

THESIS 2023



Unlocking the Golden Years

/ Design for Social Innovation

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“Social connection is a fundamental human need, as essential to survival as food, water, and shelter.”

—Dr. Vivek H. Murthy,
19th and 21st Surgeon General of the United States



Personal Story

As a Chinese international student, I initially felt disconnected from the city and its culture. It was during my visits to Chinatown that I found a sense of belonging and was embraced by a group of wonderful people, the elderly Chinese community, who spoke to me in Cantonese. These individuals have been in the city much longer than me and have faced many challenges as first-generation immigrants. Through their stories, I learned about the history of Chinese immigrants in New York, and each of their experiences was like a superhero legend.

However, as heartwarming as their stories were, I couldn't help but notice the enduring problem they faced: social isolation and the feeling of being stranded on an island. This realization sparked my interest and led me to explore the issue further. Hence, the purpose of my thesis is to shed light on the issue of social isolation among Chinese elderly in New York City and to design a sustainable solution that can empower them to live fulfilling lives.



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01 Social Issue

Social Isolation

What is Social Isolation:

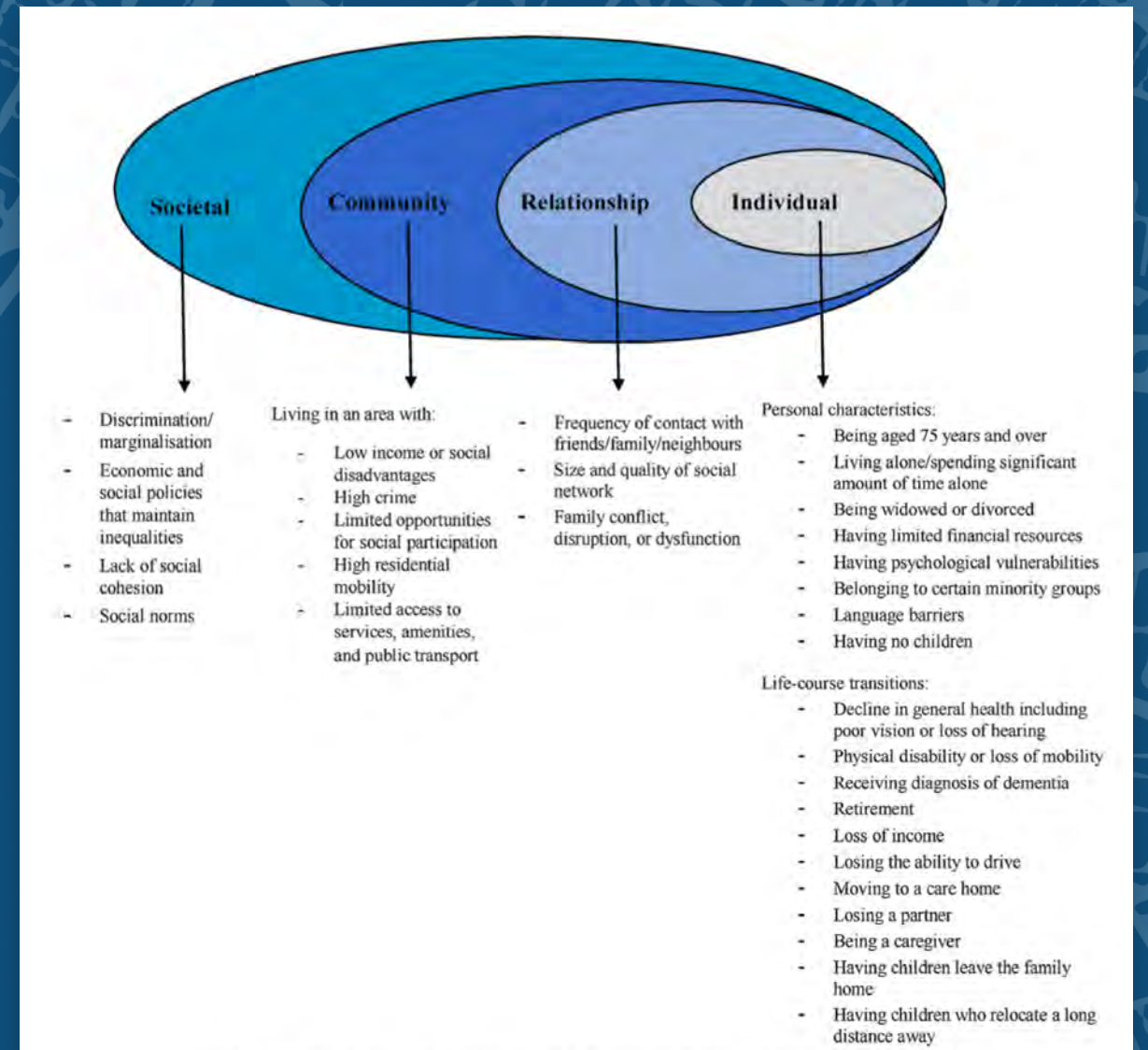
Social isolation can be defined as an objective measure reflecting an individual's lack of contact or ties with others, such as family, friends, acquaintances and neighbours [2]. Social isolation is characterised as an absence or limitation in the quantity of social interactions. It is distinct from the related and subjective concept of loneliness which occurs when there is a perceived discrepancy between an individual's desired and achieved level of social interaction.

Why it's matter:

Social isolation has been linked with a range of health problems in middle and later life. Individuals who are socially isolated have been found to be at greater risk of developing cardiovascular disease [3], stroke [3], depression [4], dementia [5], and premature death [6]. The mechanisms underlying the impact of social isolation on health remain unclear but are thought to include influences on health behaviours, sleep, exhaustion, and social connectedness [7]. Social isolation affects both individuals and the wider community. Health issues arising from isolation and loneliness lead to an increased use of health and social care services, and a higher number of emergency admissions and GP consultations [8].

