



Selected Readings from the West Coast

The following is a cross-section of ideas, opinions and current events relating to International / Heritage Languages Education from a British Columbia perspective. The selections are intended for information purposes only.

Cultural Diversity and British Columbia's Future in the International Economy

Dr. Michael Stevenson
President and Vice-Chancellor, Simon Fraser University

Speech to the Vancouver Board of Trade, Vancouver, BC

February 18, 2005

There is now widespread agreement in Canada and BC that our cultural diversity is a good thing.

The majority of Canadians think positively about cultural diversity: whether out of affection for a varied diet; recognition of the varied background of our international superstars; or as a result of more deeply thought commitments to the philosophical values and social arrangements that sustain peace, order and good government (or at least peace and order) amidst our marked cultural divisions.

Non-Canadians admire what they see as our distinctively open and tolerant society, and they think the Canadian response to diversity is "cool" (to quote the Economist) when compared to the more heated inter-ethnic and inter-racial relations experienced elsewhere.

Our governments properly applaud diversity, as in BC's recent Speech from the Throne. There we were told: "Our heritage, diversity and inclusive society is not just a source of provincial pride—it is a strategic asset that must be realized.... There is no place on Earth that sets a better example...of how citizens from all countries can come together and forge a new culture that is rooted in diversity, mutual trust, respect and celebration."

There is much to celebrate indeed, and certainly for a "new Canadian" like me, who has been the beneficiary of this country's extraordinary openness and generosity to a new immigrant. But my experience is not the norm, and I am as aware as you are that cultural diversity in this country has not always been a cause of celebration. Much of our history has been scarred by antagonism, ethnic prejudice, racism and anti-Semitism.

Our current mood of self-congratulation cannot erase the continuing evidence of these pathologies, and I want to call attention to developments that could threaten the advantages we properly associate with cultural diversity. Before I get there, let me focus on the reason that cultural diversity is now so widely celebrated; why that celebration now trumps the conflicts over multicultural policy that were so obvious until recently; and why it tends to mask some underlying problems.

The reason, I think, derives from the work of Richard Florida and his colleagues who have argued that cultural diversity promotes creativity, and that creativity has replaced raw materials and geographic location as the crucial wellspring of economic growth. As these researchers say, "The ability to attract creative people in arts and cultural fields and to be open to diverse groups of people of different ethnic, racial and lifestyle groups provides distinct advantages to regions in generating innovation, growing and attracting high-technology industries, and spurring economic growth." To take an analogy from biology: new knowledge comes from new ways of thinking about old problems and having available as a resource a broad diversity of approaches is essential to the long evolutionary processes that generate new ideas and knowledge.

This argument has become so compelling that every university President is now able to deliver speeches on the fundamental value of the arts and humanities, despite a decade of silence about funding policies which are systematically biased against these fields in Canadian universities. The argument is so convincing that the Speech from the Throne gives it a succinct formulation in reference to trade rather than innovation: "This is the age of global communication and global partnerships. The new explorers are those who seek new knowledge and push through to new frontiers of cultural understanding." Our cultural diversity is an asset enabling us "to welcome the world and understand it better, through new gateways to trade, new cultural exchange, new relationships, and new partnerships in education."

All of which, I believe, is true and comforting, although perhaps too comforting. Our cultural diversity is an undeniable fact, with multiple communities of diverse linguistic and cultural tradition, sustained by the high rate of immigration required by economic growth coupled to declining domestic birth rates. There is strong evidence that economic regions of high cultural diversity lead the world in innovation and trade competitiveness. But one must not confuse association with cause, and there are some signals that we are not creating the virtuous cycle of immigration, cultural diversity, innovation and trade competitiveness that the popular argument supposes.

A few observations about immigration (from recent studies produced by our own Vancouver Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis, and from Statistics Canada) will be sufficient to state some problems at the start of the cycle: immigration. Despite a highly selective immigration policy, that gives preferential access to immigrants with business expertise, capital or education (i.e., those more likely to succeed in the Canadian labour market), most researchers agree that immigrants to Canada realize below average returns for their human capital. Recent studies in BC show that immigrants realize significantly below average returns from self-employment, and that these returns are dramatically lower for those (notably from South Asia) with lower levels of proficiency and education in either of our two official languages.

Historical trends make the picture still less comforting. Despite the significantly higher educational attainments of more recent immigrants, the 2001 employment rate of immigrants aged 25 to 54 who arrived in Canada during the previous five years trails native Canadians of the same age (65% vs. 81%). And this is a reversal of the situation twenty years earlier. Even for those who succeed in the employment market, the situation has deteriorated over time: recent immigrant men employed on a full year, full time basis saw their real earnings fall 7% on average from 1980 to 2000, when during the same period, real earnings of Canadians went up 7%. Interestingly, the earnings of immigrant women went up in that period, but the earnings of Canadian women went up much faster so that a growing earnings gap also emerged between recent immigrant women and their Canadian-born counterparts.

In summary, rather than producing the economic and social integration of immigrants, and profiting from the stimulative effects of cultural diversity on economic activity, there are signs that we have instead been producing too much ethnic stratification in employment and income, and the isolation and cultural rigidity that follows.

I hope you will not think it self-serving for a university President to notice from some of the work I've cited that education is a key mediating influence determining whether cultural diversity is likely to work beneficially to produce the creativity, innovation, intercultural communication, trade and partnerships that promote economic growth and the quality of life. All educational institutions are important in this regard, and much of the task of stimulating greater mobility and integration amongst new immigrants lies with early childhood and K-12 educators. They require improved resources for second language teaching and for civic education that provides common bearings for immigrant children who must learn to navigate Canada's social and political terrain.

Colleges, too, require improved resources for skills certification under Canadian requirements for immigrants trained in other jurisdictions. If we focus on the role of innovation in the economic cycle from immigration to trade competitiveness, I believe that access to and the quality of university programmes are most important. This is because universities have a unique mandate to create research, and to educate the highly qualified graduates capable of both conducting that research and applying it.

I want therefore to review the role played by universities, and my university in particular, in addressing the accessibility and quality of education for students from our culturally diverse communities.

The starting consideration is our capacity to admit qualified students. Anyone who has spent time recently in one of our major universities would assume that we are very accessible to diverse cultural communities. Last year, for example, 40% of SFU's undergraduate students spoke a language other than English in their homes. 15% spoke Cantonese, 12% spoke Mandarin, 2% Korean, 1% Punjabi and 10% spoke other languages at home. Although there is a marked preponderance of ethnically Chinese students, reflecting the dominant stream of immigration to BC, these data suggest that we are meeting our commitment to being an open and inclusive institution.

Since these students are admitted in a merit-driven admissions process that is blind to ethnic background, diversity is also coupled to merit at SFU. This means that we have some confidence in expecting to produce the benefits of diversity discussed earlier. However, two qualifications to that expectation are necessary. The first concerns our ability to deal with questions of linguistic diversity. The second concerns the evenness of access across the many communities that make up the multicultural society we serve.

The problems of linguistic diversity in an educational setting as multicultural as ours can be illustrated by our survey results. Of the 40% of our students who speak a language other than English at home, close to 80% indicated that they lacked confidence in their ability to write English to satisfy academic standards, and one-third of them confessed that English language skills had a negative impact on their SFU grades. The fact that all these students have satisfied an English language proficiency requirement (either a BC English course requirement at high school or the equivalent of a 570 TOEFL score) does not diminish the reality of a lack of adequate language preparation for an academic institution in which English is the medium of instruction.

