

Ian Goldman:

Here are the points that I will make to the committee.

1. There is a huge demand for mandarin as a second language. I base this on my many discussions with parents and parents-to-be.
2. The VSB should put a question on the form which is used by parents to register their kids for French Immersion. The question should be something like, "Would you prefer to have your child in a Mandarin as a second language program if the chances of getting your child registered was the same as that for a French Immersion program?" Another question could be, "If your child cannot get into a French immersion program, would you like to have your child registered in Mandarin as a second language?" Analysing the data of the responses will give a better idea of just how large the demand is.
3. If there is only one school used as a pilot project, the project will be doomed to fail because there will be a very limited amount of people willing to transport their child to that school, no matter how central the school is located. I submit that there should be at least two schools for any pilot project to minimize the transportation problem.

I ask that you pass this email on to the responsible VSB staff so that I may have a discussion with them before the committee meeting.

Thank you

Will our Children be able to Talk to the World?

Early Mandarin Bilingual Learning - Challenges and Possibilities

Conference Executive Summary

SPONSORED BY:



St. John's College
聖約翰學院
University of British Columbia



BCParentsForMandarin

November 22, 2008
9:00am-5:00pm

Guest Speakers

WELCOME

Chris Kelly, VSB
Superintendent of Schools

LUNCH KEYNOTE

Roma Ilnyckyj

DISCUSSION PANELS

Dr. Henry Yu, UBC (panel
moderator)

Dr. Patricia Duff, UBC

Dr. Duanduan Li, UBC

Billie L.C. Ng, SFU,
Canadian TCSL Association
Vice President

Dr. Huamei Han, SFU

Rick Beardsley, Garry Point
Educational Consulting

Janice Aubry, EPSB

Dr. Wei Li, EPSB, CI in
Edmonton Vice President

Peter Wong, ECBEA
President

John Yee, ECBEA Former
President

Dr. Joe Wu, University of
Alberta

Lulu Tan, Dr. Annie B.
Jamieson Elementary School

Loretta Kong, Edmonton
program graduate

Sebastian Ko, VSB program
graduate



HOSTED AT: St. John's College
University of British Columbia
Vancouver, B.C.

1. INTRODUCTION

On Saturday, November 22, 2008, **BCParentsForMandarin** (Vancouver Committee) hosted the Conference “Will our Children be able to Talk to the World?” which was co-sponsored by the University of British Columbia (UBC), St. John’s College and Vancouver School Board (VSB). The event was held at St. John’s College, UBC, and we were honored to have 16 guest speakers share their insights and expertise on the challenges and possibilities of an early start Mandarin language program in BC.

Guest speakers included educators, administrators and academic experts from UBC, Simon Fraser University and University of Alberta. Representatives from the Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB) and Edmonton Chinese Bilingual Education Association (ECBEA) also shared with participants their experiences with their own Mandarin bilingual program. As well, graduates from Edmonton’s Mandarin bilingual program and VSB’s Dr. Annie B. Jamieson elementary school Mandarin program added a student perspective to the discussions.

The Conference facilitated the exchange of knowledge and experience of teachers, administrators and students, as the first step to understanding how to successfully implement and sustain an early start Mandarin language program in BC. We hope to highlight in this report the most salient observations and findings from the Conference, as summarized in the Executive Summary.

Thank you again to all those who participated and helped make this event a success. We hope that the productive dialogue fostered at the Conference will continue between all education professionals and parents, so that the proposed program can become a reality for our children and generations to come.

BCParentsForMandarin (Vancouver Committee)

Eileen Sue	Susan Duffy
Vanessa Munro	Lara Honrado
Tami Wong	Winnie Wong
Ann Wong	

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Because counting should be as easy as 一 二 三



Giving our children the gift of Mandarin/English bilingualism through our public schools

About **BCParentsForMandarin** (Vancouver Committee)

We are a group of volunteer parents from Vancouver who are passionate about enriching our children's learning. We believe that providing a Mandarin language option for our children will provide them with significant advantages, both from a global citizenship and economic perspective. We also believe that starting as early as possible is the key to success in second language mastery.

www.MandarinForBCSchools.org

Will our Children be able to Talk to the World?

Conference Executive Summary

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2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 Desirability

The overall sentiment shared by all Conference participants was clearly that an early start Mandarin language program in Vancouver is desirable. Some participants were even surprised as to why Vancouver, British Columbia – a city, province strategically situated on the Pacific Rim – does not already have this type of program in place. In his opening address, Chris Kelly, Vancouver School Board (VSB) Superintendent of Schools, commended our neighbors in Alberta for its impressive developments in this area, especially given the fact that Alberta is a prairie province and not geographically situated as close to Asia as BC.

