

# The ACIE Newsletter

News from the American Council on Immersion Education

SPECIAL ISSUE: MANDARIN IMMERSION

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## Amazing Grace: A Parent Reflects on Her Daughter's Kindergarten Year in Chinese Immersion

by Joan Brzezinski, Acting Director, Confucius Institute, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN

**M**y husband and I came to the decision to enroll our daughter in Yinghua Academy's Chinese Immersion education program gradually, over a period of about a year. As we began to think of the kindergarten options for Grace, we realized that we wanted something beyond the basic public school kindergarten experience for her, and we explored magnet programs and others. Initially, both of us were intrigued and excited by immersion education, my husband more so than I. He believed that this would be a great opportunity for Grace and encouraged me to give it more thought. Although I found immersion education to be an interesting model, I was concerned that somehow it would delay the children's grasp of basic concepts, and I had my doubts about the viability and accountability of a charter school.

### WHY CHINESE IMMERSION?

In the next several months, I began to read more about immersion education and ask questions of university faculty, families who had children enrolled in immersion programs, and also people working with charter schools and the state's Chinese language initiative at the Minnesota Department of Education. I



Grace, the author's daughter, center, and her classmates learn about Chinese characters from their kindergarten teacher.

questioned anyone who was patient enough to answer my many questions about immersion education, charter schools and Yinghua Academy in particular.

We visited Yinghua Academy on several occasions. We were greatly surprised by our daughter's engagement in the activities and were encouraged by her interest in the school. On one visit, she observed a classroom of older children playing a "Simon Says" type of game in Chinese. When the teacher asked who wanted to be the leader for the next round, Grace stepped forward without really understanding what was being asked of her.

Amazing Grace, continued on page 14

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**THE ACIE  
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**T**he Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) recently updated the Directory of Foreign Language Immersion Programs that it has maintained for over twenty-five years (see The Bridge: From Research to Practice insert *Foreign Language Immersion Programs: Features and Trends Over Thirty-Five Years* in the February 2007 newsletter). As we prepared for this special issue on Mandarin immersion, I was curious to see how many Mandarin immersion programs exist in the U.S. and was surprised to find that only twelve programs in six states showed up in the directory. To be fair, the directory can only be updated by schools that self-report, so I knew CAL was going to have a hard time keeping up with the growth trend if the Minnesota experience is any indication of nationwide interest in Mandarin-medium education. Although the database mentions only one Mandarin program in Minnesota, a charter school that opened in St. Paul in 2006, four more schools in two suburban school districts and one in greater Minnesota opened in 2007 and two of Minnesota's Spanish immersion programs are now offering Mandarin as a third language. What extraordinary growth in just three years!

In this special issue we offer several important perspectives on this phenomenon. First, the parent point of view: how and why do parents choose Mandarin immersion for their children? Unlike cognate languages, such as Spanish or French, with which parents may be familiar, Mandarin offers few clues to English-speaking parents who hope to ease their children into a language immersion school. Our cover story chronicles the yet unfinished first year of our author's exploration of those questions and the family's surprising, and not so surprising, emotions about the decision to enroll in a Mandarin immersion school.

Our teacher perspective is featured in the *Bridge* insert. A Mandarin immersion kindergarten teacher wanted to maximize her role as a language model while creating opportunities for her students to communicate authentically in their new language. Read her

account of the action research project that helped her do just that.

Next: the curriculum perspective. What if your school already successfully educates in a more commonly taught language, but you want to add a third language experience? What does the research say about L3 instruction? What language do you select? In *First Spanish, then Chinese*, you can follow the development of Lakes International Language Academy's Mandarin program. They've been preparing for this day (hence the name language academy rather than Spanish immersion school) before the Spanish immersion Kindergarten even opened its doors.

The principal viewpoint is examined in our *Reflections on Administering an Elementary School Mandarin Immersion Program*, a reprint from the Asia Society's online newsletter that supports their Chinese Language in the Schools initiative.

And, finally, even as demand for Mandarin language instruction grows in the U.S., native speakers of Mandarin in China look to English immersion to provide their children with the same economic advantages and world view that English-speaking parents are hoping Mandarin will offer their children. The English immersion classes in the PRC are big by North American standards - 40 to 50 students per class - but the goals are similar. *An experiment with early immersion in China* helps us understand the challenges Chinese educators face as they develop curriculum, train teachers, and cultivate parent support.

Opportunities to learn more about immersion education abound this year from the highly successful CARLA summer institutes (see page 10) to the third international immersion conference coming up in October (more about that on the next page). If you would like to visit a Mandarin immersion school, consider coming to St. Paul for the school visits which include Yinghua Academy - the school featured in our cover story.

We hope to see many of you at one or the other, or even both.

— Kimerly Miller, Editor



## Immersion Education : Pathways to Bilingualism and Beyond

THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON IMMERSION EDUCATION

*October 16-18, 2008*

*Crowne Plaza Riverfront  
Saint Paul, Minnesota*

IMMERSION STUDENT LANGUAGE USE ACROSS PROGRAM CONTEXTS

INVENTED SPELLING IN FRENCH IMMERSION

CREATING NEW WORDS FOR EFFECTIVE INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE MEDIUM EDUCATION

DEVELOPING A K-12 SPANISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

**T**his is just a sampling of the topics that will be presented and discussed at the third international immersion conference, *Pathways to Bilingualism and Beyond*, to be held in St. Paul, MN, from October 16-18, 2008. The call for proposals is closed and the conference committee is reviewing over 120 submissions that came in from the USA, Canada, the UK, Thailand, Taiwan, China, Japan, Finland, Mexico, New Zealand, Ireland, Brazil, Belgium, and Indonesia - a truly global representation. Presentations will include 1-hour paper sessions and discussion sessions and 2-hour research symposia in addition to 1-hour follow-up sessions with our plenary speakers.