To handle this problem, SFU offers a very high quality English Bridge Programme for students needing greater competence in academic English, and the university is engaged in a major curriculum renewal requiring, among other things, a new emphasis on the teaching and assessment of writing competence in all degree programmes. Recognizing the starting language difficulties of a very large number of our students, whose aptitudes are otherwise superbly suited to academic study, the university is creating new "foundational courses" for students needing special assistance with written communication in

English. In addition, we are creating a Student Learning Centre to assist students in acquiring exemplary writing skills, and will require undergraduates in all degree programmes to complete two writing intensive courses focused on improving their writing skills within and beyond their normal disciplinary requirements.

Without these initiatives in curriculum renewal and improved second language education, we could not fully deliver on the social and educational benefits of diversity in the university. And there is another hurdle to be overcome: a problem of accessibility to all communities in our multicultural society.

The broad index of linguistic diversity within our student body masks sharp differences in access to university for particular groups and for particular socio-economic areas. Close to 50% of graduating high school students in the lower mainland who spoke Chinese at home entered university in 2000. This was triple the rate of university entrance for high school students whose home language was English. And it was five to ten times the university entrance rate for students who spoke Punjabi or Hindi at home.

These differences are compounded by regional differences within the lower mainland. For example, 32% of all high school graduates go on to university from Vancouver schools, compared to only 15% in Surrey. And the differences between Chinese speaking and Indian language speaking sub-populations are even larger in Surrey than in the lower mainland as a whole, with 49% of Chinese but only 2% of Hindi speaking students in Surrey going on to university.

We have no comparable figures for aboriginal students going on from high school to university. 1.9% of SFU students self-identify as being of aboriginal descent, as compared to 4% of the population of the lower mainland, which suggests some success at attracting aboriginal students. However, considering the very large proportion of this population that is under 24 years of age, university access rates from high school for aboriginal students are likely well below the average for other socio-cultural groups in the lower mainland. This is especially likely given the markedly lower rates for aboriginal student high school completion, and certification in key subjects like math required for many university courses.

Despite the sketchiness of the data discussed here, the diversity of our university student body is clear, but so are the effects of the distinctive socialization and economic situation of different socio-cultural groups, which mean that university accessibility is not evenly spread across those groups. Large differences in the rate at which immigrant and aboriginal communities are sending their children to universities in British Columbia are damaging to expectations of equity and diversity in a multicultural society and damaging to the university's interest in delivering the compelling educational benefits of a truly diverse learning environment.

These problems of access to higher education have been compounded by the fact that BC had been producing, at least until very recently, fewer university graduates as a proportion of its population aged 20-29 than anywhere else in Canada. The provincial government's very bold commitment to funding, by 2010, 25,000 new spaces in post-secondary institutions (12,400 of them in university programmes) will do much to rectify that problem. But this new growth in enrolment (17%) only equals the growth over the same period in BC's population aged 18-24. Furthermore, the allocation of this growth is such that the proportion of that population enrolled in university programmes in the region South of the Fraser River will be only 60% of that expected in other regions of the province (Vancouver and the North Fraser, the Interior or Vancouver Island). Since the South Fraser is the fastest growing region of the province, with the lowest university participation rate and the highest concentration of educationally disadvantaged immigrant communities, we must question the adequacy of our policies to address issues of cultural diversity and educational accessibility.

Apart from insisting that we address these access problems, those of us who lead universities have much to do if we are to maximize the assets of BC's cultural diversity. Let me sketch a few of the innovative approaches we are taking at SFU.

First, we are seeking ways to better integrate the educational experience of adult migrants into the BC economy. Wasted credentials and experience are all too common. SFU is addressing these issues in a couple of ways. Our Faculty of Education offers a professional qualification programme for immigrant teachers. And our Faculty of Continuing Studies, together with the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, works with immigrant service providers like SUCCESS, Mosaic, and others to offer second degree programmes to cohorts of adult immigrant students in selected areas of concentration.

Ironically, Canada has perhaps done least to take advantage of the cultural diversity resulting from its new immigrant and aboriginal communities. I have already spoken about the problems of aboriginal access to the university, and SFU is making major commitments to teacher training and professional development directed at improving access for aboriginal students wanting university admission. We are also working closely with an aboriginal advisory board to develop programming and more hospitable services that will attract greater enrolment from aboriginal communities. Finally, we are working in partnership with the Chief Dan George Centre to create bridging and credit programmes for mature students from our urban aboriginal population.

We need to do as much with respect to the French-English axis of Canadian diversity. Although the rate of growth in French immersion schooling is faster in BC than anywhere else in Canada, we have had few options in this province for students to optimize the benefits of bilingual schooling. SFU, I'm proud to say, has initiated, in partnership with Parents for French and the BC Francophone community—and with the support of the Federal and Provincial governments—the first bilingual degree programme in this province. This unique programme will allow students to take a major in public administration, and courses related to social policy, in French.

With additional, university-level courses in French language, these students will be well equipped for employment in the public service and in social service organizations where bilingualism is required or an advantage. Further, as part of a consortium of bilingual programmes in Canada, our students will be able to take courses taught in French in business or international affairs, for example, preparing for employment in firms that have boosted their earnings through Canada-wide operations (like Vancouver's Mountain Equipment Co-op) or in international organizations that operate throughout the Francophone world.

We are here at the cutting edge in mining the benefits of cultural diversity in education—the development of programmes which directly prepare students for occupations in international trade, organizations and communications. Again, we have done far less to maximize the assets of our cultural diversity than we should. But SFU, like other post secondary institutions in the province, is on the move, as a few concluding examples will show.

We are about to launch a dual degree programme with Zhejiang University, one of China's leading institutions. In this five-year Information Technology programme, cohorts of Chinese and Canadian students will study together alternating their time in both countries and receiving credentials from both universities at graduation. This programme will be especially attractive to Canadian students of Chinese origin, but - given the huge appeal of a truly international education - it will also stimulate better Mandarin as-a-second-language opportunities, creating the fullest mobility between China and North America.

A final example is also related to language training. As a result of SFU's prominence in the field of applied linguistics and our programme in Hellenic studies, our colleagues have received significant external funding to develop an intelligent language tutor for internet-based instruction in Greek for English speakers (and vice versa). A spin-off development is an equivalent programme for Greek and Chinese, motivated and funded by interests in the international shipping business dominated by those two countries.

To conclude, we are on the move in many ways, but there is much more to do. If we are truly to build on the asset of cultural diversity in this province, we need to make major investments in educational access and programmes like those I have discussed. It is a mistake to assume that cultural diversity automatically promotes innovation and economic activity. The consequence of holding to this mistaken belief may be to find that we have sewn the seeds of disruptive cultural divisions and the costly social problems they create. We need instead to recognize that our much-celebrated cultural diversity can indeed be a wellspring for the new ideas and knowledge that will generate innovation, grow and attract high-technology industries, and spur economic growth and prosperity. But, for this to happen, we need to build the necessary partnership of governments, business and educational institutions willing to invest in and nurture the rich economic potential that our cultural diversity allows.



The Value of Second Language Education

**A brief presented to the select Standing Committee on Education
November 2001**

**By *Denis Hazelton, Diane Tijman, and Dinah Lewis*
With supporting statements from students *Eldar Sehic* and *Christopher McLean***

We would like to start off by thanking the government for providing us with the opportunity to give direct input into change. In spite of being very proud of our school system, there are some changes we would like to see and this forum is most welcomed.

The goal of the BCATML, (BC Association of Teachers of Modern Languages), a provincial specialists' association, is to promote and advance the teaching of modern languages throughout the province. We represent approximately 450 active members specialized in the teaching of French, German, Japanese, Mandarin, Punjabi, Spanish and other languages in B. C. Our mandate is to present the concerns of second language teachers to the BCTF and through the BCTF to the government and outside agencies.