Demand for Mandarin language learning clearly exists, as evidenced by growing waitlists for UBC’s Mandarin program, which is already the largest in North America. Demand for Mandarin will likely continue to grow as the usefulness of the language increases on the global stage. As Dr. Duanduan Li of UBC noted: *“It is high time for Vancouver, BC, Canada, to think more seriously about the possibility of training our children to be more prepared for the globalized world”*. Rick Beardsley, an Education consultant, concurred: *“As an education system, we have lost our focus on Asian studies...The decline seemed counter-intuitive since economic and political imperatives are clear. Migrations from Asian and Canadians in large numbers are now in Asia working, studying, etc.”*

Supporters for the proposed program include both Mandarin-as-a-second-language (MSL) learners looking to improve their prospects for grasping this complex and unfamiliar language, and learners already with Chinese-background wishing to preserve their language, culture and heritage. Therefore, regardless of personal motivations for learning the language, there is a shared common desire for more Mandarin language learning opportunities in BC.

An early start program may give children the necessary time and opportunity to learn the language in a non-competitive environment, thereby fostering a love for the language, without the pressures of exams and testing in higher grades and at post-secondary level. As Lulu Tan, a VSB Mandarin teacher, noted: *“[Students] need time to explore the language and hook it to their background. Need to connect with real life experiences. If it’s just in the end about the exams or tests, it will take away from their learning experiences...need to connect to the stories or experiences to learn to love the language. It’s the allowed time to learn to play with the language.”*

Loretta Kong, a former student of Edmonton’s Mandarin bilingual program agreed with this assessment of the advantages of early exposure. Loretta felt that at age 6 (when she started the program), she was able to learn very naturally and without being self-conscious. Although Loretta spoke Cantonese at home for the first 5 years of her life, she did not remember struggling at all when she went on to learn both Mandarin and English at school. Dr. Huamei Han of Simon Fraser University commented that an early start may also help set phonological patterns and correct accents.

Also supporting the case for an early start program is its potential role in improving the flow-through of Mandarin learning to post-secondary level, which could raise overall language proficiency and language retention for students. As Rick noted: *“[Currently] there is a lack of focus to have an identifiable program that is a flow-through to post secondary [level]”*. At present, Dr. Annie B. Jamieson Elementary School is the only elementary school in BC offering Mandarin language instruction from Grades 4 to 7, so a proposed

Kindergarten to Grade 3 would effectively be an extension to the Jamieson program. Dr. Patricia Duff of UBC contended: “*Learning at a younger age does not guarantee success... [instead, it is] the duration and intensity of the experiences*”. Therefore, provided a consistent learning experience can be continued through a child’s academic career, early start is both desirable and beneficial.

Another benefit of an early start is that at Kindergarten level, differences in language ability between MSL learners and native-Mandarin learners are not as great as in later grades. As teachers noted at the Conference, the differences between these two types of learners become more glaring at higher grades and presents a huge challenge for teachers when it comes to managing classroom dynamics. Early start presents an opportunity for teachers to narrow pre-existing differences in language abilities between MSL and native-Mandarin learners, so that in higher grades (provided that MSL learners are given the consistent support they need) both groups of learners can be taught together in an environment where language abilities are ideally more evenly matched.

2.2 Challenges and Possibilities

Speakers identified several challenges, including:

- Sustained political willpower, community support
- Funding
- Curriculum, policy development resources
- Teachers training and qualification
- Program delivery in the classroom, pedagogy

In Rick’s view, sustained political willpower and/or community support is paramount to the success of the program. He recalled how there used to be lots of funding for Pacific Rim language programs in the 1980’s but because political favor changed in the 1990’s, students are now inadequately prepared for influences from the Pacific Rim. Rick believed that for the program to be successful, ongoing dialogue, long-term leadership and sufficient resources are needed. A good example of this is the long term support and strong partnership witnessed between the Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB) and parent group, Edmonton Chinese Bilingual Education Association, on sustaining their – now 26 year old – Mandarin bilingual program.

In fact, it was clear that there may be an important role for a strong parent advocacy group such as the Edmonton Chinese Bilingual Education Association (ECBEA) in Edmonton to help fund, promote and sustain a Mandarin language program in BC. As Janice Aubry, Supervisor of EPSB’s Institute for Innovation in Second Language Education (IISLE), commented, there is no special funding which goes with bilingual programs in Edmonton, and while Heritage Canada is starting to pay more attention to other languages, it is not really involved. There is more involvement from foreign governments and in that regard the EPSB works in partnership with the Confucius Institute, Hanban and Communications University of China. Also, while the province of Alberta supports Edmonton’s language programs in terms of teacher supports, assessment programs, etc., there is no actual funding support to programs directly. Janice remarked that the ECBEA has done much to help with advertising and promoting the programs. ECBEA’s John Yee and Peter Wong

confirmed the association continues to play an extremely active role in fundraising and promoting Edmonton's Mandarin bilingual program.