Risk factors for social isolation:

To understand the risk factors associated with isolation, it is useful to place the discussion within the context of an ecological framework [9]. This views social isolation as the outcome of interaction among multiple factors at four levels: individual, relationship, community, and societal



The ecological framework: examples of risk factors for social isolation at each level

Chinese elderly population in New York

Highest proportion of Seniors among Asian ethnic group, and growing rapidly:

In 2021, there were 193,388 AsiAn-American seniors in New York. Compared to other Asian ethnic groups, the Chinese population in NYC has the highest proportion of seniors (15.6%) The share of seniors in the overall Chinese population is growing: they now are 2.9 percentage points more of the total Chinese population than they were in 2015. The Chinese population is aging faster than the broader NYC population, whose senior population grew by 2.2 percentage points.[10]

Foreign-born:

More than two-thirds (68.2%) of Chinese residents are foreign-born. This is the highest foreign-born rate among Asian ethnic groups in NYC.[10]

Low English Proficiency (LEP):

The LEP rate is significantly higher for Chinese seniors (age 65+) at 86.3% among Asian ethnic groups.[10] Approximately 68% of seniors need English to be translated into one of 12 languages. [11]

Cultural Distance:

Cultural distance is an academic concept that measures the degree of difference between cultures. It can impact immigrants' life quality in various ways, including communication barriers, difficulties in adapting to new social norms, and challenges in building social connections. A higher cultural distance between the immigrants' home country and the host country may lead to more significant challenges in adapting to the new environment and can influence immigrants' well-being and life satisfaction.[12]



Poverty: Over half (56.4%) of Chinese seniors live either in poverty or near poverty, almost double the rate of seniors in New York City as a whole (37.3%). [10]

Living Alone: Approximately 30% of seniors live alone, and 37% do not have daily contact with family, friends, or neighbors they do not live with.[11]

Technology Barriers: Even in our increasingly virtual world, 35% of seniors do not have a technology device that can access the Internet, and 51% of seniors are not comfortable accessing the Internet, whether or not they have the technology. [11]

Chinese Immigrants History

The Chinese elderly's resilience in their immigration story of building connections in US society:

Most of today's Chinese elderly immigrants came to America in the 1960s and 1970s. As the first generation of immigrants in their family, they came to New York with hopes of a better life but soon realized that everything was not as easy as they had thought. Stranded without any relatives, language barriers and cultural differences turned them into isolated islands in the city. Nonetheless, language and mutual culture also serve as a bridge to connect. Within Chinatown, these generation were able to form a close-knit community that served as a beacon of hope and support for many immigrants.

People banded together to create support networks through Hometown Associations, sharing information about jobs, policies, and providing guarantees for each other. Limited job options formed strong Unions, which helped navigate the insurance and welfare system. Together, the community created a support system that helped them root themselves in the city, thrive, and raise the next generation of Americans, who became the next strong and lasting connections between the first generation and the city's culture.

Current challenge: A new support system is needed

For over 40 years, the Chinese immigrant support system has played a vital role in helping them achieve personal success and contribute to building New York City. However, times have changed. Elderly immigrants are retiring and work is no longer their primary link to society. Meanwhile, the younger generation has boarder job options and priorities, leading to weakened relationships within the community. To compound the issue, the children who once helped their parents navigate the challenges of language and culture have grown up

and moved away. The rise of technology has also created new barriers, leaving many elderly immigrants struggling to access services and information and feeling . All of these bringing the risk of social isolation and the feeling of being stranded on an island.

This is where we must begin. We need to find new ways to evolve our support systems and ensure that everyone, regardless of their age, culture, or background, can feel connected and supported in our communities.



同鄉會
Hometown Association



車衣工廠
Union

下一代
Next Generation





Today's Chinatown

How might we bring
New York Chinese
elderly immigrants'
incredible resilience
back to build
connections and
improve their
quality of life?



02 Research

RESEARCH PHASE 01

Understand the challenge in current connection with society among Chinese elderly in New York.

Research Goal & Research Question:

To better understand the challenge in current connection with society among Chinese elderly in New York, I started from understand their current connections and the way they build new connections, as well as their expectation for ideal connections.

Activities:

I conducted an interviews with 8 Chinese elderly. The interview was conducted into 3 sessions. In the first session, I encouraged the elderly to share their daily life around 3 key factors: where they go, what they do and who they spend time with. This helped me understand the relationship map around them.

Next, I asked them to share how they know about the place, activities as well as people or organizations. This helped me understand how they get new information and build new connections.

In the third session, I encouraged them to share what connection they want to build more on and what's stopping them from building it. This helped me understand the challenge as well as the opportunities to build their ideal social connection.

Finding01:

Language barriers and cultural distance continue to limit the places Chinese elderly can go, the information they can access, the activities they can participate in, the services they can obtain, and the people they can connect with.

- **Insight01:** Language barriers and cultural distance continue to hinder Chinese elderly from accessing necessary resources: Chinese elderly have unique cultural and language needs, providing culturally responsive services and language assistance is critical in ensuring that Chinese elderly can access the information and support they require.



- **Insight02:** Language and cultural barriers also impact their self-efficacy in exploring and building ideal connections.

Finding02:

Although Chinese elderly rely heavily on trusted networks for accessing information, trying new experience or services, they desire more independence in building connections.

- **Insight:** Leveraging trusted network can significantly accelerate the trust-building process for the Chinese elderly when establishing new connections.
- **Insight02:** However, excessive reliance on others limits their ideal connections. Strategies for building and maintaining connections independently are essential to empower them and foster self-efficacy and independence.

Finding03:

Community-based organizations have become the new social hubs and resource connectors for Chinese elderly after retirement and children moving out.

- **Insight01:** Community-based organizations are efficient platforms for helping Chinese elderly build or maintain relationships and connection with society.

Summary:

These findings reveal the challenges Chinese elderly face in accessing information and building ideal connections due to language and cultural barriers. They heavily rely on trusted networks, which can both facilitate and limit their connections. Community-based organizations play a vital role as social hubs and resource connectors.

Moving forward, addressing these challenges and leveraging community-based organizations as platforms will be essential in empowering Chinese elderly to independently build and maintain connections and ultimately fostering greater self-efficacy and independence.

RESEARCH PHASE 02

Identifying challenges and opportunities in community-based organizations for helping Chinese elderly build connections

Research Goal & Research Question:

To uncover opportunities in community-based organizations for helping Chinese elderly build connections, I aimed to understand the effectiveness and limitations of their strategies by exploring existing services, their implementation, and the feedback from both the elderly and the organizations.

Activities:

1. I conducted secondary research on services provided by various community-based organizations and senior centers, which allowed me to understand the current service map and the types of programs offered to Chinese elderly.
2. I volunteered at different community-based organizations and senior centers to observe their strategies firsthand and learn from the elderly's feedback through informal conversations, providing valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities these organizations face in helping the elderly build connections.
3. I interviewed 1 social worker and 3 senior center project managers to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives on the effectiveness and limitations of the current services, revealing organizational challenges and opportunities for improving strategies to better support Chinese elderly in building connections.