As language educators, we strongly believe in the value of second language learning. We, therefore, recommend that BC require second language studies not only at the elementary level, as is the current policy, but also at the secondary level where they have no current status as part of the Graduation program. This should be done for three benefits: intellectual, cultural, and economic.

The latest research shows that the study of a second language actually increases the elasticity of the brain. Students find that during their second language studies, their command of English improves as does their ability to acquire other languages more readily.

Culturally, what better way to broaden our understanding of the world, other people and their points of view but through another language. Second language study breaks down barriers and enhances cross-cultural understanding and appreciation not just in our multicultural province but most importantly in the global community which, of late, is clearly in need of much understanding.

Economically speaking, second languages are now becoming a vital part of the basic preparation for an increasing number of careers. Even in those cases where the knowledge of a second language does not help graduates obtain a first job, many report that their second language skills often enhance their mobility and improve their chances for promotion. Key business deals are often closed because of the cultural awareness gained through the study of a second language.

The latest research also shows that second language learning is best obtained by starting at a young age, and we believe that this learning requires proficient teachers and quality materials. To ensure success with second language programs at the elementary level, it is important that the teachers have the linguistic proficiency to deliver the program. Many of our elementary teachers are frustrated with their inability to speak French well, yet they are compelled to teach it. We recommend that funding be put in place to allow such teachers to participate in methodology courses and attend language proficiency courses, and provide them with appropriate teaching materials. For our elementary teachers in training, we also recommend that university education programs include a second language methodology course. This would help to alleviate the anxiety of many beginning teachers.

Currently, high school students are limited in their ability to take second languages because of the graduation requirements. Students tell us that they are left with few options and as a result, often do not enroll or continue their language study. Therefore, we ask what can the government do to give greater value and recognition to language education and give students more choice and flexibility in their options during their high school years?

In conclusion, language education is a vital part of the student's school experience. With some welcome changes as noted above, this education could be more powerful, beneficial, and enhance the opportunities of our young people and ultimately our province. We want to build world class leaders and second language education is an essential key to that goal.

And now we would like to introduce two recent graduates and success stories from the public school system, Eldar Sehic, now a first year student of economics at Simon Fraser University, and Chris McLean, a first year arts student at the University of British Columbia.

*Student presentation #1: **Eldar Sehic***

I stand here today, with a sense of faith and honour. Through my dear family, and my experiences, I've learned to seek knowledge. All the way from Bosnia, my dear homeland torn by genocide, by evil, I found myself living in this new home, Canada. Learning English was a new challenge. As every challenge has its upsets and its moments of glory, French is no exception. It was a valuable journey, and still is. Yet to be sincere and honest, I'd have to say that in the past, French never really grasped my learning ambition. All I saw in French was a bridge of many bridges, to get to university. Grade 11 French seemed enough for me. Yes, it's a shame that I was, like so many others, blind in seeing the value of learning a language at a young age.

But through it all, I was able to change my perspective. In the summer of 2000, encouraged by my family to go on a 5-week French program, I made my way to Quebec, expecting nothing more than some time to relax. Going there with no particular interest for French, I came back grateful, with great memories of an unforgettable summer, an increased knowledge of French and its culture, and of course this surprising new feeling towards learning this language. As a result of this positive experience, I took Grade 12 French, and completed it successfully with no regrets. In that year I had an opportunity to compete in the French public speaking competition. Once again, I found myself grateful for French. At the same time, it proved to me that what you learn can later benefit you, because you never know what the future holds.

And so as high school ended, as all those bridges were crossed, and the hunger for knowledge and success grew, I'm now taking French in the first semester of university. Keep in mind, French is neither my major, nor a requirement. It is merely a tool to enhance my education, and a doorway to more opportunities. To be truthful, learning French can really develop your mind, and yet some still wonder if knowing it is an asset. Perhaps we need to understand that we live in a country where French is an official language, not to mention its popularity all over the world. Its knowledge seems vital. Aside from the fact that not all students have the opportunity to go to a French-speaking region, many, sadly, can't see the value of knowing French. I hope that you can.

For students to have the necessary education, and to be better prepared for the future, making grade 12 French an essential, is a step forward. Their opportunities rely on family, excellent teachers, and the respected positions that you all hold. Your leadership is needed, your experience respected, and your efforts will be reflected. I believe that if people travel more, and learn more about the world, it will erase ignorance, it will defeat hate and evil, and it will allow people to seek further knowledge, resulting in, I hope, humble success.

I'm thankful for all I've gained, including French. With the doors open, and always challenges to overcome, the opportunities await. In reality, you can lose a lot in life, but you can never lose what you know. So let us keep in mind the importance and the power of communication and knowledge. Let us learn and understand that we'll never know everything. But every time we learn something, it makes a difference, and believe it or not, it can amazingly change the world.

*Student presentation #2: **Christopher McLean***

My name is Christopher McLean, and I have been invited to speak before you today as a student sincerely interested in second language education. I am currently enrolled as a first-year student at the University of British Columbia, where I am taking the Arts 1 program, and studying Chinese language. I first began taking Mandarin in high school in grade 9, and I continued taking it through grade 12 and now in university.

I am interested in studying language, and to be blunt, I think it is fascinating. In my opinion, language is one of the most important skills we possess. To learn a language can be a frustrating, demanding and time-consuming process, but the rewards are immense. The process of learning Chinese started out difficult and is still a difficult task, but I have found it to have opened many doors for me, and has enabled me to be effective in situations where I would not necessarily have been. Moreover, learning another language, and one so vastly different from English, has allowed me to consider and approach problems, and indeed life, from a greater variety of angles. Languages express different ideas in different ways, and therefore facilitate different approaches to the same problems. This has been a benefit to me in many ways, from normal everyday situations, to writing essays in English.

Knowing a second language can be extremely useful and has a verisimilitude of applications. Therefore, it would be logical to label second language learning as a skill, specifically a skill with a variety of applications, or an "Applied Skill" if you will. This brings me to the second point of my presentation. While at high school, I was nearly unable to take Mandarin in grade 12 because of the necessity of having enough Applied Skills credits for graduation - for which second language courses do not count. Indeed, it was only through a small loophole in the definition of "Applied Skill" that enabled me to do some extra work in my band class and permit it to be both an applied skill and a fine arts course to satisfy graduation requirements.

Language, however, is nothing if not a skill - and a skill which by its very nature must be applied, for it is only in application that it exists at all. Indeed, second language study requires not one skill, but many disciplines: reading, writing, speaking, listening as well as culture, history, music, etc. In fact, second language learning embraces all disciplines.

In conclusion, second language courses are demanding, useful, and in my experience, they should most definitely be labeled as an Applied Skill as part of the Graduation Program.



BC lags in Asian education

By Carlito Pablo
Georgia Straight

Published: Wednesday, May 1, 2008

British Columbia prides itself on its historic ties with, geographical proximity to, and vibrant economic relations with the Asia-Pacific region. But according to a study, secondary-school students in the province are not learning enough about this part of the world that is a major source of new immigrants to Canada.

The authors of *Asia Pacific Studies in the Secondary Schools of British Columbia: A Report to the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada* also pointed out that fewer students are enrolling in Asian-language programs.

Co-author Mike Wittingham, a history and social-studies teacher at Cambie Secondary school in Richmond, noted that not much has changed since the study was released in April 2007.

A portrait of multilingual Canada

- > The Chinese languages are Canada's third most common mother-tongue group, behind English and French.
- > Italian remained in fourth place, followed by German, Punjabi, Spanish, Arabic, Tagalog, and Portuguese.
- > The proportion of allophones in BC who reported using nonofficial languages at work was 30 percent in 2006, the same as in 2001.
- > Just over one in two workers in Metro Vancouver whose mother tongue is Chinese or Korean reported using a language other than English or French at work, compared with 40 percent of those whose mother tongue was Punjabi.