On available resources to assist curriculum development and policies, Janice named several supports and resources the EPSB would like to share with the VSB. These include supports available for Trustees and Boards to establish policies at the district level; a 1,000-page Chinese language teachers' guide to be published online in Spring 2009; provincial and local assessment materials (performance tasks by grade level); provincial and local teacher assessments; professional development supports and a guide for parents on how to support your children in bilingual programs. (Please see EPSB's presentation in Appendix B for details.)

As for obtaining enough qualified teachers for the program, Patricia noted that: *"There is a problem to recruit qualified teachers at the secondary level. At present, you need certification in another commonly taught subject in addition to Mandarin. The problem in recruitment is that you need to have senior level course credits to understand Mandarin as a language system... One area that might be most successful is with teachers who have come through French Immersion teacher training and have some Mandarin training and meta-linguistic understanding."*

No-one felt that the issue of qualified teachers was insurmountable. In fact, UBC is poised to address this, as Patricia noted: *"UBC is open to change right now. We are talking about revising our B. Ed. Program significantly and new dual degree programs in Mandarin for example. In response to the opportunities and the need, the timing is very interesting. Now the real work will begin to figure out all the nuts and bolts."* Patricia is currently Director of the recently launched UBC Centre for Research in Chinese Language and Literacy Education (CRCLLE). Moreover, Duanduan and Dr. Joe Wu of the University of Alberta identified an ideal group of candidates that could be mobilized to teach MSL fairly quickly – native Chinese teachers who originally learned how to teach English as a second language who have meta-linguistic training and can transfer a lot of that knowledge to the teaching of Mandarin. That is, Chinese graduate students who studied ESL can now play a role in MSL. Dr. Joe Wu commented: *"I see so many new immigrants with very good language proficiency plus willingness to take additional courses in university. It is a growing pool."*

In terms of program delivery in the classroom, Billie contended that teachers need to be well supported by a curriculum that is easy to implement and which is supported by the community as a whole. Billie stressed that this is vital for the lower grades, where students cannot fully articulate any difficulties they experience, compared to university level, where students can communicate their frustrations better. Billie further recommended that the curriculum should support contextual learning, as the most effective way to engage students by connecting learning experiences with practical, real world, uses. This view was echoed by Huamei, who felt that using the language for real-life purposes is an important part of learning that language.

In terms of teaching to a classroom of children with different language abilities, panelists generally agreed that this challenge should be less at kindergarten level than in later grades. However, we must remain cognizant of the needs of MSL learners. Billie, Duanduan and Lulu (who have between have taught Mandarin at elementary, high school and university levels) agreed that there needs to be strong, consistent support for MSL learners, who may feel intimidated by native-Mandarin learners who have the advantage of prior Mandarin language knowledge and access to further language support at home.

The main challenge facing teachers in early learning is how to take advantage of this opportunity to create a non-competitive and cooperative learning environment – before performance (i.e. marks and scores) matter in later grades – so that all children may have positive learning experiences. Early start presents an opportunity to

narrow pre-existing differences in language abilities between MSL and native-Mandarin learners, so that in higher grades (provided that MSL learners are given the consistent support they need) both groups of learners can be taught together in an environment where language abilities are ideally more evenly matched.

2.3 Closing Remarks

Guest speakers offered their words of encouragement in support of an early start Mandarin program being implemented in Vancouver. Janice urged BC Parents for Mandarin Vancouver Committee to *“Encourage the VSB to take the leap of faith and start this program, it’s been very successful for us in Edmonton... We wish you all the best.”*

Loretta reiterated the benefits of studying Mandarin from an early age: *“I think the program has benefited me a lot. The graduates have all ended up in different places. If I wanted to I could go to China to study further. I support this program hugely.”* As Lulu, a VSB Mandarin teacher stated: *“From my students, their responses to this idea of Mandarin starting in kindergarten: I would be very jealous because they will know so much more than we do.”*

On the willingness and dedication of Vancouver parents to make this program a reality, Susan Duffy of BC Parents for Mandarin Vancouver Committee: *“We have committed parents who will move the earth to make this happen and we need all of you in this room to make a commitment on a professional basis to move this project forward. We need: qualified teachers; a curriculum; and of course, a school or 2!! One the East and one on the West side of this city, once the word gets out. We all know this is fantastic and the time is right and the time is now and we have a group of parents who are extremely motivated to move the process along. Whether it is continuing to raise the profile or fundraising for a library or anyone of a number of things brought to us from the Edmonton group here today – thank you.”*