The speakers, Fred Genesee, Philip Hoare, Kauano'e Kamana, Roy Lyster, Mimi Met, and William (Pila) Wilson will address issues relevant to the four conference themes: Immersion Pedagogy, Culture and Identity,

Policy and Advocacy, and Program Design and Evaluation.

On the conference website, [www.carla.umn.edu/conferences/immersion2008](http://www.carla.umn.edu/conferences/immersion2008), you will find further details on plenary speakers (bios and abstracts of their talks), discussions of conference themes, and information on the following features of the conference:

- ◆ Wednesday (October 15) site visits to one of five different immersion schools in the Twin Cities metropolitan area;
- ◆ 16 pre-conference workshops held on Thursday (October 16) at the conference hotel;
- ◆ registration fees and online forms;
- ◆ hotel accommodations, a reservation link, and things to do in St. Paul.

Sometime later in the summer, the full conference schedule will be available, but register now to benefit from discounts and to reserve places in workshops and school visits.

### OTHER CONFERENCES/ PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*Dual U Training Institute  
June 16-20, 2008  
Santa Fe, New Mexico*

*A 4-day dual language training intended for administrators, teachers, parents, and school board members. The Institute will be led by a team from the Illinois Resource Center with the participation of Else Hamayan, Fred Genesee, and Nancy Cloud, the authors of Dual Language Instruction: A Handbook for Enriched Education. The Dual U Training Institute will provide novices with an introduction to dual language education; more experienced participants will delve deeper into dual language issues and gain the expertise to use the curriculum as a professional development tool.*

*Download a registration form at [www.thecenterweb.org/irc/pdf/dualu-sum08.pdf](http://www.thecenterweb.org/irc/pdf/dualu-sum08.pdf)*

*The registration deadline is June 1, 2008.*

*La Cosecha*

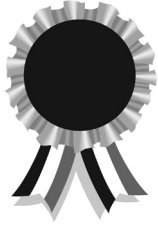
*13th Annual Dual Language Conference*

*November 12-15, 2008  
Santa Fe, New Mexico  
Santa Fe Convention Center.*

*To learn more:  
<http://lacosecha.dlenm.org>*

THE IMMERSION CONFERENCE WEBSITE IS READY FOR VIEWING:

[www.carla.umn.edu/conferences/immersion2008](http://www.carla.umn.edu/conferences/immersion2008)



## BEST PRACTICES

*In-service immersion teachers frequently explore new ideas for teaching and learning in the classroom. Sharing ideas that work is the emphasis of this regular feature, Best Practices.*

*In this section, teachers can read about tried and true, practical instructional techniques that immersion colleagues might also adopt for their classrooms.*



*Tracy Nelson-Maurer can be reached at [tracymaurer@hotmail.com](mailto:tracymaurer@hotmail.com).*

## First Spanish, Then Chinese: Expanding Elementary Language Learning Opportunities

*By Tracy Nelson-Maurer, Board Member, Lakes International Language Academy, Forest Lake, MN*

**F**ounders of Lakes International Language Academy (LILA) in Forest Lake, Minnesota, intentionally chose a name that embraces teaching more than one foreign language and reflects a mission to prepare students for global citizenship. This public charter elementary school opened in 2004 with a Spanish immersion curriculum based on the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) Primary Years Programme (PYP). In LILA's first year, the school welcomed 177 students in grades K-4. Fifth and sixth grades followed in the respective school years. Currently, the K-6 school serves 450 students and has a projected capacity enrollment of 600. Sustained enrollment growth combined with an expressed community interest in Chinese (proven when LILA offered a highly successful after-school for-fee Chinese program that generated a waiting list) positioned the school to begin its expansion into Mandarin Chinese as a third language (L3) in June 2007.

### RESEARCHING A THIRD LANGUAGE

The choice of Mandarin Chinese was based on research and national and local need for the language's instruction. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Chinese is the third most commonly spoken language in the United States after English and Spanish. The U.S. Department of Education (USDE) has identified a need for schools to produce

competent foreign language speakers for domestic reasons, such as emergency response, health care services, educational settings, etc., and also for reasons related to heightened national security and international diplomacy. In 2007, the USDE recognized LILA's potential for educating students in Spanish and Chinese, a critical-need language, by awarding the school with the largest-ever Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP) grant—more than \$800,000 dispersed over three years.

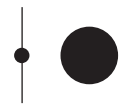


*LILA Spanish immersion students sing about their animal sign in their third language, Mandarin Chinese.*

In addition to meeting a national critical-language need, LILA's program fills a need on the local level. No local community education resources exist for Chinese instruction near Forest Lake. Only one newly opened Chinese immersion school operates in the entire metropolitan area, Yinghua Academy elementary charter school in St. Paul.<sup>1</sup>

Minnesota's Governor Tim Pawlenty has worked with the Minnesota Department of Education, which is LILA's charter sponsor, to develop initiatives focused on supporting Chinese language instruction in Minnesota's





schools. The Minnesota Department of Education is working with its peers in Chinese schools to develop language instruction resources, develop exchanges, and learn about Chinese language pedagogy. In addition, in 2006, LILA *Coordinadora de estudios infantiles* Shannon Peterson joined a network of educators, Mandarin Chinese speakers, business owners, and other interested partners to develop recommendations for a Mandarin Chinese curriculum. Results from the project were presented to the Minnesota legislature in February 2007.

