

## AN EMERGING FIELD: CHINESE IMMERSION PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

### AUTHORS

**Shuhan C. Wang**

Project Director,  
CELIN@Asia Society

**Robin Harvey**

Clinical Associate Professor  
of TESOL, Bilingual  
Education and World  
Language Education,  
New York University

**Joy Kreeft Peyton**

Senior Project Associate,  
CELIN@Asia Society

### CELIN BRIEF SERIES EDITORS

**Shuhan C. Wang, Ph.D.**

Project Director, CELIN

**Joy Kreeft Peyton, Ph.D.**

Senior Project Associate,  
CELIN

### CITATION

Wang, S.C., Harvey, R., & Peyton, J.K. (2021). An Emerging Field: Chinese Immersion Preschool Education. In S.C. Wang & J.K. Peyton (Eds.), *CELIN Briefs Series*. New York, NY: Asia Society.

CELIN Briefs are developed by the Chinese Early Language and Immersion Network under the China Learning Initiatives at Asia Society.

### INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

In response to various requests from preschool programs in the United States, CELIN (Chinese Early Language and Immersion Network) at Asia Society organized the *CELIN at Asia Society Chinese Immersion Preschool Education Meeting* in New York City, NY, in February, 2020. Invited participants in this exploratory meeting included educators, researchers, and state-level leaders in early learning education and Chinese dual language immersion preschool programs, and organizations supporting early Chinese language learning and assessment. (See the list of participants in the Appendix.)

The meeting sought to find answers to the following questions:

1. Who are the providers of and key players in Chinese immersion preschool education in 2020–2021? What are the successes and common issues, needs, and challenges that they face?
2. What does a quality Chinese immersion preschool look like?
3. What does research inform us about the role and value of preschool education? How does Chinese immersion preschool education contribute to a child's growth, development in bilingualism and biliteracy, and school achievement over time?

After this introduction, Section 2 describes how preschool education and Chinese immersion preschool are defined in this Brief.

Section 3 provides preliminary answers to Question 1, identifying the key players in this emerging field and their knowledge bases, successes, and common challenges. Section 4 answers Question 2 by following a four-year-old girl, Cleo, as she attends a typical day in her Chinese immersion preschool. Section 5 addresses Question 3 and explains research findings about the benefits of preschool in general and additive language immersion preschool education in particular. A case is made for why Chinese immersion preschools contribute to children's development of bilingualism and biliteracy in Chinese and English, while laying the foundation for cognitive skills and school achievement in later years. Section 6 provides a rationale for the importance of studying Chinese language and culture and makes recommendations for further building the field. Section 7 concludes the Brief.

This Brief is the first of a trilogy of papers that seek to build this emerging field. A companion Brief, *Surveying Chinese Immersion Preschool Programs and Teachers in the United States: 2020–2021* (Wang & Wong, 2021) reports on and discusses the results of two national surveys -- of Chinese immersion preschool programs and of teachers and staff working in these programs. The last one is a white paper, *A Blueprint for Building and Sustaining Chinese Immersion Preschool Education in the United States*. Together, these documents form the baseline data for the emerging field in 2021.

### DEFINING PRESCHOOL AND CHINESE IMMERSION EDUCATION

Early childhood spans the time from birth through age eight ([The Center for High Impact](#)

This is a period in which a child goes through the fastest growth and development in physical, social-emotional, linguistic, cultural, and cognitive domains, among others. This Brief focuses on [\*preschool programs that are organized and operated by professionally trained adults and in which learning is combined with play\*](#). By this definition, we focus on [\*preschool programs\*](#), that serve children between the ages of 3 and 5 years old, until they are ready to enter kindergarten or elementary school, depending on their local educational context and requirements. We exclude nursery centers, private home care centers, and day care centers that provide custodial care to infants and toddlers.

We take a comprehensive view of a variety of preschool programs that may be funded by local, state, or federal entities—private, parochial or faith-based, community-based, company-subsidized, and other types of programs. We invite readers to ponder the following question while reading this Brief: *How can we offer equitable learning opportunities for all children, particularly in programs designed with additive language and enrichment as a goal?*

Specifically, this Brief focuses on Chinese preschool programs that spend at least half of instructional time in Chinese, which aligns with the definition of [\*language immersion\*](#) provided by Fortune and Tedick (2003). Ideally, a language immersion preschool would consider using Chinese 100% of the time, with a minimum of 50% of that time using Chinese as a medium of instruction and interaction in addition to using English. This arrangement ensures that children in the program will develop oral language proficiency and the groundwork for literacy in Chinese for later years. This strong foundation for language development in Chinese also helps expand and strengthen the foundation in English (or the home language, if it is other than English) (Cummins, 2000). In a well-designed and well-implemented preschool immersion program, parents do not need to worry about their children's development in English. Research has consistently shown that the majority of children in the immersion program will perform in English at or above grade level by grade 4 or 5, despite the fact that they only spend half, or less, of their time learning in

English (Collier & Thomas, 2018; Steele et al., 2017; Thomas & Collier, 2017). Students in an immersion program will become bilinguals/multilinguals who will enjoy many additional benefits that their English-only peers do not. This point is elaborated in Section 5.

