

The Role of Communication and Culture in Building and Sustaining Successful Mandarin Immersion Programs

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XinXing Program Description

- Early total, one-way foreign language immersion
- Program began in 2007
- Strand program within Eisenhower Elementary:
 - Mandarin immersion K-6 (2 classrooms per grade; 12 native speaker Chinese teachers, 4 native speaker teaching assistants, 2 visiting teachers from China)
 - Community school K-6 (2-3 classrooms per grade)
- Immersion continuation program grades 7-9 (XinXing@West Jr High) + grades 10-12 (XinXing@HHS starting fall 2017)



XinXing Program Coordinator: Background and Roles

- PhD in French linguistics, specializing in French-American cross-cultural communication
- Worked with XinXing program from conceptual phase through implementation (ongoing)
- Responsibilities:
 - Facilitate communication (parents, staff, administration, community)
 - Staffing and Staff development
 - Program / curriculum development / adapting to new district initiatives



Communication Challenges Facing Mandarin Immersion Programs

- ◊ Teacher-Student
- ◊ Teacher-Parent
- ◊ Among colleagues
- ◊ Administration (School or District)
- ◊ Community



Teacher-Student Communication

Classroom context and instruction



Instructional Approaches: Finding the Right Balance

U.S.

- Student-centered
- Teacher as facilitator
- Students question; critical thinking
- Focus on individual
- Differentiation/grouping within classroom

China

- Teacher-centered
- Teacher as authority/expert
- Students listen, repeat
- Focus on collective
- Whole-class instruction

Instructional Approaches: Finding the Right Balance

U.S.

- Project-based / experiential learning
- Creativity and self-expression
- Positive reinforcement; self-esteem
- Error correction: Recast
- Pride in work

China

- Test-oriented
- Follow model
- Critical feedback
- Error correction: Focus on accuracy and precision
- Modesty




Staff Development

- Provide opportunities to observe experienced teachers (English and immersion teachers):
Observe with an expert to guide the observation;
try a new strategy, with an experienced teacher observing
- Mentor teachers (one Chinese/one English-side, if possible); they can learn from each other

The graphic features a blue background with a pattern of overlapping squares. At the top, there are stylized white clouds and a large yellow sun. A light blue pen is positioned horizontally across the middle. Below the pen, a dark blue rounded rectangle contains the text "Teacher-Parent Communication" in white. The bottom of the graphic is a light blue rounded rectangle.

Teacher-Parent Communication



Informing Parents/Students on Academic Progress

- Parent-teacher conferences
 - Cross-cultural differences in purpose and process
 - Need for staff development (observation, practice)
- Confidentiality / Data privacy



Cross-Cultural Challenges in Communicating with Parents

- In Chinese culture: Teacher is the authority and expert on what is best for the child. Academic progress is primary concern
- In American culture: Parent is the authority and expert on what is best for the child. Social and academic progress are equally important
- Need to work in partnership



Parental/Societal Expectations for Academic Rigor

- Focus on test scores and pressure to perform is much stronger in Chinese educational system
- Helping students to meet academic expectations:
The challenge of differentiation
 - The individual vs. the collective
 - Academic development vs. social development
 - Students with special needs



Parent Communication Tools

- Teachers' weekly newsletters, teacher/class websites and calendars, email (some teachers prefer daily emails to parents), notes home, phone, conferences
- Classroom visits: Invite parents in to see students in action



Parent Communication Tools

- Program updates from coordinator, principal, district
 - Parents view immersion (especially in a character-based language) as an opportunity, but also as a risk. Need reassurance that they have made a good choice
- Use multiple communication formats: Electronic newsletter (from administration, teacher, parent group), parent meetings, website



Parent Communication Tools

- ◊ Share information on what to expect at strategic points in the program
 - ◊ Entering K
 - ◊ Primary grades (1-2)
 - ◊ English program in grades 3-4
 - ◊ Shift to 50-50 in grades 5-6]
 - ◊ Program model for middle/high school (Vision for where students will be by end of grade 12)



Communicating with Colleagues

Developing effective relationships



Cross-Cultural Challenges in Building Relationships with Colleagues

- Chinese teachers may be reluctant to ask for help
- The principal: Boss or friend?
- Other school leaders: Where do they fit in the hierarchy?
- Hierarchy, status, role and competition: The impact on teaming and collaboration



Cross-Cultural Challenges in Building Relationships with Colleagues

- Challenge of collaboration/teamwork for teachers from a culture that is hierarchical
- Importance of “face” / reluctance to say “no”
- Direct and explicit communication
 - Say what you mean; words are very important
- Indirect and implicit communication
 - What you don’t say is more important than what you do say; read between the lines; interpret



Cross-Cultural Challenges in Building Relationships with Staff

- Principals: Invite / Assign teachers rather than asking for volunteers to take on leadership roles
- Recognize the importance of modesty in Chinese culture
- Encourage Chinese teachers to share their opinions during staff meetings; will need to learn how to participate in a team in which all participants have an equal role



Cross-Cultural Challenges in Building Relationships with Staff

- Build cross-cultural bridge in both directions between Chinese teachers and English-side teachers
- Provide staff development for English-side teachers so that they can learn about:
 - Cross-cultural differences
 - Immersion education; sometimes the program needs are different

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**Communicating with District
Administration and the Community**



Communication with District Administration

- Communicate that immersion programs have some needs that are different. It is almost always more complicated.
 - Teacher licensure
 - Immigration issues
 - Development, translation and adaptation of curricular materials
 - Special education services and Gifted-Talented services
 - Assessment (Chinese proficiency; MCA/MAP; CoGAT)
 - Balancing same and different staff development needs



Communication with the Community

- Keep the community informed of events, successes, program planning updates
 - District website newsfeeds, pictures
 - District Facebook page / Twitter feed



Enjoy the journey!
We are always learning...

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