### BILINGUAL STUDENTS TAKE ON L3

In preparation for its L3 expansion, LILA administration and staff reviewed the Minnesota report and other research results, including several empirical studies showing that prior second language experience has a positive effect on L3 acquisition in bilingual contexts (e.g., Cenoz & Valencia, 1994; Sanz, 2000; Swain, Lapkin, Rowen, & Hart, 1990). LILA leaders also found studies showing “level of bilingualism” as a variable closely related to level of proficiency in a third language (Cenoz, 2001; Lasagabaster, 2000; Muñoz, 2000; Sagasta, 2003). However, existing research on the effects of third language learning after acquiring second language skills is admittedly sparse and we continue to monitor the work of language education experts at the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) and individuals abroad such as Ulrike Jessner at the University of Innsbruck, Austria.<sup>2</sup>

Using available data, LILA’s board of directors and its staff concluded in 2006 that embracing a third language such as Mandarin Chinese would strengthen the school’s mission to produce global citizens, reinforce its commitment to educational innovation, and complement its goal of offering a rigorous academic curriculum. As part of its mission to value its teachers and to become an employer of choice, LILA emphasizes professional skill development opportunities in cooperation

with the Minnesota Department of Education and CARLA. In December 2007, LILA announced that Yuping Liu had accepted the school’s first Chinese teaching position. By the second trimester of 2007-08, Ms. Liu had introduced Mandarin Chinese as a specialist subject for all grades, K-6. She also will implement a Chinese enrichment program for students from grades 1-6 who have been identified as needing additional learning challenges.

As part of its mission, LILA holds its students to a high standard in traditional elementary subjects and a high level of proficiency in both spoken and written Spanish. This will extend to Mandarin Chinese. LILA already administers Student Oral Proficiency Assessment (SOPA) testing at the spring trimester for grades K, 2 and 5 in Spanish and will introduce Mandarin Chinese testing in spring 2010 for grade 2 students participating in the sequential Mandarin Chinese program (assuming kindergarten entrance to the program). LILA has used FLAP funds to train additional SOPA assessors and support SOPA results analysis. FLAP funds have also been slated for acquiring teaching materials and resources in Chinese or for Chinese cultural study, including library books and computer programs.

LILA expects that the addition of Mandarin Chinese to its successful Spanish immersion program will fortify its mission and help build multicultural appreciation, just when Minnesota—and the United States—need it most. ○

### ENDNOTES

1. Since LILA did its research on opportunities for learning Chinese at the elementary level in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, four new immersion schools have opened up with Mandarin as the language of instruction.
2. Ulrike Jessner is among the leading researchers studying multilingualism, specifically third-language acquisition.

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- References for Expanding Elementary Language Learning, continued on page 8*



## SCHOOL PROFILE

*There has been dramatic growth in the number of immersion programs during the last decade. More and more communities have chosen to support this educational option, whose benefits to students are well documented. In this feature we spotlight immersion schools and explore factors that make each one unique.*

## *An Experiment with Early Immersion in China*

*by Stella Kong, Assistant Professor, Hong Kong Institute of Education*

**X**i Dian Experimental Primary School in Xi'an, China, began its immersion program in September 2005 with two immersion classes at Grade 1 when it joined the China-Canada-USA Collaborative English Immersion Project (CCUCEI). The 2007-08 academic year is the third year the school is offering an immersion program, with a total of eight immersion classes, three at Grade 1, three at Grade 2 and two at Grade 3. There are a total of five classes in each grade level at the school. The school has a history of over thirty-five years but its immersion program is relatively 'young'. The school community, including the school management, teachers, students and parents, is very enthusiastic and positive about the program. The school is hoping to offer the immersion program up to Grade 6 by 2010 for more than 800 students.

The CCUCEI project started in Xi'an in 1997 in a few kindergartens and has now expanded to include about 20 kindergartens, 17 primary schools and 4 middle schools in Xi'an as well as to other cities in China (see article by Philip Hoare in The ACIE Newsletter, 2007 February issue for more project details). In recent years in China competition between schools has increased greatly. Before immersion was introduced, Xi Dian Experimental Primary

School had to go to the suburban areas around Xi'an to find enough students for Grade 1 classes. With the introduction of the immersion curriculum, thousands and thousands of parents are lining up outside the school every April-May to register their children for the screening tests.

## PROGRAM AIMS

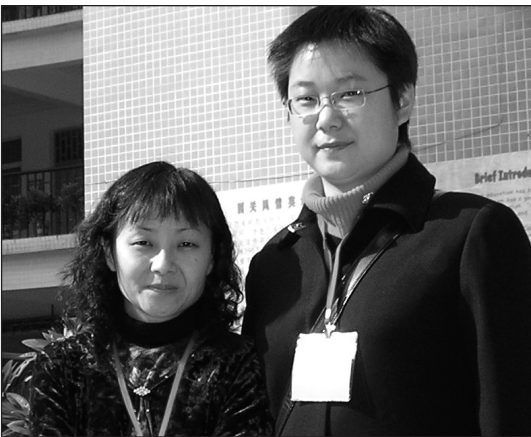
The massive demand for English in the midst of the rapid social, economic and political development in Mainland China has led many schools to provide more and better English. Recognizing that the English language curriculum focuses too much on learning linguistic knowledge, the CCUCEI project aims to provide students in schools with a language learning experience that will help them *use* English, especially spoken English, in authentic contexts. Xi Dian Experimental Primary School joined the project with this aim in mind.