Source: Statistics Canada's 2006 Census

"One of the important factors, definitely, is the lack of emphasis on the part of the Ministry of Education in promoting Asia-Pacific programming," Wittingham told the Georgia Straight. "And I would say an equal part is shared by local school boards that haven't continued the promotion of the development of those courses and curriculum."

The study conducted by Wittingham and two other secondary-school teachers sought to bring to light what schools are doing to prepare students in BC, as well as in Alberta, for the changes being brought about by the rise of Asia on the world stage.

"Our findings indicate a considerable gap between the economic, political, and cultural ascendancy of Asia and secondary school programs in both provinces," the document stated. "While projects and programs in the United States and Australia are gearing up Asian Pacific content in the schools, B.C. and Alberta have been reducing it."

The study found that Asia-Pacific content in secondary social studies has declined since the 1990s. It also noted that business-education programs like Economics 12 do not "include Asian economic growth, Asian economic and business structures, or the concept of British Columbia serving as the Asia Pacific gateway for North America".

The study likewise pointed out that in 2006, the BC Ministry of Education removed from the Grade 10 social-sciences curriculum the expectation that students would assess the province's economic relations with its major trading partners. "This is the only area in the K-12 social studies curriculum in which students had opportunities to examine British Columbia's contemporary economic relations with both the United States and the Asia Pacific," Wittingham and his coauthors wrote.

Wittingham said he has yet to hear of any government initiative that would designate as mandatory a course on Asia-Pacific studies. "For a cause to be mandated or to be given prominence, it's essentially the minister of education who has that clout," he said. "It usually takes some sort of an interest group with a degree of influence to push the ministry in that direction."

Enrollment in elective Asian-language courses has declined. The study noted that between the school years of 2001–2002 and 2004–2005, enrollment in Punjabi 11 dropped by 11.8 percent, Japanese 11 by 5.7 percent, and Mandarin Chinese 11 by 4.9 percent.

The study indicated that this drop may be attributed to both a shortage of Asian-language teachers and low demand for the courses, which "may also reflect perceptions students and their families have of the efficacy of taking these courses".

Henry Yu, an associate professor of history at UBC, believes that Canada in general hasn't done much even in the area of encouraging and providing support for students with immigrant backgrounds to learn their traditional language.

"We want a multilingual society, but we don't want our kids to be trained that way," Yu told the Straight. "It's very paradoxical. We want all these [new immigrant] people with all these language skills because it's great economically: it means we're globally effective and practical because we can find people who speak all kinds of languages. But for some reason, we want those people only as adults. We can't imagine them ideologically as children."

Yu said this would explain why a 10-year-old child who arrives in Canada with his migrant parents has a better chance of being able to speak a non-English language than does a second- or third-generation member of an ethnic minority.

"We want our young to be globally minded global citizens," Yu said. "We want them to understand the world, to have marketable skills, and be able to go out and do things to change the world for the better. Those are our aspirations for Canada. In terms of language skills, we do a horrible job."

Do we need to encourage young Canadians of Asian descent to learn their heritage languages?

A selection of perspectives from the Georgia Straight



Rika Uto

Chair, Vancouver Japanese Language School & Japanese Hall

"It is absolutely necessary because it really opens you up to different kinds of thinking. It makes everyone more compassionate and understanding. Promotion of language can't just be strictly language learning. It has to be incorporated into cultural learning, and it must somehow relate to what students are doing in their everyday life....That's what we do in our school—creating a community environment."



Sadhu Binning

Punjabi instructor, UBC department of Asian studies

"Everybody who comes to Canada should know English, and we should exist as one country. I'm not in favour of creating ghettos. But at the same time, we should also welcome other languages. If I'm learning Punjabi, it shouldn't be seen as being anti-Canadian....Being Canadian doesn't mean learning only the two official languages, which are English and French."



Anna Pansacola

Vancouver-based English-Tagalog court translator

"Language is a valuable facet of our ethnic heritage and cultural identity. Unfortunately, deeply ingrained colonial mentality in the Filipino psyche has relegated the Filipino language to a lower status, so that fluency in English and European languages is more desired. Parents need to motivate their children, expose them to our culture's wealth of resources, starting in the fields of music and literature."



Jim Wong-Chu

Founding member, Asian Canadian Writers' Workshop

"If the government doesn't institutionalize the histories of Asian Canadians, our young won't have enough motivation to learn their traditional languages. We don't even talk about our own history. All we do is French-Canadian, English-Canadian history. The Chinese have been here for over 150 years, the Japanese a hundred years, and the Indo-Canadians for at least a hundred years, and yet none of that is in the school curriculum."



Grace Seear

Teacher and coordinator of Camp Korea, which is organized by the Korean Canadian Coactive Society

"A lot of the younger Koreans or kids with half-Korean background don't know much about their culture. Aside from language lessons, we try to get them to bond with each other in camps so that they will feel proud of their heritage and their dual identity. It's a kind of gift you should pass on to your children. It's truly a privilege to have that background."

See: <http://www.straight.com/node/143893>



China funds language courses for BC schools

An unusual announcement today from Premier Gordon Campbell.

China has agreed to pay for the development of three Mandarin language courses that will become credit courses in BC schools.



The premier describes the courses as a "gift" from one Olympic Games host country to another. They will be offered in Grades 10, 11 and 12 and students who pass them will earn four credits per course towards graduation. They will also be available for free to any B.C. resident through LearnNow BC.

The courses will be developed by the Confucius Institute, which operates in downtown Vancouver by way of a partnership between BCIT and China. Dean Lawrence Gu, describes this unusual arrangement as a "visionary program (that) will further facilitate mutual understanding and friendship between the people of Canada and China."

This reminded me of a story earlier this week about the Burnaby board of education refusing an offer of money (more than \$20,000) from the Korean community to pay for Korean classes in Burnaby schools. (The classes were in jeopardy but it now appears they will continue, at least for Grades 10-12.)

Board chair Kathy Corrigan said the two situations are quite different. China is paying for the development of a course - not on-going delivery - "and I don't have any problem with that at all," she said. "My assumption is, and my expectation would be, that this course - like every other course - would be vetted by the ministry of education . . . to ensure that the courses meet the very high standards that we have for education in British Columbia."

The ministry isn't commenting on the value of the "gift", referring questions to BCIT. I asked BCIT's Allison Markin about costs and she replied by email from China:

"We will be working with the Min of Education and schools districts to manage the development of the courses and consult on the budget, and will determine costs with the Min of Education. Until we get further along in the consultation process, we won't have a firm estimate."

The Confucius Institute is a curious creature. It's a part of BCIT - a public post-secondary institution - but it's funded by Beijing. BCIT refuses to say how much money it has spent on the Confucius Institute and how much money it has received from Beijing to operate the institute. (I've seen confidential documents indicating that Beijing's contribution has been several hundred thousand dollars. For what? BCIT says the release of such information would harm China's negotiating position in setting up other Confucius Institutes around the world.

The premier's announcement today will create some activity in BCIT's Confucius Institute. It has been open for more than two years but has had fewer than 100 students during that time and received less than \$17,000 tuition from them, according to documents obtained under FOI.



China-funded language courses in BC "not democratic": UVic prof

By Macleans.ca | May 28th, 2008

Premier Campbell signed agreement to offer free Mandarin courses in BC while on trip in China

The BC government has accepted an offer from China to fund Chinese-language courses in British Columbia — a move one political scientist says leaves the province open to political pressure. Premier Gordon Campbell signed a memorandum of agreement to provide free online language courses to British Columbians, paid for by China, during a visit there earlier this month.

