Confucius Institute holds Chinese Culture and Language Summer Camp at SDSU-IV

By ROMAN FLORES, Staff Writer

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CALEXICO — Black ink and calculated brush strokes helped a class of school-aged children paint people and numbers at the San Diego State University-Imperial Valley campus here Wednesday.

The 15 students learned to hold their brushes correctly during the calligraphy activity and how to write numbers and simple words in Chinese characters. This was part of the two-week Chinese culture and language summer camp that SDSU-IV is holding through today.

In this program, students from all over the Imperial Valley interested in the Chinese culture participate in language learning together with different activities, including bean bag and ping-pong games as well as traditional Chinese music, professor Wendy Huang, said.

“It is our mission to help people interested in the Chinese culture to learn about it, not just the language,” Huang said. “The Chinese culture is pretty rich so we want to bring that to them. They’re really showing interest,” she said of her students.

This summer program stems from the Confucius Institute, which is a partnership with the Han Ban, or the Chinese educational system, in order “to provide resources for the community to enhance students’ education in order to have that little competitive advantage of knowing another language and learn cultural sensitivity,” said Miriam Castañon, international program coordinator at SDSU-IV.

“Our kids are already bilingual but being bilingual isn’t enough anymore,” Castañon said, stating that the job market is becoming more and more competitive than in years past.

“Chinese is the second most-widely spoken language in the world,” she stated. “Rarely do we have something this interesting in the Valley for free,” she said.

The program, both Castañon and Huang said, seems to be keeping the students’ interest.

“I like the language,” 13-year-old Calexico resident Daniel Phan said. “I want to learn as many languages as I can. I know English and Spanish and I want to learn Chinese, too, so it will help me get into college,” he said.

“The program is good because it teaches young people Chinese history and culture,” Phan’s classmate, 12-year-old Zachary Tam of Calexico, said. “It’s interesting how they first learned to write,” he said.

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Wendy Huang demonstrates how to use a brush to make Chinese characters during camp Wednesday. Huang is professor of Chinese language at the Confucius Institute at San Diego State University-Imperial Valley campus.