Finding01:

There are many existing methods for helping the elderly build connections, and community-based organizations are actively innovating through external collaborations. However, many innovative projects have limited capacity to serve the elderly, making it difficult for them to access these services. Additionally, due to limited staff or funding, it is common for projects to be discontinued.



- **Insight01:** While CBOs are aware of the community's needs, they may not always have the capacity to implement effective solutions.
- **Insight02:** It is essential for community-based organizations to develop sustainable solutions that address the needs of Chinese elderly within their regular services, ensuring long-term stability and support.

Finding02: Although community-based organizations are aware of the elderly's desire for more independence, most of their service strategies involve directly solving individual problems for the elderly rather than enhancing their abilities and self-efficacy to address challenges independently, possibly due to the slower results from capacity-building efforts.

- **Insight01:** There is a gap between the elderly's desires and what the service organizations can provide, given the limitations they face.
- **Insight02:** Identifying opportunities to improve the elderly's ability to build connections and self-efficacy within existing resources is a valuable approach. By focusing on these aspects, community-based organizations can better align their services with the needs of the elderly and contribute to their long-term growth and independence.

Summary :

This research highlights the challenges and opportunities faced by community-based organizations in helping Chinese elderly build connections. The findings show that while there are many existing methods and innovations in place, limited capacity, funding, and staffing often hinder their effectiveness. Furthermore, there is a gap between the elderly's desire for independence and the services organizations can provide, as most strategies focus on solving individual problems rather than enhancing their abilities and self-efficacy.

By developing sustainable solutions that address the needs of Chinese elderly within existing resources, community-based organizations can ensure long-term stability and support. Additionally, identifying opportunities to improve the elderly's ability to build connections and self-efficacy can better align services with their needs and contribute to their long-term growth and independence.



Hamilton Madison House 華埠社區中心 City Hall Older Adult Center 曹英會 100 Gold Street, New York, NY 10038 Tel: (212) 749-5887				
2023年二月份午餐菜單		Lunch Menu February 2023		
Monday 星期一	Tuesday 星期二	Wednesday 星期三	Thursday 星期四	Friday 星期五
01/30/2023 Oven Fried Chicken Wings 焗雞翅	01/31/2023 Baked Salmon 焗三文魚	02/01/2023 Baked Asian Style Honey Chicken 蜜汁雞扒	02/02/2023 Baked Egg with Cheese 芝士焗意大利通粉	02/03/2023 Chinese Style Roast Pork Lo Mein 叉燒
02/06/2023 Vegetarian Delight 齋菜	02/07/2023 Pork Spare Ribs 燒排骨	02/08/2023 Curry Chicken 咖喱雞	02/09/2023 Beef Stew 牛腩	02/10/2023 Baked Breaded Fish 麵包鱈魚片
02/13/2023 Lincoln's Birthday Center Closed 林肯生日中心關門一天	02/14/2023 Wagon Apples 叉燒	02/15/2023 Chinese Style Roast Pork Lo Mein 叉燒	02/16/2023 Oven Fried Chicken Wings 焗雞翅	02/17/2023 Baked Fish with Garlic Sauce 麥香魚片
02/20/2023 President's Day Center Closed 總統日中心關門一天	02/21/2023 Beef Stew 牛腩	02/22/2023 Vegetarian Delight 齋菜	02/23/2023 Baked Breaded Pork Chops 麵包豬扒	02/24/2023 Curry Chicken 咖喱雞
02/27/2023 Vegetarian Delight 齋菜	02/28/2023 Chinese Style Roast Pork Lo Mein 叉燒	03/01/2023 Teriyaki Chicken Legs 日式燒汁雞腿	03/02/2023 Baked Breaded Fish 麵包鱈魚片	03/03/2023 Pork Spare Ribs 燒排骨



HMW utilize existing resources within community-based organizations to more effectively boost self-efficacy and independence in building connections among Chinese elderly immigrants in New York?

COMMUNITY PARTNER

Manny Cantor Center

Manny Cantor Center is a well-established nonprofit organization in New York City that has been serving underserved communities since 1889. Over the years, they have provided educational and social programs to thousands of individuals and families, with a focus on promoting social, emotional, and intellectual growth. According to their website, Manny Cantor Center serves over 50,000 people each year.

Their impact on the elderly Chinese community in New York's Lower East Side has been particularly significant. Through their senior services program, they offer English language classes, technology classes, and other educational and social activities that help to alleviate social isolation and improve overall well-being. They also provide assistance with accessing healthcare and other resources, and work to ensure that seniors are able to age in place and maintain their independence.



03 Design

Design Focus

English and Technology Course

Building upon our preliminary research, me and my thesis partner have narrowed our focus on the English and Technology Courses, a widely used program in the organization focused on helping Chinese elderly to build their ability to overcome language and technology barriers to help them improve their independence and self-efficacy.

Technology applications, such as mobile maps, translation software, communication apps, and video conferencing tools, can have a significant impact on improving the lives of elderly individuals. These applications help seniors to better integrate into their community, maintain social connections with family and friends, increase their digital literacy, and become more independent.

Learning English is also important for elderly Chinese immigrants, as it can help them access resources and services, better communicate with their healthcare providers, understand important information related to their health. In addition, learning English can improve their social interactions with people outside of their Chinese-speaking community, and increase their overall sense of independence and integration into American society.

Design Goal:

Boost self-efficacy and independence in building connections among Chinese elderly immigrants in New York with English and Techonlogy course in community based organization



Design Challenge & Opportunity

Design Challenge:

By doing participant observation and interviews with both teachers and elderly in the class, I have identified 2 specific challenges.

Finding01: Elderly adults have specific goals for learning English and using technology, but current courses don't sufficiently meet these aspirations or incorporate their needs.

- **Insight:** Seniors have clear learning objectives, highlighting the need for more personalized, goal-oriented teaching methods that involve their participation in the course design process.

Finding02: Elderly students struggle to retain new knowledge because current courses emphasize step-by-step procedures over understanding the underlying logic. Additionally, there's a lack of Chinese language materials tailored for older adults.

- **Insight:** For effective learning, teaching methods should prioritize comprehension and understanding over rote repetition. Furthermore, creating culturally appropriate and age-inclusive resources is essential to cater to the needs of elderly students.