University of Victoria professor Dennis Pilon said Tuesday the BC government is putting itself in a position of conflict by allowing a Chinese government agency to pay for high-school level Mandarin courses in British Columbia. "It immediately creates a conflict because once you become indebted to someone then you no longer can speak as freely about whatever issues may come to hand," he said.

China has been widely criticized on the world stage for alleged human rights abuses.

Pilon said accepting or soliciting money from foreign governments for things wanted or needed in British Columbia interferes with citizens' rights to hold the BC government accountable. "If we elect them to raise our concerns, this kind of relationship may interfere with that," he said. "Which some would say is not very democratic."

Education Minister Shirley Bond dismissed the concerns, saying the funding arrangement is simply a gift from one Olympic Games host to another. Canada is hosting the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver and China is hosting this summer's Olympics in Beijing.

An education spokesman at the Chinese consulate in Vancouver concurred the memorandum was not a politically-motivated gesture. "It is not political, only a gift for the Olympic Games," Fajun Zhang said.

Bond said the free courses are an effort to forge stronger ties between two trading and cultural partners. "It's going to provide an opportunity for British Columbians, either adults or students, to learn Mandarin," she said. "There's always an interest in expanding cultural opportunities between the two countries."

Bond said the cost of the language program has not been calculated.

The May 23 agreement was signed in Beijing between the BC government and China's Office of Language Council International (Hanban). The Chinese agency will provide the Confucius Institute at the BC Institute of Technology in Vancouver with funding to create three Mandarin courses with the Education Ministry. The courses will include an introductory, Grade 10 level Mandarin course and two more advanced courses at the Grade 11 and 12 levels. Students will be able to receive graduation credits for the courses.

Pilon said allowing China to pay for such a program takes the economic and cultural relationship between the two jurisdictions in the wrong direction. "If it's important enough to do, then it's important enough for us to pay for," he said. "To try and get the money from someone else, that suddenly introduces a whole bunch of strings which may have very undemocratic consequences."



A global view of learning

Kids who speak Mandarin or Punjabi will have an edge in the world economy, education official says

Janet Steffenhagen, Vancouver Sun

Published: Wednesday, February 06, 2008

French is fine, but parents who really want to give their children an edge in the global economy should be clamouring for Mandarin and Punjabi immersion in K-12 schools.

So says Emery Dosedall, a former BC deputy education minister who heads a new provincial government office charged with improving relations between British Columbia and Asia-Pacific countries.

His mandate includes promoting Asia-Pacific studies in BC schools, attracting more international students and opening new BC-certified schools abroad, Dosedall said in one of his first media interviews since he returned to BC in to join the education ministry.



Vancouver's Jamieson elementary has the only Mandarin bilingual program in B.C. The program has Asian and non-Asian students, such as this Grade 4 class taught by Peggy Wu.

He worries that BC parents, while keenly interested in French immersion, haven't recognized the opportunities with other languages. "French is great -- it's our second language. But as a language of industry, I'd certainly recommend things . . . like Punjabi and Mandarin. They're going to [create] great opportunities for your children in the future."

In many countries, Mandarin is being described as the "must-learn" language in light of China's new economic muscle, and students are reported to be flocking to language classes. Not so with Punjabi which is not a major world language, although it is spoken in parts of the Lower Mainland.

French is the only immersion program currently available in BC schools and it's popular, especially at the elementary level. Province-wide, French immersion enrolments have climbed to about 40,000 from 32,470 five years ago.

While a number of schools offer classes in other languages, there appears to be little interest in non-French immersion.

Kim Howland, president of the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils, said she's heard nothing from parents on the topic. "It isn't something that's been brought up by our members," she said.

Several districts offer classes in Mandarin and Punjabi, but no immersion. Surrey, for example, teaches Punjabi in a number of high schools while Vancouver has the only Mandarin bilingual program in the province, at Jamieson elementary, and offers a Punjabi class at Moberly elementary.

Both districts say there's been little pressure to provide more.

"Many parents are asking for more spaces in French immersion, especially early French immersion. [But] there's no huge pressure or calls or petitions asking for more spaces in Mandarin or Punjabi," Max Adrien, Vancouver district's language consultant, said in an interview.

The Mandarin program at Jamieson is for Grades 4-7 and, while it's not immersion, students who attend for all three years are generally comfortable in reading, writing and speaking the language by the time they graduate from the school, said principal Caroline Wallbridge. Students enrol for a variety of reasons, she added. Some have a particular interest in the Pacific Rim, some have family members who speak Mandarin and some expect it will help them with future jobs.

Kay Wang said she transferred her son from a private school to Jamieson to give him a link to a heritage she lost touch with growing up in Nova Scotia. Wang and her husband are both of Chinese descent and while he speaks Mandarin, she does not and so their home language is English.

"I had very limited access to my heritage . . . and I really wanted to give my children an opportunity that I missed," she said.

Yael Elron, who moved to Canada from Israel several years ago, has two children in the Mandarin bilingual program -- including a son who could speak only Hebrew when he arrived in Vancouver, but picked up English quickly and is now learning his third language.

"It's a huge opportunity and a great brain trainer. It opens their minds to so many things," she said, adding the fact that Chinese could be the dominant language in the future is another plus.

Richmond, with its large Asian population, offers Mandarin classes in several high schools but no immersion. The district considered offering immersion years ago but decided against it after realizing it would draw students with vastly different abilities -- Mandarin speakers, Cantonese speakers and unilingual anglophones.

District curriculum coordinator Tony Carrigan said he can understand Dosedall's push for more Mandarin but isn't sure about the need for Punjabi immersion, given that it is not a major world language. Rather, he said, why not promote the more widely spoken Hindi or Spanish?

Surprisingly, the school district that is a Canadian leader in offering language instruction is Edmonton. Mandarin bilingual programs are available in 12 schools and have a total enrolment of almost 2,000

students. Mandarin is the language of instruction 50 per cent of the time in those schools, compared with 20 per cent at Jamieson.

Dosdall, a former Langley superintendent, was the top school official in Edmonton before moving to Victoria. He was a strong proponent of school choice and the Liberals, in hiring him, hoped to bring that philosophy to BC.

While choice has expanded since then, the options here do not match those in Edmonton.

The Punjabi Language Education Association has been working for more than a dozen years to promote Punjabi instruction in BC public schools and has had pockets of success, especially in Surrey, Abbotsford and Merritt.

President Balwant Sanghera was heartened to hear that Dosdall is also promoting Punjabi language instruction, saying he has encountered several issues hampering further expansion. For example, he noted there are insufficient Punjabi learning resources with a Canadian context, and few BC-certified teachers who speak Punjabi.

Most of the students who study Punjabi are Indo-Canadians who want to learn the language to communicate with family members who don't speak English, but Sanghera said the courses offer opportunities for everyone.

"We live in a global village now, and India's economy is growing," he said, adding that anyone wanting to do business in the Punjab would benefit from speaking the language.

Kanwal Neel, a Punjabi-speaker who is also a long-time Richmond teacher, said benefits from speaking Punjabi can also be found closer to home. "Many employers in Surrey are wanting their employees to be bilingual, and when they say bilingual it's English and Punjabi because that's what their clientele is," he said.

"That's been a real boost for kids to learn Punjabi -- and not only the Punjabi kids, but also the Caucasian kids."

Gordon Comeau, chair of the Nicola-Similkameen board of education, said a Punjabi program began several years ago in Merritt in response to concerns from the Punjabi community that children were losing their ability to speak the language.

While it's been successful in his district, he said many districts wouldn't be able to offer such programs unless they received government funding. "In small communities you just don't have the numbers to drive the program."