At the same time, the school hopes to broaden teachers' and students' horizons, enhance the professional standards of the teachers involved, and enrich curriculum resources of the school. The school sees immersion as a challenge to every sector in the school and an opportunity for the school to grow and develop through implementing a curriculum initiative.

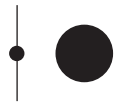
## PROGRAM FEATURES AND KEY INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

The school currently offers partial immersion in three subjects: science, moral education and integrated English where English is used to teach subjects such as music, art, and physical education (as opposed to standard English classes where the subject taught is the English language). Students' first language, Chinese, and Chinese literacy are taught from Grade 1 when the immersion program starts.

As immersion is a very new approach in China, teachers have few models to follow and have to experiment with classroom teaching techniques within the immersion framework. These are sometimes very different from those employed in 'standard' English classes.



*Stella Kong, seen here, left, with Li Mingming from the Xi Dian Experimental Primary School, can be reached at [stella@ied.edu.hk](mailto:stella@ied.edu.hk).*



*Li Mingming, a teacher at Xi Dian School, teaches a Grade 3 science class in her English immersion classroom.*

Students are expected to use only English in immersion lessons as they go higher up the grade levels though some Chinese is accepted. The focus is on the use of spoken English, with content used mainly as a tool to facilitate use of English. Motivation is high and this is a key aspect of the program's success. Teachers never discourage students from trying out the new language and mistakes are accepted as part of the learning process. All students' work, not just the very best, is displayed around the classrooms to encourage and motivate students. Strong motivation among students leads to high response levels and when the teacher asks a question, most students are keen to try to answer. During group or pair work, students turn immediately to the task, using the target language. While these more student-centered activities may be everyday occurrences in Western schools, they are not common in mainstream English lessons in China. Management of these activities is not easy in a large class but they are seen as important features of the program.

#### **ASSESSMENT PRACTICES**

As immersion is still a very new approach in the school and indeed in China, there

is no standardized language test available. There is, however, recognition that formative assessment is more helpful to students' language development than summative evaluation. Students are given some English homework to do every week and this is viewed as one way to monitor their learning. Every month, students are also given a self-assessment

form in which they or their parents have to report on how well they have been learning English, whether they have been working collaboratively with a partner, what problems they have encountered, and so on.

#### **PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

The parents are very supportive and have high expectations for the level of English their children can develop through participation in the program. Much of the impetus for the adoption of the program came from pressure from parents. The school sees their cooperation and support as an important factor in its success. Regular meetings are held with parents to help them better understand the program so that they can more appropriately support their children's learning. Teachers welcome feedback from parents to more clearly understand how their students are progressing and how they are feeling about their learning. Every semester, there is an open class day when parents are invited to come to observe their child's immersion lessons. In these lessons, the teacher will try to involve parents, for example, by having students write a card to send their love to their parents.

#### **SCHOOL INFORMATION**

*Xi Dian Experimental Primary School*

- ♦ *Target language: English*
- ♦ *Location: Xi'an, Shannxi Province, PRC*
- ♦ *Type of program: one-way early partial immersion*

#### **DISTRICT**

- ♦ *Urban*
- ♦ *Size of district: 1980 primary schools in Xi'an*
- ♦ *Number of immersion programs in district: 17*

#### **HISTORY**

- ♦ *Year program began: 2005*
- ♦ *Grade levels currently taught: Grades 1-3*
- ♦ *Program goals: To raise students' English proficiency level*

#### **ADMISSION PROCESS**

*Students are screened in Chinese, English and mathematics to ensure that they can learn through English but not at the expense of learning in other subjects.*

#### **STUDENT POPULATION**

- ♦ *Whole school: 1247 students*
- ♦ *Immersion classes: 379 students*
- ♦ *Average class size: 45-50 (same as non-immersion classes)*
- ♦ *All native Chinese speakers*

#### **STAFF/TEACHER POPULATION**

- ♦ *Total teaching staff: 74*
- ♦ *Immersion staff: 7 teachers for 8 immersion classes*
- ♦ *All Chinese native speakers*
- ♦ *Staff-student ratio is 1:16.9*



## THE BRIDGE

Educational research is vital to validating effective practices, challenging ineffective ones, and encouraging innovations. Yet research is only valuable if teachers read and implement findings in their classrooms.

The Bridge feature is included as an insert to encourage teachers to collect them for future reference. We hope this pull-out insert will help immersion educators stay abreast of the latest research and allow it, when applicable, to affect their own practice.



Author Jing-Tyng Shyu

Jing-Tyng (Teresa) Shyu received her Masters of Elementary Education with a concentration in Early Childhood Education from San Francisco State University. She has been teaching as a kindergarten Chinese immersion educator for the past two years at the Chinese American International School in San Francisco, California.

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## Early Immersion in China, *continued from page 7*

### TEACHER TRAINING

A key success to any new curriculum initiative is teacher training. The CCUCEI project helps a lot in this respect. The project team organizes regular meetings with the immersion teachers in all the primary schools participating in the project. Every two weeks a member of the project team visits an immersion class in one school to observe a lesson and to discuss the lesson with the teacher. One teacher from each participating school is also expected to join the observation and discussion.

