

Chinese as a *second language*

is the Best Gift for Your Child



By: Stephen Tsang

Today, most North Americans are living a unilingual life, and we seem to be able to get by; but the world is getting smaller by the minute. Twenty years from now, will knowing one language be enough to compete with the rest of the world? Once you've decided that your child will learn a second language, which language will you choose?

To the Friesen family, whose two children are currently enrolled in the Chinese Bilingual Program (one in Dovercourt Elementary School and one going to Ross Sheppard Senior High to continue the program), this is a no-brainer. "We chose the program that we envisioned would provide the best opportunities for our children. With China becoming a dominant global economy, we think that their fluency in Mandarin will open many doors for meaningful and rewarding careers," said Dan and Dawn Friesen.

To Cara Au, a straight A student from Meadowlark Elementary School, who looks and acts like any typical Canadian child, it is a matter of identity. Cara comes from a family with a father of Chinese origin and a Caucasian

mother who is bilingual in English and French, "I really want to keep learning Chinese, because even though it was not my first language, since I am half Chinese, it is a very important part of me."

Non-Asian parents who do not speak or write Chinese, quite often worry that they cannot help their children with their homework. The Friesens do not have that particular problem at home. "As unilingual, non-Asian parents, we were not able to provide direct second-language support at home. At times the program was challenging for our children but there is excellent school support and their studies were always manageable. Our children have excelled in Mandarin and we are impressed with their fluency and confidence. Opportunities to use their language skills outside of school have been numerous and have enhanced their success."

Dick Au, Cara's father, immigrated to Canada when he was young with parents who speak very little English, and seems to have the answer. He figured that if he could learn English without much support at home, his children should

be able to learn Chinese with limited Mandarin support at home; especially with computers and internet dictionaries and databases readily available nowadays. On the other hand, Heather-Jane Au, Cara's mother with a background of French immersion, knew that she always wanted her children to learn a second language. She believes when they learn to say things more than one way, they also learn to think more than one way. There is often more than one right answer to many situations in life.


Even though both of the Friesen children, Ivy (14) and Isaac (9), have no prior knowledge or background in Chinese language and culture, they love being in the program. In fact they find that learning Mandarin as a second language not only helps them achieve better results in other subjects, but it also provides more choices for extracurricular activities, as well as more opportunities to be involved with the local community during cultural festivals and events.

With almost 30 years of history, the Edmonton's Chinese (Mandarin) Bilingual program has been giving students the opportunity to learn one of the world's most widely spoken languages in a unique Alberta context. Almost 2000 students from Kindergarten to Grade 12 are learning Mandarin during regular school hours in the Edmonton public school system. The free program is offered at five elementary schools – Caernarvon, Dovercourt, Kildare, Meadowlark and Meyonohk; four junior high schools – Londonderry, Ottewell, Parkview and Rosslyn; and three senior high schools – McNally, ME LaZerte and Ross Sheppard.


Every parent wants to give the best to their children. Giving your children an opportunity to learn a second language is really one of the best gifts possible - a tool that your children can use for the rest of their lives.

Stephen Tsang is the Vice President of the Edmonton Chinese Bilingual Education Association. For more information on the Chinese Bilingual Program offered by Edmonton Public Schools, visit the Edmonton Chinese Bilingual Education Association web site www.ecbea.org.

EC



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Edmonton Chinese Bilingual Education Association
www.ecbea.org
www.ecbea.org
 ECBEA is a non-profit organization of volunteer parents dedicated to promote the learning of Chinese language and culture. Today, 2000 students from kindergarten through grade twelve are learning Chinese in the Chinese Bilingual Program at five elementary, four junior and three senior highs in the Edmonton Public School System.



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Editors' Notes: This guide is provided as a reference only. Please research your choices carefully and choose the companies that work best for you and your family.



Q & A

with the expert...

Anita Gerlinsky

Anita Gerlinsky is a leader with Girl Guides. Why does she do it? Read on to find out...

Q: How did you get started with Girl Guides?

A: Like a lot of leaders, I got involved to spend quality time with my daughter, and share the Guiding experience with her. The rest is history. My daughter is now grown and a leader as well. Today I'm a leader for myself, the girls in my group and the community. I enjoy finding new and exciting activities for the girls where we can all learn together, have fun, and make a positive contribution to our community.

Q: What are the rewards of volunteering?

A: The biggest reward for me is watching the girls grow into amazing young ladies with a passion to learn and making the world a better place. Being a positive role model for these girls has earned me lifelong friendships that will be cherished forever. It's given me a purpose in life that I wouldn't trade for anything in the world.

Q: The challenges?

A: I'd have to say dealing with so many different personalities in one group, and balancing them all to work together as an effective team. But in Guiding, we challenge ourselves continuously as a way to learn and grow. By facing challenges and overcoming them, girls come to realize they can accomplish anything if they put their minds to it.

Q: What has been your best experience?

A: It's hard to choose just one, there have been so many. I would have to say any outdoor adventures, be it connecting with nature, camping, whitewater rafting, rock climbing, rappelling, or horseback riding.

Q: The funniest story?

A: We had a "Harry Potter" themed camp a few years ago, and we were making magic wands from wooden dowels for a craft. One of the leaders finished her wand, and was demonstrating to the girls how to try it out. At the exact moment she pointed her wand into the air, a huge flash of lighting travelled across the sky. Needless to say, the girls were in awe of her magical powers.

Q: How can others get involved?

A: All it takes is one phone call to the Edmonton area Guide office at 780-451-2263. The staff will help find a convenient unit for girls or a suitable position for adult volunteers. Opportunities are available for unit leaders, committee members, treasurers, trainers, and administrative roles.

Q: How does volunteering connect you to the community?

A: It's opened my eyes to all the needs in the community. A large part of the Guiding program involves helping others, so we're always on the lookout for volunteer opportunities suitable for the girls, where they can learn that even at a young age they can make a difference. We've done projects like making tray favours for Meals on Wheels, making sleeping bags for the homeless from recycled bedspreads, collecting food for the Food Bank, baking cupcakes at the Mustard Seed for their children's Christmas party, packing food hampers for the Christmas Bureau, painting yellow fish beside storm drains to discourage pouring toxins down the drains that feed directly to our river, delivering gifts for Santa's Anonymous, doing projects for Habitat for Humanity and the Stollery Hospital, baking Christmas cookies for the homeless, and the list goes on. The girls come to understand that part of being a responsible citizen involves helping others, and these girls will be the caring leaders of tomorrow.

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