Finding03: The majority of courses are delivered by volunteers, and a lack of standardized teaching materials contributes to inconsistency in instruction and feedback across various teachers and organizations.

- **Insight:** A standardized, unified curriculum is necessary to ensure consistent and effective teaching across different educators and organizations.

Refine Design Goal:

Develop a course that meets Chinese seniors' needs in building connections and is easy to learn.

“ When learning a new script instead of understanding the letters, I'm merely drawing characters ”

— Mrs. Yang



“ It's hard to find course materials design for the elderly, which ended up with course not sufficiently incorporating to their need. ”

— Sophia, ESOL Program Manager



PROTOTYPE 01

Goal-Design Workshop

Goal:

To create an inclusive and comfortable space for the elderly to communicate their learning goals and preferred learning styles to teachers.

Description:

The Goal-Design Workshop employs storytelling, role-play, and interactive voting to inspire elderly individuals to share their aspirations and preferred learning methods, promoting independence through English and technology learning. The process is guided by metaphors and prompts, such as seeds (goals and aspirations), weeds (obstacles and challenges), and soil (resources and support systems).

What worked:

1. The senior participants shared specific scenarios and desired outcomes, demonstrating a clear goal in independence of building connection understanding that they aim to achieve by English and technology learning.
2. The Seed-Weed-Soil metaphor and storytelling method made it easier for the seniors to articulate their goals and required support/resources without feeling stigmatized by their perceived challenges.
3. The use of stickers for expressing agreement and disagreement enabled even the most introverted elderly participants to voice their opinions, promoting more open and constructive discussions.

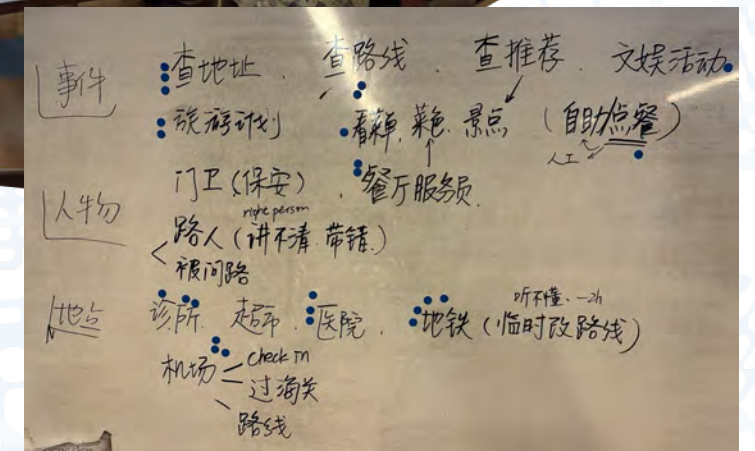
What didn't Work:

1. The initial format requested seniors to write or draw their thoughts for the prompt before sharing. However, seniors preferred verbalizing their thoughts and listening to others' shares directly.

Learnings:

1. Allowing the elderly to autonomously define course content increased their interest in participating in subsequent courses.
2. The workshop nurtured a higher level of trust and rapport between the elderly and teachers.
3. The interactive workshop was a novel experience for the elderly, inciting more active participation and sparking interest in more such experiences.
4. The sense of voicing significant opinions and contributing to the community boosted their confidence and sense of belonging.

“
If your English becomes incredibly fluent, and you become highly skilled in technology next week.
 How will your next week looks like?
 ”



PROTOTYPE 02

Fill-in-the-blank Card

Goal:

Identify teaching methods that are easier for the elderly to understand and encourage their active engagement in learning.

Description:

The Fill-in-the-blank Cards are a set of portable tools that leverage existing teaching methods of breaking sentences apart. They allow seniors to understand and customize their English expressions for daily scenarios, such as using public transportation, reading medication instructions, and describing their desired routes.

What worked:

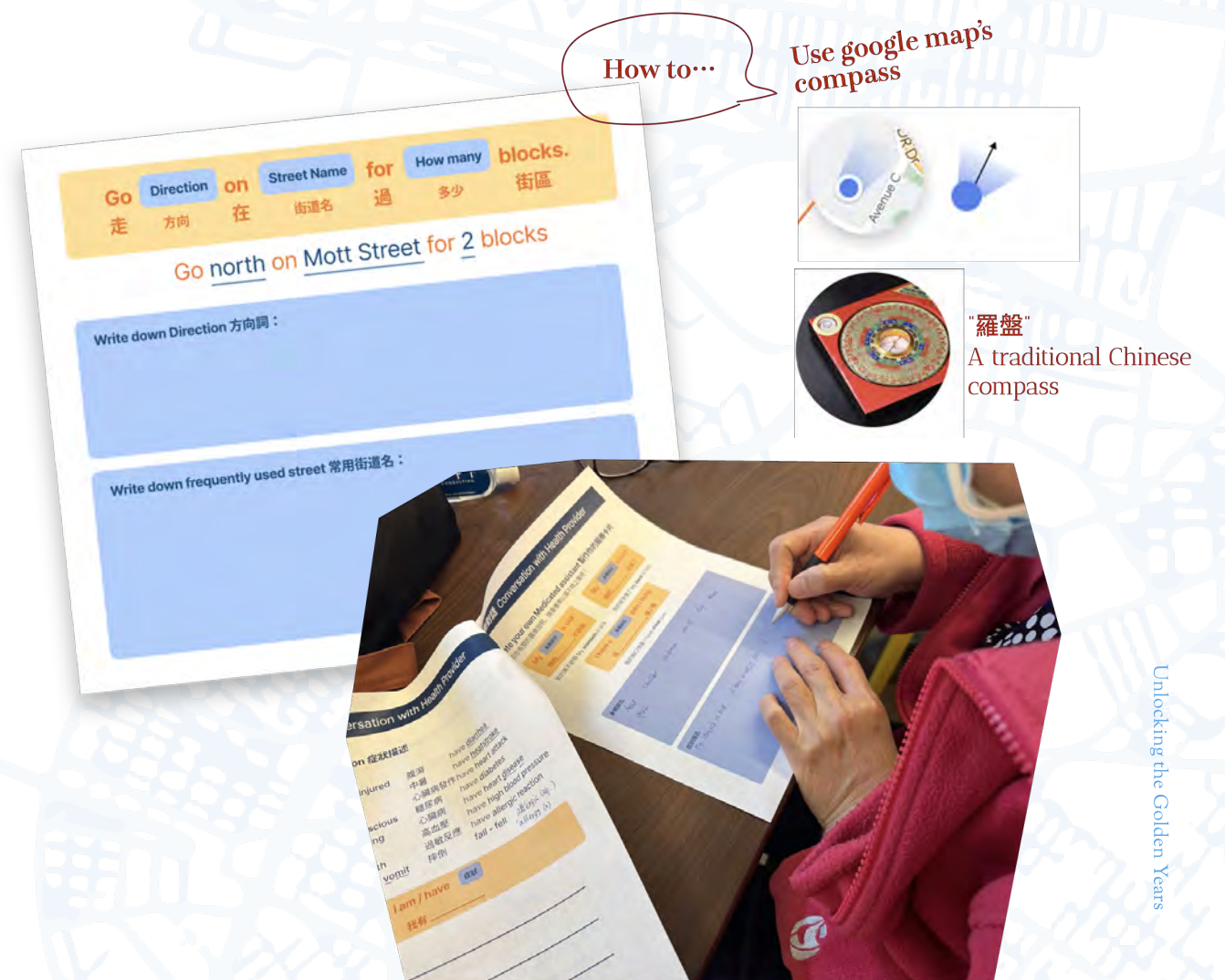
1. Customized words and fixed phrases on the cards facilitated easier understanding and sentence creation for the seniors.
2. The immediate usability of the cards increased seniors' willingness to participate in their own card-building session, more questions were asked.
3. Using color codes as guidelines helped them understand how to construct their sentences and add their words.