BC schools are required to teach a second language from Grades 5 to 8. Most offer French, but they can also teach Arabic, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Punjabi, Spanish and a number of first nations languages.

Neel, who is on secondment to Simon Fraser University and helps Punjabi teachers gain BC certification, said Punjabi is a great language to study, but French is still a better choice for most students.

"I wouldn't go for Punjabi immersion but I would go for Punjabi as a heritage language or a second language. For French immersion, there's a lot more opportunity in terms of looking at where we are based in Canada."

Nancy Taylor agrees. As BC's spokeswoman for Canadian Parents for French, she says French continues to be the most popular and logical choice for the vast majority of students. Not only is it Canada's second official language, but French-language instruction is available in most communities so students who relocate can continue their studies uninterrupted.

As well, the federal government gives BC school districts about \$8 million a year to help pay for French-language programs, and that doesn't include money given to the Conseil Scolaire Francophone for French-speaking students.

Other language programs don't qualify for similar support.

Mandarin classes are wonderful for families with links to China -- or individuals seeking such links -- but French is a more logical choice for typical BC students, she said. Although more people speak Mandarin than any other language, they are mainly in one geographic location while French is spoken on five continents.

"And of course this is Canada, and Canada's two official languages are very much on people's minds."

Dave Thomas, an associate professor at Simon Fraser University who specializes in international business, says studying a foreign language -- any language -- provides valuable insight into other cultures. But immersion, in Mandarin, Punjabi or even French, is only advantageous for those who plan to work in a specific environment.

"If we're talking about being able to deliver services to people who speak those languages exclusively, then certainly that's an advantage. But I'm not sure how many of us are going to be in that situation," he said in an interview. In the case of French, there are benefits for those who want a career in federal politics or public service.

International business dealings generally involve a variety of countries, cultures and languages, Thomas noted. One could deal with a Mandarin-speaker one day, a Punjabi-speaker the next and a francophone after that, so learning one language well wouldn't be a significant benefit.

Furthermore, studies have shown that there are tremendous benefits from knowing enough words in a foreign language to exchange pleasantries, but few added benefits from speaking the language moderately well. More significant benefits accrue only when one is completely fluent, he added.

Although English is still considered the lingua franca of international business, many suggest Mandarin will eventually claim that title. China has been aggressively promoting the use of its language abroad since 2004 through such measures as the establishment of Confucius Institutes in cities around the world.

Vancouver has one at the BC Institute of Technology. There are three others -- in Moncton, NB, Sherbrooke, QC, and Calgary -- with a fifth soon to be set up in Edmonton and operated by the Edmonton public school district.

Sun education reporter: jsteffenhagen@png.canwest.com © The Vancouver Sun 2008

More about BC education: <http://communities.canada.com/vancouver/blogs/reportcard/default.aspx>



Lower Mainland school boards mull inclusion of Mandarin

Cheryl Chan, Vancouver Province

Published: Friday, September 26, 2008

Some kids in the Lower Mainland could be learning *pinyin* along with their ABCs should proposals for a bilingual Mandarin language program for primary school kids push through.

Parent group Mandarin for B.C. Schools has submitted two separate proposals to the North Vancouver and Vancouver school boards for a 50-50 Mandarin and English program for kindergarten and Grade 1 and 2 students.

"There is no Mandarin at this level in all of B.C. and that's really embarrassing because we are the gateway to the Pacific," said Pamela Drakos, who is spearheading the initiative in North Vancouver.

The multilingual Drakos, who has two young boys, aged 4 and 6, believes early exposure to languages benefits kids tremendously. "If you expose kids to multiple languages when they're young, they'll pick it up and they'll be very good at it."

Eileen Sue, who represents Vancouver parents, agreed. "At this early stage of childhood education, children should be offered English and something else -- it doesn't matter what."

Both parents chose Mandarin for heritage reasons and because it's the world's most spoken language.

Their quest took them to Edmonton, where a bilingual Mandarin program from kindergarten to Grade 7 has operated successfully for 26 years. About 2,000 students are registered in the program.

Drakos envisions a similar model with PE, arts, math and language arts taught in Mandarin and core courses -- English, history, science -- taught in English. The target demographic are kids who are already fluent in English, whose parents want them to learn Mandarin as a second language.

For more information, visit: www.mandarinforbcschools.org chchan@theprovince.com



The Punjabi Push

Thu, May 08 2008

By Lucy-Claire Saunders

South Asian Post

The South Asian community is rapidly growing and with it, the push to make Punjabi an official language. As British Columbia strengthens its economic ties to India's Punjab region, greater emphasis is being placed on Punjabi as more public schools offer classes and employers seek applicants with a working knowledge of one of the most spoken languages in the world.



Even politicians are grappling to learn the ancient Indo-Aryan language.

For over three years, Gian Singh Kotli has been teaching Vancouver Mayor Sam Sullivan how to speak Punjabi.

"Before his Mayoral election, Sam Sullivan expressed his desire to learn Punjabi to get closer to the Punjabi community," said Kotli. "His friends introduced me as a suitable teacher and so I accepted it as a gesture of service to the community."

Kotli, who moved to B.C. 17 years ago, is a certified translator by the Society of Translators and Interpreters of British Columbia, and a freelance journalist with a regional Indo-Canadian weekly newspaper.

He has spent numerous days reading, writing and speaking Punjabi with Mayor Sullivan.

"Sam Sullivan is very intelligent and a quick learner," he said. "There is no special technique to teaching a language. I only make the subject interesting by sharing the richness of the Punjabi language by specially referring to the hymns of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh saint-poets contained in the Sikh Scripture."

In Canada, there are close to 400,000 people whose mother tongue is Punjabi. With the latest census showing a 35 per cent increase in Punjabi speakers since 2001, the language is set to become the fourth largest spoken language in Canada.

As the community grows, B.C. is in a unique position to foster strong economic links with Punjab. Abbotsford MLA Michael de Jong has repeatedly expressed his intent to expand relations between the two regions, even pushing for direct flights between Amritsar and Abbotsford, where Punjabi is the second most spoken language.

Given the strong historic immigration connection, over the years there has been a greater emphasis placed on the Punjab region despite the fact that Canada conducts most of its trade with the south of India, where businesses use English and Hindi.

Sadhu Binning, a professor of Punjabi at the University of B.C. says that the language has not been given enough credence and believes that there is a vast source of untapped economic opportunities B.C. can harness if its starts laying the groundwork today.

"Punjabis live in 125 countries around the world. They have a lot of economic power," he said. "Yes, the South of India is the hub of business in India, but if in the next few years peace returns to the region, North India will return to its glory that it had in the older days."

In order to position itself for the economic splendor that lies ahead, Binning says the time has come for the Canadian government to seriously consider making Punjabi an official language.

"We feel that the demographics of Canada are changing now so the government should change the two-language policy," he said. "In B.C., the government has accepted Punjabi and we're hoping the federal government follows suit."

Currently, Canada only recognizes English and French as its two official languages.

In 2005-2006, 411 groups from minority communities received \$37.4 million under the Official Languages Support Program. Of these 411 groups, 368 were from francophone communities outside Quebec, while 43 groups were from anglophone communities inside Quebec, according to the Ministry of Canadian Heritage.

Currently, Canadian Heritage's Multiculturalism Program does not provide funding for heritage language projects.

In B.C., however, Punjabi has been considered an official second language since 1994, along with French, Spanish, German, Japanese and Mandarin Chinese.

Punjabi is taught at the University of B.C., Simon Fraser University, University of Fraser Valley, Kwantlen University and many elementary and secondary schools in Metro Vancouver.