The school provides a great deal of support to the immersion teachers. All immersion teachers are free of classes each Thursday afternoon. This provides them with a common timeslot to meet and discuss teaching issues and strategies. This also allows them to participate in the regular observation schedule across schools. Teachers are encouraged and subsidized to attend any relevant teacher training workshops. The immersion teachers also receive a monthly personal bonus from the school as acknowledgement and encouragement of their efforts. The school holds at least two planning and evaluation meetings each semester with all immersion teachers to evaluate the success of the program and to set directions for future development.

### ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE AND CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

The school is currently very proud of the students' English, especially spoken English. They feel that the oral English proficiency of students in the immersion classes is clearly a lot better than that of students in mainstream classes. There is a particular contrast between the immersion students' confidence and willingness to use English with one another and the non-immersion students' reluctance to talk. Immersion students even seek



*The School Management and the Immersion Teaching Team at Xi Dian.*

opportunities to use English outside class and are not afraid of speaking in English to foreigners. When foreign visitors involved in the CCUCEI project visit the school, some students will seize the opportunity and approach them to talk, feeling justifiably proud of themselves for being able to do so.

The school feels strongly that the teachers have benefited greatly from their involvement in the immersion project. The school management also feels that their own management skills have been enhanced through having to consistently work out ways to overcome problems in implementing an extremely innovative curriculum in the context of China, where curriculum innovation has only recently been encouraged. Nonetheless, the school is aware of the challenges yet to come as the program moves into the upper grade levels. The content will become an increasing challenge to specialist English teachers who, while best equipped to teach the immersion classes because of their language skills and professional training, are not trained to teach subject content. This means that teacher development will continue to be a focus. It is expected that the immersion program will continue to grow to Grade 6 with a total of 18 immersion classes, three at each grade level. This is sure to make recruitment of qualified teachers a considerable challenge. ○

### NOTE FROM THE EDITORIAL STAFF

*As currently implemented, immersion programs in the People's Republic of China do not adhere to a number of core characteristics of immersion education in North America. Nevertheless, we believe the ACIE readership will find it interesting to learn how this program model is presently evolving in China.*

MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF IMMERSION EDUCATION “HOW WELL DO STUDENTS SPEAK THE IMMERSION LANGUAGE?”

Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA)

University of Minnesota  
Minneapolis, MN

July 14–18, 2008

Register at [www.carla.umn.edu/institutes](http://www.carla.umn.edu/institutes)

Increasingly, immersion educators are looking for ways to assess target language development within and across program models, immersion languages, and grade levels. At this institute, participants will learn about a range of oral language proficiency assessment tools available for K-8 immersion programs. Emphasis will be placed on the administration and rating of three valid and developmentally appropriate instruments developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics.

**Presenters**

Tara Fortune, Ph.D., is the immersion projects coordinator for CARLA and has been involved in program-wide language proficiency assessment of immersion students.

Lynn Thompson is an assessment specialist with the Center for Applied Linguistics where she is involved in assessment material development.

# Immersion 101 for Chinese and Japanese: An Introduction to Immersion Teaching

2008 CARLA SUMMER INSTITUTE FOR IMMERSION EDUCATORS OF CHARACTER-BASED LANGUAGES

JUNE 23-27, 2008

**A** must for new Chinese or Japanese immersion teachers and administrators, this institute provides a research-based introduction to the challenges, options, and issues in the unique world of immersion education (K-12). Targeted institute participants include one-way (foreign language) and two-way immersion educators who teach subject matter through Chinese or Japanese for 50 to 100% of the school day and promote continued development of English (amount of instructional time in English varies by grade level). On the first two days, the focus will be on issues of interest to new immersion teachers and administrators. Administrators and district personnel will have an opportunity to identify key issues in immersion program design and implementation for character-based languages and discuss strategies for meeting those



2007 Immersion 101 participants listen to a colleague.

challenges with an experienced immersion administrator. During the following three days, novice teacher participants will be introduced to effective practices that inform language and literacy-attentive curriculum development and instruction with non-cognate, character-based languages whose writing system differs from English.

“ I learned how ... English speaking people recognize Chinese characters [so] I can create some activities related to radicals in learning centers. ”

-Immersion 101 participant

**PRESENTERS**

- ♦ Tara Fortune, Ph.D., is the immersion projects coordinator at CARLA. She facilitates professional development of immersion educators and oversees research initiatives in immersion.
- ♦ Michael Bacon is the immersion coordinator for Portland Public Schools. He is a former Japanese immersion teacher and member of the Chinese K-16 Pipeline Project.
- ♦ Molly Wieland, Ph.D., world language curriculum coordinator for Hopkins Public Schools, has been instrumental in developing and implementing the XinXing Mandarin Immersion Program in Hopkins, Minnesota.

“ [I liked] talking with immersion teachers and immersion experts and learning from their experiences. ”

-Immersion 101 participant

LIMITED SPACES LEFT! REGISTER AT [WWW.CARLA.UMN.EDU/INSTITUTES](http://WWW.CARLA.UMN.EDU/INSTITUTES)

Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) • University of Minnesota • Minneapolis, MN



# Reflections on Administering an Elementary School Mandarin Immersion Program

By Mary Patterson, Principal, Woodstock Elementary School, Portland, OR

The ACIE Editorial Staff thank the Asia Society for giving us permission to reprint this edited version of an article that originally appeared in its online newsletter for Chinese Language in the Schools (see sidebar on page 13).

Acting as the principal of Woodstock Elementary School, in Portland, Oregon these past four years has been an incredible journey and privilege. On a daily basis I have the unique opportunity to work with my teacher colleagues offering a Mandarin language immersion program to students in kindergarten through fifth grade within a public school setting. Woodstock is one of five schools within the Portland Public Schools District (PPS) that offers Mandarin language instruction and is part of the Oregon Chinese K-16 Flagship Program. We strongly believe that if we truly want to prepare our children to function successfully in a global society, it is imperative that we provide them with the opportunity to learn a second language at an early age.