What didn't Work:

1. Seniors were hesitate to study and use the cards independently. Despite instructions on how to use the cards, they preferred having someone guide them through their first attempt.
2. Not all knowledge could be conveyed effectively using a combinatorial approach, especially in the technology section.

Learnings:

1. Seniors would like to create their own cards tailored to their individual needs and situations
2. The cards inspired the seniors to share more of their unique ways of memorizing complex information with us. Many of them leveraged their cultural backgrounds and concepts they were familiar with. This emphasized how our culture and experiences continue to help us unlock new things, not just when we first encounter them, but throughout our entire lives.
3. Seniors would like to share their cards with other elderly friends to benefit them as well.



PROTOTYPE 03

Google Maps Learning Lesson

Goal:

To create a safe place for the elderly to learn and practice, applying their newly acquired knowledge to independent challenges they face in daily life scenarios.

Description:

The third prototype was the first lesson of the curriculum, focusing on learning Google Maps. The class format encouraged the elderly to correlate their learning with real-life implementation. We introduced a customized task card and a take-away card to shape the in-class exercises according to individual desires, and to encourage its use beyond the classroom. The customized task card, used before every lesson, listed related in-class exercises for each teaching content, encouraging students to set the in-class exercise related to their real-life scenarios. The take-away card, used at the end of the lesson, recapped the fill-in-the-blank card teaching in the lesson and provided space for students to jot down words and sentences they frequently use to facilitate the practice beyond class.

What worked:

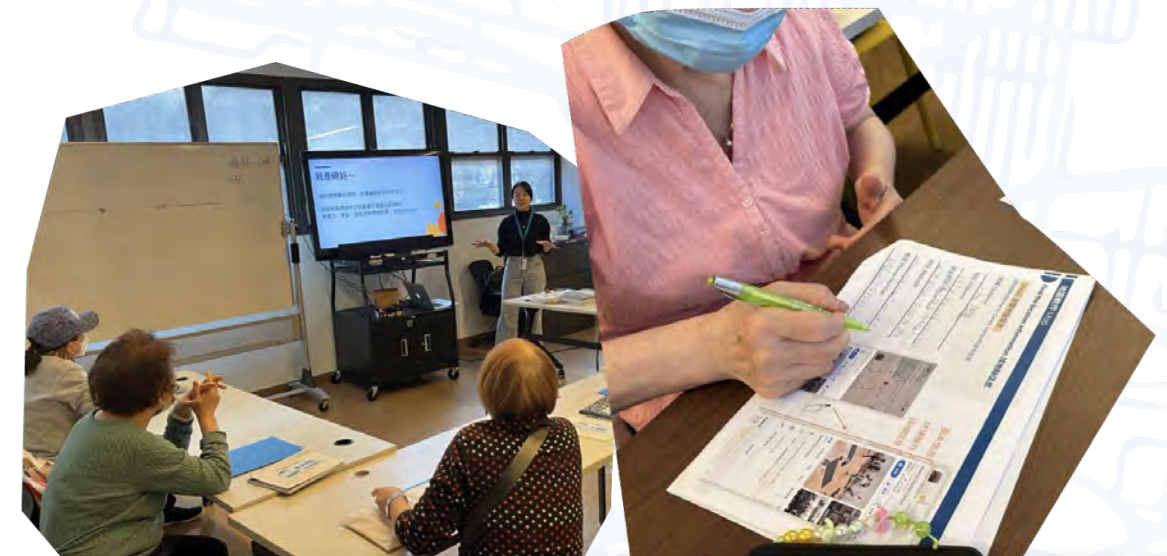
1. The customized task card enhanced the seniors' sense of ownership and engagement in the learning process.
2. The tasks set by seniors for themselves provided teachers with deeper insights into the specific scenarios in which this demographic wished to improve their independence, helping them understand what the seniors wanted to learn.
3. The take-away card prompted seniors to think proactively about application scenarios. They consulted teachers for more specific words and sentences they might use based on their individual circumstances.

What didn't work:

1. Initially, some students couldn't think of specific scenarios and were unsure about how to write on the take-away card. However, after hearing others share their scenarios or raise questions, they noted down what resonated with them.

Learning

1. Class notes can serve as evidence for course iteration.
2. Increased class interaction and sharing can promote mutual learning among the seniors and foster collective brainstorming.



I want to check the information of Italian Restaurant

<input type="checkbox"/> 離我的距離 distance from me	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> 地址 address	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> 路線 routine	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> 營業時間 opening hour	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> 電話 phone number	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> 人均消費 average spending per person	_____

Design Principle

Building upon the insights and learnings we gleaned from the prototyping process, we were able to distill these experiences into five core design principles:

Design Principle 1: "It's designed by, not designed for"

This principle emphasizes the importance of co-designing with the target users rather than designing for them. In this case, the elderly population should be active participants in the design process of their learning materials. Their experiences, needs, and goals should be the driving force behind each design decision. This process would not only empower them but also ensure the solutions meet their unique needs and preferences. It is about creating with them a more personalized, relevant, and effective learning experience, which can ultimately lead to better outcomes and user satisfaction.

