S community

INDICATOR MATRIX TABLE

The definition of some words mentioned in Log Frame and Theory of Change. How to measure the success.

INDICATOR	DESCRIPTION	DATA SOURCE	FREQUENCY	LEVEL
Feedback	What participants feel about the workshop	Survey	End of each workshop	Outcomes
Workshop Plan	This plan will include the topic of the workshop, when and where to host, what participants will be taught during the event	Co-creation session with partner from New Oriental school and ESL teachers	At lease once a month	Outputs
Promote the activity	Use the social media to attract more Students to participate the activity	School websites Instagram YouTude	Twice a week	Inputs
Sustainable development	A toolkits that allows organizers to host the workshop in the future	Meeting or session	After implementing the workshop and got some positive feedbacks	Outputs
Number of student who attends	If this workshop is attractive to students, many of them would like to join in	Individually counted	End of the workshop	Outputs

LEARNINGS

System thinking

At the beginning of this project, I used to focus on many small tiny things and get lost in complicated information. From the discussion with Esther and Miya, I changed my thinking model and got more closer to root causes of the problem. Instead of only considering students themselves, I included the analysis of cultural difference between Chinese and U.S educational system which took my project to a higher level.

Leadership

Since I have to collaborate with professional English teachers to make the teaching guide of each workshop, and find volunteers to help me host the event. It's a challenge but also an opportunity for me to practice my leadership skills. I have to let them feel interested in my project and motivate them to join in my team. During the process, I felt my communication skills improved a lot

Face the uncertainty

In March, the COVID-19 broke out in U.S which greatly impacted the implementation of my intervention. Finally, I changed to use virtual way to conduct my workshop. It's definitely a tough time for everyone, but I think it also inspired me to think about how to face the uncertainty and minimize losses during the whole process.



With my perfect thesis group consists of professional and outstanding designers

SPECIAL THANKS

Miya SVA Chinese Student Organization
Esther SVA International Student Office
Fang New Oriental School
Mei iEnglish
Meng DSI Cohort
Jiahui Research Participants
Sunny Parents and friends



Let's stay together and make a better future!