The Mandarin immersion program began in 1998 with the support of the PPS School Board. It was placed at Woodstock Elementary because the building had available space. It began with a blended kindergarten/first grade class. Additional classes were added as these first students moved forward through each grade. When I joined the program four years ago, our first group of students was moving on to the middle school level. Currently the program extends through grade 9 at Cleveland High School, with plans that it will continue through grade 12. In order to provide a sufficient foundation for the middle and high school programs we expanded this past fall to include an additional kindergarten class. Our goal is to offer two classes of Mandarin at each grade level K-5 by the 2010-2011 school year.

## TWO SCHOOLS IN ONE

Administering a program of this type is highly rewarding and equally challenging. Issues related to building a cohesive school climate, selecting and supervising school staff and articulation of the curriculum are often strongly influenced by cultural differences, and district and state requirements.

There are approximately 375 students currently enrolled in the school. Of these students 230 are enrolled in the Mandarin program. Families who wish to enroll their child in the traditional neighborhood, or English, program may simply register at the school office. Any family who wishes to enroll their child in the Mandarin program must apply through a district lottery system. As the administrator of the school, I have had the task of setting up building procedures to handle separate registration processes for both programs.

Placing a special focus program into an existing neighborhood school can easily create tensions between the two communities. At Woodstock we have always believed in operating as one learning community. The immersion program is fully integrated within the traditional neighborhood school and I intentionally take a number of steps to reinforce this.

I begin with the language I use when talking to students, parents or community members about our school. I refer to the traditional program as the English rather than neighborhood program. In this way I set the focus on two languages, rather than on two separate programs.



IMMERSION 101

*If we peel back the layers that currently envelop immersion schools, what might we find at the core?*

*In this column we will share with readers basic principles behind successful immersion programs, and show how challenges have been met at the classroom, school and district level.*

**CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE:  
MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

<http://confucius.msu.edu/resources.htm>

*The Confucius Institute at Michigan State University has a list of online Chinese resources. Topics include podcasts, blogs, pronunciation and characters, culture and society, Confucius, and interactive tools.*

**CHINESE LEARNING  
OBJECTS: LEARN TO READ  
CHINESE**

[http://www.nflc.org/projects/current\\_projects/used\\_chinese\\_lo](http://www.nflc.org/projects/current_projects/used_chinese_lo)

*A state-of-the-art website developed by the University of Maryland's National Foreign Language Center is now live online to help teach high school students to read Chinese and to provide essential classroom support for teachers.*

## *Reflections, continued from page 11*

Another step is to mix the students in both programs together for academic and enrichment classes. Since we offer a 50-50 immersion model the Mandarin students spend half their day learning to speak, read and write in that language. Math and science instruction are integrated into that portion of the day as well. When they shift at mid-day to their English classes, the grade level cohort is split in half. With a cohort of thirty first-grade Mandarin students, for example, fifteen would join one English class at mid-day and the other fifteen would join a second English class at the same grade level. During the second half of the day they would work with their English peers developing their English literacy skills and receiving social studies instruction. We believe that this model has had a very positive impact on the overall climate of the building.

In addition, we use the arts and school assemblies to reinforce the concept that we are one learning community. Student-created murals grace two separate walls in our building. Each depicts images of both Western and Eastern cultures engaged in joint activities. At weekly school assemblies we focus on school-wide behavioral expectations, celebrate student achievement and recognize students who have successfully taken on leadership roles. Both of these steps strongly promote a sense of community within our school.

### **PARENT GROUPS COLLABORATE**

Helping to establish open and collaborative communication between the parent groups for both programs is equally vital

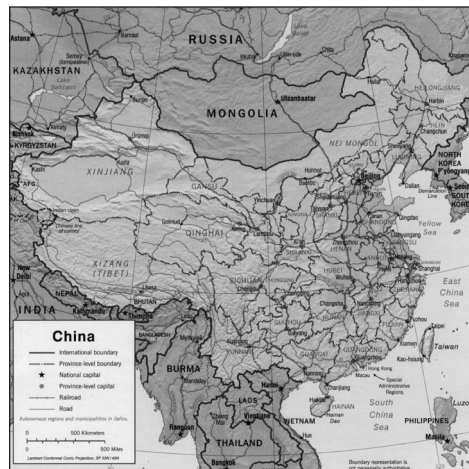
to maintaining a strong, cohesive school climate. At Woodstock, we have a strong Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and a very dynamic parent support group for the Mandarin program called Shu Ren. I invite the chairpersons from both groups to meet with me jointly to collaborate on fundraising activities and to coordinate school events offered individually or cosponsored by both groups. Our Site Council has one elected parent representative from the English program and one from the Mandarin program.

In this way parents from both programs have an equal voice in the development and implementation of our School Improvement Plan. Parents with children in both programs often have questions about the allocation of available funds and materials, classroom configurations, teacher expectations and a

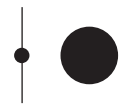
myriad of other issues. Creating opportunities for this type of collaboration greatly assists me when considering innovative suggestions offered by our families, and in addressing their concerns.