Design Principle 2: "It's about enhancing their self-efficacy for expanding connections"

This principle focuses on boosting the self-efficacy of the elderly population in expanding their social and community connections. It's about fostering a sense of confidence and competence in their ability to learn and use English in their daily lives, and subsequently to connect with a broader network of people and resources. This could mean helping them to understand and navigate technology, encouraging them to express their thoughts and needs, or creating opportunities for them to interact with different social groups. The ultimate goal is to enhance their autonomy and social inclusion.

Design Principle 3: "It's about providing practical solutions facing daily scenarios"

This principle highlights the need for practicality and applicability in the learning materials and teaching methods. It suggests that the curriculum and learning tools should be tailored to address the real-life challenges that the elderly face. This could be achieved by incorporating real-life scenarios and tasks in the learning process, using culturally relevant examples, and providing immediate feedback. By doing this, the elderly can see the direct benefits of their learning efforts and are more likely to stay motivated and engaged in the learning process.

Design Principle 4: "It's about emphasizing what they can do, with the knowledge and experience they already have"

This principle is about valuing and leveraging the existing knowledge and experiences of the elderly. It suggests that the learning process should not only focus on introducing new concepts but also on building upon what they already know and can do. This respects their life experiences, acknowledges their wisdom, and can also help to bridge the gap between familiar and unfamiliar concepts. It emphasizes the strength and potential of the elderly, boosting their confidence and making the learning process more meaningful and enjoyable for them.

Design Principle 5: "It's about transferring connection-building skills into real-life practice."

This principle underlines the importance of translating the skills learned in the classroom to real-life situations. It's not just about learning English or understanding technology, but also about applying these skills to build connections and navigate daily life situations. For instance, using English to communicate at a local community center, or using digital maps to navigate public transportation. By incorporating real-life application into the learning process, the elderly are not only more likely to retain what they learned, but also to see its relevance and value in their daily lives, thus promoting continued use and learning.



Unlocking the Golden Years

A senior-centered curriculum that is
co-designed by and for elderly Chinese immigrants.

How It Work

01

Goal-Setting Session

In this step, use prompts and the Seed-Weed-Soil metaphor to facilitate Chinese seniors in sharing their vision of becoming more independent in building connection through improved English and technology skills. The seniors also outline the challenges they face in the learning process.

Output:

The outcome of this step is a clear understanding of the specific scenarios and achievements that the elderly participants aspire to accomplish. This information serves as the foundation for the course content.

02

Co-Design Curriculum and Materials to Break Down Complexity

Co-design the curriculum and materials in collaboration with teachers and elderly individuals who are adept at assisting their peers in understanding complex concepts. The learning goals derived from the goal-setting session are broken down into practical tasks, represented by Fill-in-the-Blank Cards. Additionally, we leverage their successful learning experiences to provide culturally relevant explanations that resonate with the cultural backgrounds of Chinese elderly immigrants.

Output:

The result of this step is a set of course content based on practical tasks and teaching materials that incorporate culturally relevant examples, scenarios, language, and metaphors familiar to elderly Chinese immigrants.

03

Learn and Practice in Class to Prepare for Greater Independence and Self-Sufficiency beyond class

Employ customized task cards and take-away cards to encourage the seniors to apply their learning to real-life scenarios. This approach not only fosters a sense of ownership in their learning but also promotes increased independence in their daily lives.

Output:

In this step, seniors practice new skills related to their own daily-life scenarios in class and create take-away materials that will aid their practice beyond the classroom.