On April 26, the Centre for India and South Asia Research at UBC hosted the first conference on modern Punjabi literature in English. The academic and literary seminar brought together writers, students, and scholars to consider Punjabi literature as a North American and world literature.

Authors and professors from around North America presented their academic papers in English on literature in Punjabi with a special focus on diaspora literature.

In Surrey alone there are close to 1,000 students taking Punjabi classes, said Balwant Sanghera, the chair of the Punjabi Language Education Association (PLEA).

Students in Grades Five through Eight are required to take a second language, which does not have to be French.

The incentives for students to learn Punjabi range from learning about another culture, or their own in many cases, to local economic rewards.

In Surrey there are close to 2,000 posted jobs where Punjabi is listed as an asset. As the Punjabi population increases, so does the consumer market, with businesses looking for bilingual workers, said Sanghera.

Learning Punjabi instead of French can offer greater financial rewards to those living in places like Surrey or Abbotsford. "The reality is if you live in Surrey, there are no jobs at the local level that require French," said Binning. "But if you speak Punjabi, you will get a job right away."

The interest in Punjabi continues to swell as more students and businessmen take classes and politicians court the South Asian community by giving speeches in Punjabi and flouting their knowledge of Sikh culture.

"The community is really pleased because we consider these politicians as good role models," said Sanghera. "We tell our children, 'Look, if Sam Sullivan can learn Punjabi, why can't you?'"

David Hurford, a spokesperson for Mayor Sullivan says while his boss only has time to meet with his Punjabi tutor once or twice a month, he often finds Sullivan practicing in his spare time.

"There are times when I see him in his office when he gets a spare moment, he'll pick up his book and I'll hear him practicing ten minute blurbs here or there." Sullivan feels learning a language is the ultimate sign of respect, added Hurford.

Last year, Kotli gave Sullivan a translation of the holy Sikh Scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, during the annual Vaisakhi Festival at the Gurdwara Khalsa Diwan Society Vancouver. The Mayor had made a special request in an effort to learn more about the Sikh community.

The mayor, who also speaks French and Italian, and reads the Chinese newspaper every morning, is the perfect representative of the city, said Hurford.

"It shows just how diverse Vancouver is when we have a mayor who is able to communicate in those different languages," he said.

See:

http://www.southasianpost.com/portal2/c1ee8c4419bf54a30119c97f92ce00f8_The_Punjabi_Push.do.html



Mandarin immersion worth exploring

[Burnaby Newsleader](#) - Imagine if you will that the year is 2017 and the Burnaby school district succeeded several years ago at implementing a Mandarin immersion program. What would that program look like?

If it sounds like a difficult exercise, it shouldn't be. All you really need to do is look at how similar programs around North America have grown.

This month, two schools in cities neighbouring San Jose marked significant milestones. For one, it was the middle school graduation of the first class of Mandarin immersion students. For the other, it was the end of a six-year battle to see the establishment of a similar immersion program.

While the two California schools may be miles from Burnaby, the experiences they've gone through in establishing the immersion program are worth studying at a time when Burnaby's school district is striking a committee to explore the idea of Mandarin immersion here.

The school in Cupertino was considered a pioneer a decade ago when it became one of the first in the country to introduce Mandarin immersion.

But at the time, the program was not without its skeptics, including school officials who worried whether there would be enough interest to sustain the program.

That proved untrue, and what started with a single kindergarten class of 20, now sees two new classes enter the program each year and there are more than 100 students on the wait list.

In Palo Alto, opponents argued the program would crowd neighbourhood schools and cater to a small minority. That's similar to concerns voiced here, as some complain Mandarin immersion is being pushed by Chinese parents and it should be the responsibility of those parents to teach Mandarin at home rather than in taxpayer-funded schools.

There may be some validity to that, but it overlooks the fact Greater Vancouver is home to second- and third-generation Chinese-Canadians, and for those families, English is often spoken ahead of Mandarin – if, in fact, that is the dialect they speak.

That certainly was the case with parents of children enrolled in Cupertino. One parent, who was the child of immigrants from Taiwan, understood early that learning Chinese was to be avoided if the family was going to fit in (in America). But now he's proud to have two children who are bilingual and bi-literate.

As for the concern – both there and here – that such a program would only attract students of Chinese ancestry, while most of the children enrolled in Cupertino's program are Chinese-American, there's a growing interest from other ethnic groups. Students with Vietnamese, Japanese, Korean, Hispanic, Malaysian and Anglo-Saxon ancestries are also enrolled in Mandarin immersion.

Why? Because a growing number of people believe the more languages one speaks, the better the opportunities they'll enjoy in the world, especially as technology further reduces the distances between countries.

That rationale should sound familiar – it's the same one used by parents enrolling their children in French immersion.

And for those still doubtful about whether such a program would cater only to those whose mother tongue is Mandarin, Burnaby could always do what the Vancouver School Board did at Dr. Annie B. Jamieson elementary and mandate that students entering this region's only Mandarin bilingual program must already be fluent in English (both reading and writing) and not have Chinese literacy skills.

There is good reason to think about introducing a Mandarin immersion program in Burnaby, especially when one considers the growth in the Chinese economy. If we didn't expect that growth to continue in the future, then why have so many politicians and business leaders spent so much time lately trying to establish business ties in China and Taiwan. Amongst them is Burnaby Mayor Derek Corrigan who returns from the region tomorrow.

And given that, it makes sense that knowing Mandarin will soon be as important as knowing English and French for those looking to succeed.



Parents to ask BC school district to consider Mandarin immersion

Friday, June 26, 2009

[CBC News](#)

A group of parents in Richmond, BC, will be taking a proposal for Mandarin immersion to the school board on June 29.

Richmond is a predominantly Chinese Vancouver suburb, where more than half the population speaks a Chinese dialect.

The parents, who call themselves Mandarin for BC Schools, Richmond Committee, want the board to consider a program that is accessible to all students, no matter what their ethnic or linguistic background.

If successful, it would be the first school district in British Columbia to offer a Mandarin immersion program, though Edmonton and San Francisco offer similar programs.

Richmond school board chair Linda McPhail said it's an intriguing idea but admitted she has reservations.

She said she doesn't know how many people would be interested in the program, and wondered how the details would come together.

"Can you get teachers? It's quite problematic across the province for specialist teachers, especially in French immersion; we've been dealing with this for the last couple of years. So can you get Mandarin immersion teachers? What's the curriculum? What are the resources? Are they available?"

According to the group's proposal, "Richmond children will be most successful if they have the ability to communicate and understand the fellow citizens of our city."

Mandarin is the most spoken language in the world. The proposal argues early Mandarin education makes sense as it is one of the most challenging languages to learn and children have an easier time learning languages when they are young.

The group is hoping for the program to begin in September 2010, with both kindergarten and Grade 1 admissions.

The program would "include the requisite exposure to French," and children will continue to learn English.

Sarah Dakin, a non-Mandarin-speaking parent in Richmond, would consider enrolling her children if the proposal is implemented.

"I think if they have a cultural understanding of the Chinese, I think it would help them with colleagues at work, or neighbours down the street," Dakin said about her children, Tristan and Liam Rendell.

"I want to learn [Mandarin], it would be nice for me to learn another language," said Tristan.

Patrick Kam told CBC News he hopes the program is in place in time for his now one-year-old daughter to start.

"Like my parents who immigrated to Canada to give us a better life, who knows if the tables might turn? We might immigrate back to Asia to give her a better opportunity, right?"

Critics of the proposal, like Glen Heredia, asked where the resources would come from.

Heredia has been campaigning against the proposal by writing letters to the editor in local newspapers.

"Tax money should go to fund everything equally, and not just a certain section of society or particular community," he said.