### **WORKING WITH A BICULTURAL STAFF**

Another realm of responsibilities for the principal is the selection and supervision of teachers. This presents unique challenges when seeking new teachers for our Mandarin program. It is very difficult to find teachers who are bilingual and biliterate in the simplified Chinese character system, as well as trained and experienced in implementing American instructional practices. We have worked hard with our local universities and







with the Oregon Teachers Standards and Practices Commission to address licensing issues for these teachers. If we are serious about providing our students with a comprehensive education that will prepare them to live and work in a global society, it is vital that our college and university teacher preparation programs begin to address this need aggressively.

Working with our staff has greatly increased my personal appreciation and awareness of cultural differences. I have learned that my Chinese teachers have very different expectations for me as an administrator than do their counterparts in the English program. While the English teachers want and expect to have a high degree of collaboration and a voice in decision-making, the Chinese teachers generally expect a more hierarchical approach. Differences in philosophy about student motivation, discipline and instructional practices can also be quite distinct. I have learned that I need to be sensitive to these differences both in my interactions with the staff and in my work with the parents. It is important to create opportunities for teachers in both programs to meet together in grade level and across grade level teams to discuss these issues. Targeted staff development must also be provided.

### CURRICULUM CHALLENGES

In addition to school climate and staffing issues, I also deal with a myriad of decisions related to the curriculum associated with the Mandarin program. When our program began the teachers used our district and state standards to identify the academic content that must be covered at each grade level and then

determined which areas would be presented during the English versus the Mandarin

parts of the day. In this way we have integrated math and science instruction into the Mandarin program. Over time we have adapted the curriculum and instruction based on student achievement data at each grade level.

We are currently in the process of refining our Mandarin language curriculum framework by attempting to address a number of questions that include the following: What are the language forms and functions that will be taught at each grade level? What is the related vocabulary? How will this be articulated across the grade levels? As this framework develops fully it will become important to work closely with the teachers as they utilize the curriculum and make adjustments to their instruction.

Acting as principal of Woodstock Elementary is perhaps the most rewarding professional experience I've ever had. It gives me great hope as I watch our students becoming bilingual and biliterate in Mandarin. As China's influence on our global society increases, opportunities for economic, political and environmental partnerships between our two countries multiply. My hope is that we are providing our students with the skills and cultural sensitivity to engage actively in those opportunities. ○



*An index of Chinese characters for downloading can be found at <http://chineseculture.about.com/library/symbol/blcc.htm>.*



*The Asia Society's website for Chinese language education, [AskAsia.org/chinese](http://AskAsia.org/chinese), has an abundance of information for Chinese immersion educators. You will find timely information about conferences the Asia Society organizes, a handbook for starting a Chinese language program in your school district, resources for new and veteran teachers of Chinese, a directory of Chinese language programs in the U.S. and much more.*

*The American Council on Immersion Education Newsletter's editorial staff would like to thank the Asia Society for permission to reprint the article, "Reflections on Administering an Elementary School Mandarin Immersion Program" which was originally published in an electronic newsletter dated July/August 2007: <http://askasia.org/chinese/announcements/newsletter0707.htm>. Other articles about Mandarin immersion include an introduction to immersion education by Tara Fortune from CARLA, an immersion student voice, and an immersion parent's reflection on Mandarin-medium education.*

*You can subscribe to the newsletter or peruse past issues by clicking on the newsletter link on the homepage of [askasia.org/chinese](http://askasia.org/chinese).*



## POINTS FOR PARENTS

Parents often are looking for a place to access ideas about how to support their children's education. Immersion parents who may not be fluent in the language their child is learning at school have many questions.

In this regular feature, we offer concrete suggestions for extracurricular support of language learning. In addition, we address specific parent concerns and invite parents to share their experience and expertise.



Joan Brzezinski can be reached at [brzez001@umn.edu](mailto:brzez001@umn.edu).

## Amazing Grace, continued from page 1

Her comfort level in the classroom and the extra time the teacher took to make sure all the students were engaged were very important to us.

Although we knew that Grace could study a foreign language at any point in her life, we felt we only had one opportunity to give her an immersion education experience, a solid base in a foreign language that will shape her world view and challenge her to think differently than her peers.

### WHAT A YEAR IT HAS BEEN!

#### *Initial Excitement*

The first week of school was thrilling for Grace. She was at a new school with a new teacher and many new classmates. She was very excited to become a kindergartener and be in a “big” school. She was so busy with the new experience; I don’t know that she fully understood the emphasis on learning through Chinese. As the early weeks progressed, she enjoyed learning the school songs, singing the first word or two and then mumbling through the rest of the song. She easily learned to count numbers from one to ten out loud and was already doing her weekly numbers homework in Chinese. Yet she would often come home from school exhausted and frustrated by her long day. The teacher was so focused on the academic content that many of the students didn’t feel that they had made any friends. The principal then conducted a few short units on making friends for the class to help break the ice.

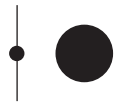
#### *From Excitement to Frustration*

Toward the end of the first month, Grace’s frustration with learning the new language and the constant drive to understand what was being said to her began to take its toll. She expressed that she did not want to go to school anymore and did not look forward to

her day. Grace often visited the principal’s office to discuss issues she was having with other students. At first we thought perhaps she was experiencing behavioral problems, but we realized that her acting out was brought on by her general frustration with the classroom. Limited to speaking only Chinese, the teacher was not able to help her resolve her problems in the classroom and she was then referred to the principal’s office to chat in English. It should not have been surprising that Grace’s first words in Chinese beyond numbers and songs were *Bu Keyi* or “Not appropriate/possible.” It was a difficult time for all of us.