04

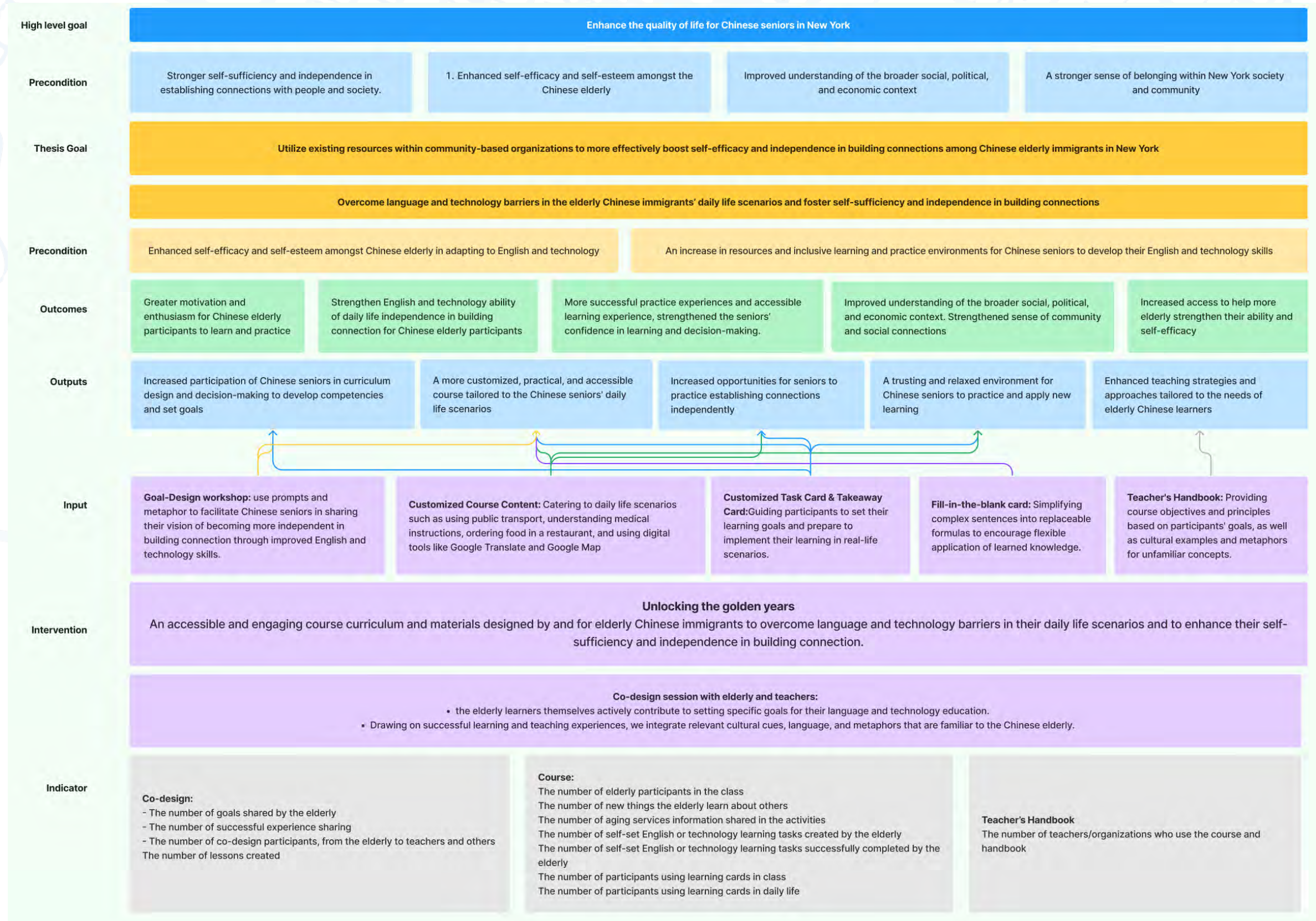
Iterating Course Based on Feedback

Conduct teaching and testing with an emphasis on inclusiveness among the elderly population. The notes that the elderly make on the course materials, along with the questions they ask during class, provide valuable insights. These inputs are used to make iterations based on their feedback and interactions with the materials.

Output:

The final outcome of this process is an evolved curriculum that includes more culturally nuanced explanations and practical application scenarios that truly reflect the real-world experiences of the seniors.

Theory of Change



TOC Narratives

The high level goal of my thesis is to enhance the quality of life for Chinese seniors living in New York. The keys to reaching this high-level goal are fostering a stronger sense of self-sufficiency and independence in the seniors, enhancing their self-efficacy and self-esteem, improving their understanding of the broader social, political, and economic context, and creating a stronger sense of belonging within the New York society and community.

My thesis goal aligns with these preconditions: to leverage existing resources within community-based organizations to more effectively enhance self-efficacy and independence amongst the Chinese elderly immigrants in New York. My thesis plan to do so by overcoming language and technology barriers that seniors face in their daily life scenarios, thus fostering self-sufficiency and independence in building connections.

To achieve this thesis goal, there are two vital preconditions: enhancing the self-efficacy and self-esteem of Chinese elderly in adapting to English and technology, and increasing resources and inclusive learning and practice environments for them to develop their English and technology skills.

The final intervention, titled "Unlocking the Golden Years," is designed to bridge these gaps. This accessible and engaging course curriculum and materials are designed by and for elderly Chinese immigrants to help them overcome language and technology barriers in their daily life scenarios, thereby building their self-efficacy and independence in building connection.

This intervention involves five key inputs. These include a Goal-Design Workshop, a Customized Course Content that caters to daily life scenarios, Customized Task Cards & Takeaway Cards, Fill-in-the-Blank Cards, and a Teacher's Handbook.

Through these inputs, it aim to produce multiple outputs. These include increased participation of Chinese seniors in curriculum design, a more customized and accessible course, increased opportunities for seniors to practice establishing connections, a trusting environment for Chinese seniors to practice and apply new learning, and enhanced teaching strategies tailored to the needs of elderly Chinese learners.

Through this intervention, we anticipate that these outputs will lead to various beneficial outcomes, including increased motivation and enthusiasm amongst Chinese seniors to learn and practice, strengthened English and technology skills, successful learning experiences, improved understanding of the broader social context, and increased access to more seniors to strengthen their self-efficacy and skills.

M&E Plan

To evaluate the effectiveness of this intervention and to test our Theory of Change assumptions, we will measure key metrics below. This will allow the project to continuously refine and improve our approach, ensuring it's making the most positive impact on the lives of Chinese seniors in New York.

- The number of goals shared by the elderly
- The number of successful experience sharing
- The number of co-design participants, from the elderly to teachers and others
- The number of lessons created
- The number of elderly participants in the class
- The number of new things the elderly learn about others
- The number of aging services information shared in the activities
- The number of self-set English or technology learning tasks created by the elderly
- The number of self-set English or technology learning tasks successfully completed by the elderly
- The number of participants using learning cards in class
- The number of participants using learning cards in daily life
- The number of teachers/organizations who use the course and handbook

Environmental Impact Assessment

Description of the proposed activities and its purpose:

"Unlocking the Golden Years" is a unique, senior-centered curriculum co-designed by and specifically tailored for elderly Chinese immigrants. Its central aim is to enhance self-efficacy, foster independence, and facilitate stronger social connections among this group in New York. This is achieved by addressing and overcoming two major challenges that this community faces: language and technology barriers.

To fulfill this purpose, the intervention proposes a set of interconnected activities that weave together the expertise of educators and the lived experiences of the seniors.

Firstly, the intervention incorporates a series of co-design workshops. These workshops offer a creative space where Chinese seniors collaborate with teachers, sharing their insights and aspirations to inform the content and format of the curriculum. This co-design process ensures that the curriculum is not only relevant but also sensitive to the cultural nuances and specific needs of the elderly Chinese immigrants.

Secondly, the intervention involves the implementation of English and technology courses within community-based organizations. These courses, informed by the co-design workshops, concentrate on practical, real-life scenarios that the seniors encounter on a daily basis. This practical focus is crucial to facilitating the elderly's adaptation to their environment and fostering their independence.

Lastly, to support the delivery of these courses, customized teaching materials are created. These materials reflect the insights gained during the co-design workshops, accommodating the learning styles and cultural preferences of the elderly Chinese immigrants. This customization ensures that the course content is accessible and engaging, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the learning experience.

Project Location:

Community-based organization in New York (Pilot : Manny Cantor Center)

Location Environmental Priorities:

The "Unlocking the golden years" is likely to affect the existing environment of community-based organizations in New York, particularly in the Lower East Side where the pilot location is located.

Affordable housing is a major issue in the Lower East Side, where many elderly individuals live on fixed incomes and struggle to afford the rising cost of housing. Access to healthcare services is also a concern, especially for those with chronic health conditions that require ongoing care.