The proposal notes that a Mandarin program would be ineligible for government funding, so a "not-for-profit parent group" would fundraise to support the program.



Parents lobbying for Mandarin immersion must wait another year at least

Naoibh O'Connor, Vancouver Courier

Published: Tuesday, September 22, 2009

Susan Duffy's five-year-old daughter Georgia takes a Mandarin class at Kerrisdale community centre. Charlotte, her seven-year-old, takes a class through Pui Ying Christian Services Society after school hours.

But Duffy dreams of the day Vancouver children like her two girls can enrol in a public school kindergarten-to-Grade 12 Mandarin immersion program. That day isn't here yet, but Vancouver committee members of BC Parents for Mandarin Immersion, including Duffy, are optimistic that dream will translate into reality. They approached the Vancouver School Board in May 2008. In February, board trustees endorsed the idea, approving, in principle, Mandarin immersion's implementation for September 2010. But it's uncertain whether it will happen that soon.

District staff indicated more information is needed about the details of the proposal, including cost, at an education and student services committee meeting last week. The school board is also struggling with financial problems and the financial and space problems of running universal all-day kindergarten.

A follow-up report is expected to be brought before committee members before Christmas, which might include enough information for trustees to make a decision. Vision Vancouver board chair Patti Bacchus concedes Mandarin immersion as early as the next school year isn't a sure thing, but it's also not out of the question. She wants the outstanding questions resolved as soon as possible so parents can start planning for a year from now.

"I would like to see [Mandarin immersion] happen and most of the board members, if not all, would like to see it," she said. "We have funding questions. There will be some costs associated with setting up a new program-different resources, curriculum materials-and as we expand it through the grades that will continue. That's a concern at a time where we're looking at potentially huge funding shortfalls. Can we afford to be bringing on a new program if we can't afford to run the ones we have?" Duffy isn't discouraged.

"I understand September 2010 is still a date they're working towards. [The committee] was very positive despite the budgetary constraints and they're working towards a firm deadline by Christmas," she said. "The two big issues are budget and facilities. The third issue is curriculum and teachers, but everybody thinks those are workable issues."

Duffy, who adopted her daughters from China, maintains Mandarin immersion would attract students back from private schools, lure new kids into the public system and help with the district's declining enrolment problem. Jamieson elementary has a small late-entry Mandarin immersion program that runs from Grades 4 to 7, but advocates favour a program that begins in kindergarten and continues through to graduation with students obtaining oral and written fluency in English and Mandarin.

"The public school system is the perfect place to do this because it's access for everybody," Duffy says, adding, "[Mandarin] is a language that is growing in use around the world." Typically, one third of those enrolling in Mandarin immersion are non-Asian, one third come from homes where one parent is Asian and a final third come from homes where both parents' heritage is Asian, according to Duffy.

She said BC Parents for Mandarin Immersion is committed to ensuring the option is available in Vancouver. "We are a group of people that want to work with the school board," she said. "We feel this is important and the best way to do this is by helping."

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Mandarin bilingual education will deliver dual benefits for English, Mandarin speakers

Both groups learn about Chinese culture -- which builds tolerance -- and dual-language learners show improved English test scores later

By Ryuko Kubota, Special to the Sun - February 2, 2010



Vancouver Sun Files / Samuel Lu, 11, and Scott Robertson, 9, brush up on the Mandarin dialect at Dr. Annie B. Jamieson elementary school in Vancouver. The school board offers this bilingual learning as a two-way immersion (dual language) program.

Photograph by: Glenn Baglo, Special to the Sun

Communicating in a new language broadens our experiences, opportunities and world view. Children in Vancouver have the chance to do this by participating in an innovative Mandarin bilingual program. Kudos to the Vancouver school board (VSB) for their vision in choosing this rising global language and vibrant local language for the program. While this long-awaited decision is welcome, questions remain whether it is implemented effectively to fulfil the mission of VSB.

Decision-making about this new language program must be informed by research evidence and examples of best practices. Unfortunately, community members are not always privy to this information -- and myths, rather than evidence, often end up navigating the debates. Accurate knowledge of research and practice not only ensures the quality of the program, but it also transforms the century-old unequal relations of power between those who are fluent in English and those who are not.

In light of this, recent arguments supporting the exclusion of Mandarin-speaking newcomer students from the proposed Mandarin-English bilingual program should be carefully reexamined.

Take the immersion myth, for example. This myth goes, "Non-English-speaking immigrant children can most effectively learn English by being immersed in an English-only environment, just like anglophone students learn French in French immersion." This assumption leads to the argument that the Mandarin bilingual program should cater only to students who are fluent in English.

Let me begin with the second part of this myth about French immersion. One should not conflate learning a language as enrichment in a context where the target language is neither a dominant language nor a threat to one's mother tongue (e. g., French in B.C.) with learning a dominant language as immigrants who have no choice but to learn it at the cost of their mother tongue (i.e. English in BC).

In the former case, students have limited exposure to the language outside of the classroom and thus a large amount of exposure in the classroom is helpful. Research on learning English as a foreign language in Spain corroborates this point. However, in the latter case, the so-called maximum exposure hypothesis does not hold.

In fact, this hypothesis is consistently rejected by research. Evidence shows that mother-tongue support through bilingual education positively influences immigrant children's acquisition of English and academic performance.

Conversely, English immersion approaches are not superior to bilingual approaches in terms of English acquisition in school contexts. This is because our capacity to use two or more languages is connected at the underlying cognitive level and this connection allows transferring what was learned in one language to another when effective bilingual instruction is provided.

The 27-year-old Mandarin Bilingual Program in Edmonton and French immersion evidence this. So do growing Two-Way Immersion (Dual Language) programs in the U.S., in which both English-speaking students and Mandarin-speaking students with limited English proficiency learn academic subjects collaboratively in both languages.

A parent in a Mandarin-English Two-Way Immersion program in North Carolina recently wrote in her e-mail that by the time the dual language cohort reaches middle school, their English test scores surpass non-dual-language peers' and that "non-Chinese-speaking parents are very pleased with how their children are becoming very comfortable orally and literate in Chinese." This experience is consistent with research evidence.

Two-Way Immersion should work perfectly in Vancouver, where an equal split between English speakers and Mandarin speakers can easily be obtained.

The same parent comments: "Aside from the clear linguistic benefits of reinforcing language learning by pairing heritage and non-heritage students, the cultural benefits have been considerable."

Because students as well as parents work collaboratively, they bond in a unique way, affirming each other's culture, language, and identity.

This bonding challenges the ideology that underlies the oft-heard comment: "But lots of immigrants learned English perfectly by being immersed in it." True, some immigrants with strong cognitive skills made quick strides in this fashion. Many others, however, have wasted their great potential in monolingual education.

Moreover, such a comment fails to consider the tremendous psychological cost that immigrants had to pay. Lasting anti-Asian racism caused segregation followed by assimilation into a linguistic melting pot, compelling immigrants to abandon their heritage language in order to speak like anglophones. To teach Mandarin only for anglophone children and only English for newcomer students is to repeat the same old history.

A program that supports heritage-language development transforms this troubling past and embraces diversity, collaboration, and mutual understanding among students as well as parents. These values are exactly what VSB promotes in its mission.

Creating a new program is a challenge, especially in a tight budget. Yet, a bilingual program does not require millions of dollars. Two-Way Immersion is especially cost effective; additional instruction in English as a second language through withdrawal of students is unnecessary, because the immersion teacher modifies instruction knowing that there are always second-language learners in the classroom.

A major goal of learning a new language is to interact and collaborate with people across borders to understand who they are. The ideal model for Mandarin bilingual program consistent with the VSB mission would be the one that encourages students to become new global and local citizens as change agents rather than individuals with perpetual values.

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