After the adjustment into the new schedule and working through some of her social frustration Grace settled down to a routine. She did not speak much Chinese at home or to others outside of the school. She did say occasional words but they seemed random. From the beginning, Grace shared what she learned at school with her younger sister by teaching her to sing the songs. At end of the first two months she was able to recite a Tang Dynasty Poem about swans and began to say specific words over and over again. She was fond of saying *lajitong* (trash can) again and again. She told her dad that the Chinese word for hat was *maozi*. She also told us that in her classroom if one wanted a drink of water or to use the restroom, one must ask the teacher “*keyi bu keyi he shui or keyi be keyi (qu) xishou jian.*” Grace missed verbs or key words in the sentences when she said them, but understood when her teacher said them.

In November it was clear that Grace now understood much of what her teacher was saying to her. She concluded a unit on the family and was able to name her family members and describe members of the family that she doesn’t have, like a “brother”. When we met with the teachers for parent conferences, we learned that Grace’s academic progress was satisfactory and the teachers felt that she was learning Chinese and other



subjects well. We expressed some concerns about Grace's inattention in the classroom and in other activities, and the teacher pledged to work on engaging her more in the classroom.

At the end of December the teacher shifted from speaking about concrete things to more relational concepts. Grace's understanding of the language around these concepts was very clear. She had begun to learn the basic strokes for writing Chinese characters. She copied the teacher's writing and wrote the words for "winter" on a drawing without instruction; she did it very well.

### *The New Year Brings Renewed Confidence*

After the holiday break, Grace returned to her classroom with a renewed confidence in herself. Her attitude was positive and she seemed to enjoy school more; she was excited and happy to go to school in a way that she hadn't been since the very first week. She brought a Chinese book home from the library and when I offered to read it to her, she declined and told me, "Actually Mom, your Chinese is not really very good – you don't speak it that well." Her Chinese is very strong now and she is beginning to say small phrases around the house. She teaches her sister how to say "excuse me," "not a problem" or "don't be a guest."

Chinese New Year was celebrated in a big way at Yinghua Academy, and Grace prepared every day for the school performance. She practiced singing the Chinese New Year songs in the car to and from school each day. On the day of the performance, I learned that she was not only singing the songs that her class performed, but she was also singing some of the songs that the other classes performed. She was extremely proud of the decorations that her class had made to celebrate Chinese New Year.

As we are now winding down to the last three months of this first year, we can see that Grace is beginning to master the Chinese of kindergarten. Her teacher has said that

she no longer employs visual aids to help the children understand and that she can usually simply talk to them, and they follow what she says. She is giving incentive points to the children to speak Chinese to each other and in the classroom, and we hear Grace use more Chinese phrases at home. Grace has begun to quiz me during the car ride home from school each day. She says the Chinese word and waits for me to say the meaning in English. So far I have done well on my Chinese language quizzes, but I can see a day where she will surpass me.

Just last week, I realized that Grace does not have a very complete understanding of the days of the week in English. She can recite Sunday through Saturday but is unable to tell you what day it is today and what day tomorrow might be. However, her understanding and communication of these concepts in Chinese is perfect. She accurately names the day, yesterday's day and tomorrow's day. It has seemed that for the other subjects that she has covered in school thus far, Grace understands the concepts both equally well in English and Chinese. It is interesting to find her ability in Chinese superior to that of English on this topic.

Over the last eight months, we have seen a tremendous change in Grace and she is confident and engaged in her academic and social interactions at school. The trauma of the adjustment during the fall has completely been overcome. Moreover, her understanding of and ability to use Chinese is amazing. She is thriving and we look forward to seeing what first grade at Yinghua Academy brings. ○

### THE BILINGUAL EDGE: WHY, WHEN, AND HOW TO TEACH YOUR CHILD A SECOND LANGUAGE

By Kendall King and Alison Mackey

Published by Harper Collins

Written for parents interested in having their children reap the benefits of learning more than one language, *The Bilingual Edge* provides insights and information to guide important decisions on language education.

Outlining the benefits of bilingualism and dispelling many of the myths around language learning, *The Bilingual Edge* offers practical advice and tips to help parents select the language that will most benefit their child, find the most effective language education materials and programs, and identify ways that families can promote language learning at home.

The book also includes sections on the advantages of becoming bilingual, when children should start learning another language, the characteristics of good second language learning programs and teachers and how to find them, and how to deal with opposition and overcome objections.

You can order the book from the Center for Applied Linguistics: [www.cal.org/resources/pubs/bilingualedge.html](http://www.cal.org/resources/pubs/bilingualedge.html)

**GUIDE FOR  
CONTRIBUTORS**

We welcome submissions to be considered for publication and give preference to those that relate to our current features, including best practices, parent communication, new teacher tips, technology and second language education, immersion research, guest editorials, and "The Bridge," an insert with a focus on bridging research and practice.

Manuscripts should be between 750 and 1,500 words. All references and notes should follow the specifications described in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA), 5th edition, and must be placed at the end of the article. Please include the title of the article, your name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, institution, a short biography as well as pictures.

Manuscripts can be submitted, preferably by email, to:

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Editor, ACIE Newsletter

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**Submission Deadlines**

May 15      November issue  
August 15      February issue  
November 15      May issue

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**ACIE NEWSLETTER/MAY 2008**

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**T**he American Council on Immersion Education (ACIE) is an organizational network for individuals interested in immersion education—teachers, administrators, teacher educators, researchers, and parents.

Conceived by immersion teachers in Minnesota and funded in part by the National Language Resource Center (NLRC)

in the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota, ACIE aims to facilitate communication among immersion teachers and others interested in immersion education.

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