While "Unlocking the Golden Years" program does not directly address these environmental and climate issues, it can have an indirect impact in several ways:

1. **Empowerment through Language and Technology:** By helping elderly Chinese immigrants overcome language and technology barriers, the program can empower them to better navigate the systems related to housing, healthcare, and transportation. For instance, with better English and technology skills, they can understand and communicate their needs more effectively, access online resources and services, and advocate for their rights and needs.
2. **Building Connections:** The program's focus on building connections can enhance the community's resilience in facing environmental and climate challenges. As seniors form stronger social networks, they can share resources, information, and support each other in dealing with issues like housing affordability and access to healthcare.
3. **Promoting Sustainable Practices:** Through the curriculum, the program can incorporate lessons on environmentally friendly practices, such as using public transportation and reducing waste. This can contribute to the location's environmental priorities by encouraging more sustainable behaviors among the participants.
4. **Advocacy:** With improved self-efficacy and a stronger sense of belonging, the elderly participants might become more engaged in their community, including participating in discussions and actions related to the environmental issues in their area.

Project Type:

Workshop / Service / Course Materials

Climate Impact:

Energy & Power / Deforestation

Probable Impact Assessment

Action/activity	Related Factors	Probable Impacts
Conducting workshop	Energy & Power using in the building	Increased greenhouse gas emissions and rising global temperatures; habitat destruction and loss of biodiversity.
Printing out course materials	Deforestation	Increased greenhouse gas emissions and rising global temperatures; habitat destruction and loss of biodiversity.
Use of the mobile phone and Internet during class	Energy & Power	Climate change, rising global temperatures, increased greenhouse gas emissions

Conservation Techniques

Activity	Mitigation Technique
Conducting workshop	Use energy-efficient lighting and appliances in the building; control the temperature of the room using energy-efficient heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems; encourage participants to use public transport or carpool to reach the workshop venue.
Printing out course materials	Use recycled paper for printing; print double-sided to reduce paper usage; recycle all used paper; limit the use of colored ink which usually contains harmful chemicals.
Use of the mobile phone and Internet during class	Encourage participants to use energy-saving settings on their mobile devices; use energy-efficient equipment in the classroom; switch off equipment when not in use.

Alternatives Analysis: No-action

1. Continuation of Current Situation: Without the intervention, elderly Chinese immigrants may continue to face language and technology barriers, leading to difficulties in accessing services, understanding crucial information, and integrating into the wider society. This could result in a lower quality of life and potentially increased social isolation.
2. Missed Opportunity for Empowerment: The co-design aspect of the intervention encourages active participation and fosters a sense of ownership among the elderly. The no-action alternative would mean a missed opportunity for these individuals to build self-efficacy, confidence, and skills.
4. Unaddressed Needs: Without the intervention, the specific needs of elderly Chinese immigrants in terms of language and technology learning may remain unaddressed. Standard language courses might not cater to their unique requirements, and the lack of suitable resources could hinder their learning progress.

Conclusion:

While the no-action alternative would avoid the environmental impacts associated with the intervention, such as energy consumption and potential resource use, it would fail to address the pressing needs of elderly Chinese immigrants, potentially leading to ongoing challenges and disparities within this community.

Next Step

So far, we have co-designed 5 lessons with Chinese seniors and conducted two rounds of the curriculum at the center. The Course Content including:

- 01 Public transport, asking for directions when getting lost
- 02. Use Google Translation to read instructions and communicate with native speakers
- 03. Use Google map to search locations and event information
- 04. Read drug directions and describe frequent symptom
- 05. Order food in the restaurant

As I look ahead, I am filled with anticipation for the potential of our course. I see it not only helping more Chinese seniors, but also extending its impact to elderly immigrants from diverse backgrounds in New York, aiding them in forging stronger connections.

However, let's dare to dream even bigger. Imagine extending this senior-centered design approach to more services. We could transform our system into one that facilitates seniors to interact with the world in the way they desire, catering not only to today's seniors but also to future generations, for you and me.

In this envisioned future, we continue to co-design more lessons with and for communities of diverse backgrounds, expanding the co-design and senior-centered design practices to broader senior services. We aim to facilitate them in developing a truly personalized and fulfilling life, honoring their unique experiences.



04 Learning



In reflecting upon the journey of my thesis, I am filled with profound gratitude. The path was not always smooth - it was frequently punctuated with moments of anxiety and hesitation. Fear of rejection, fear of fruitless research, fear of producing something ineffectual, and fear of disappointing the community that embraced me - all these fears frequently loomed large.

However, it was the resilient seniors who taught me the power of courage. They showed me that starting small is not a weakness but a strength. Their unwavering spirit illuminated the truth that strength lies in our collective resilience, and that together, we can achieve greater heights.

The remarkable staff within the community-based organizations demonstrated the importance of curiosity and the power of asking questions. They highlighted the necessity of seeking support while making social change, and consistently provided strong support in my journey of understanding the community's needs. They embodied the essence of connectivity within our community.

To my Thesis advisor, Mari, and DSI chair, Miya, words fail to express my gratitude for your guidance. Like the North Star in a voyager's dark night, you provided direction when I felt lost and uncertain. Your wisdom and patience, your belief in my abilities, and your unwavering support helped me navigate the tumultuous sea of doubts and fears.

To my larger DSI family and friends, your steadfast support and encouragement were my bulwarks during this journey. Your faith in me and my work, your understanding during my times of stress, and your joy in my moments of triumph have been invaluable.

And to my family, your unwavering love has been my foundation. Even though we're separated by an ocean, you're always there on the other end of the phone, consistently offering care, encouragement. Your comforting words when I doubted myself, and your celebrations of my smallest victories have given me strength and inspiration. You've shown me that no accomplishment is too small to be celebrated, and no challenge is too big to be overcome. Your trust and support have been the driving forces behind my resolve.

All of you have empowered me in ways that words can scarcely capture. I am immeasurably grateful for your love and support along the way.

The journey has reinforced the belief that age does not diminish our capacity to connect, learn, and contribute. Let us continue to empower and be empowered, to live life in our city as we desire.

Social innovation doesn't necessarily require grand gestures; even the smallest efforts can make a significant difference in people's lives.

Thank you for being a part of this journey, for lending your strength, wisdom, and love, and for believing in the power of small beginnings. Let's continue to empower and be empowered in the city, living life as we desire.

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A stylized, light-colored map of a city grid on a dark background. The map shows a complex network of streets and blocks, with some areas appearing more densely packed than others. The lines are thin and white, creating a high-contrast pattern against the dark background.

/ Design for Social Innovation