It is likely that not all immersion programs can offer total (100%) immersion in the target language. In a preschool setting, language allocation can take a number of forms. Many Pre-K to grade 5 programs start with total immersion (100% in Chinese) or 90-10 partial immersion (90% in Chinese, 10% in English) and then move to 80-20, 70-30, 60-40, and 50-50 instructional time as students move from grade to grade. Some preschools start with 50-50 from the very beginning. The many schools profiled in the [\*CELIN Program Profiles\*](#) illustrate these immersion options. The decision to adopt a particular time-allocation model is based on the local context and depends on schedules, resources, availability of teaching staff, and community/parent demands, among other factors.

In this Brief, we include all types of Chinese immersion or dual language immersion programs serving students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, who may come from a home in which Chinese, English, or a language other than English is spoken. Readers may wish to learn more about the various types of immersion or dual language models with different policy orientations, students served, and funding sources.<sup>1</sup>

## CHINESE IMMERSION PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES, 2020–2021

As mentioned in the Introduction, in February 2020, CELIN held a meeting in New York City with leaders of the early Chinese education schools, universities, and state initiatives. This was the first step toward building collaborations with all entities involved in this arena, so we can develop a knowledge base of who the major players are in the field.

What emerged from these discussions was that in 2020, there were two major groups of players in the United

States, situated in the West and the East Coasts. The West Coast group was in the Bay Area in Northern California. Since 2018, the Chinese American International School (CAIS) and its partner schools have held the annual Early Childhood Chinese Immersion Forum (ECCIF), which has grown substantially over the years. Programs and teachers have been engaged in a rigorous exchange of information, strategies, and resources. The CELIN meeting at Asia Society was the first of its kind on the East Coast. As a result of this meeting, starting in 2021, the ECCIF and CELIN decided to combine forces to hold a national forum on Chinese early childhood immersion education.

The CELIN meeting participants described their programs from various vantage points: Chinese immersion in the early grades, university teacher education programs focused on early childhood and additive bilingual education, and efforts of state departments of education to develop early childhood programs. Participants and their program highlights are listed in the Appendix. The key themes that emerged from the discussion are described here.

## CHINESE IMMERSION PRESCHOOLS

During the meeting, participants agreed that Chinese immersion in early childhood education is emerging, yet not much about it is documented or studied. Based on the information shared, a number of new schools have opened, and some existing schools have expanded their program to include classes for young children, starting at age 2. Themes of the discussion include school growth; school vision and mission; the immersion model adopted; curriculum, instructional approaches, and assessments used; successes they have seen; and challenges they face.

### *School Growth*

The schools and new departments focused on learning in the early years have grown significantly since their opening, often doubling in student enrollment and increasing the number of teachers. For example, a number of new schools focused on early childhood education have opened

(e.g., Morningside PlayCare) or plan to open (e.g., China Institute Immersion Preschool) or have added Chinese to their offerings (e.g., Science, Language & Arts International School). Some existing schools have expanded their program to include classes for younger children, starting at age 2.

### *School Vision and Mission*

The school and program visions and missions focus on engagement in learning and being effective world citizens. For example:

- Make learning another language a daily practice that transforms the ways that students see and think about the world (Avenues: The World School)
- Provide a well-rounded early childhood education that will also build a solid foundation for children to master the Chinese language and build strong connections with Chinese culture as the beginning of a life-long endeavor (China Institute Immersion Preschool)
- Inspire and empower learners to embrace Chinese, become their best selves, and contribute to a better world (Chinese American International School, CAIS)
- Develop intellectually curious and flexible thinkers with exemplary character, multicultural perspectives, and linguistic abilities to become meaningful global contributors (HudsonWay Immersion School)
- Cultivate the language genius, open-mindedness, and wonder-filled hearts of young children by providing nurturing care and immersing them in Mandarin (Morningside Playcare)
- Provide an innovative, engaging, multilingual, multicultural education that inspires and empowers students to take mindful action for equity and the environment, making a positive impact on the world (Pine Street School)

- Immerse students in a school culture designed to develop collaborative, critical thinkers (Science, Language & Arts International School)
- Deliver an enriching and engaging environment that focuses on inquiry-based learning, multilingual and multicultural education, and development of the whole child, which are essential to navigating an increasingly complex world (Shu Ren International School)
- Inspire and prepare young people to create a better world by challenging them to reach their full potential in a nurturing Chinese/English educational environment. Create an enthusiastic and diverse community of learners who are grounded in intercultural understanding and respect and who are confident in their abilities to read, write, and think in both Chinese and English (Washington Yu Ying Public Charter School)

### ***Immersion Model Used***

Some schools have in place a total immersion model, with 90–100% Mandarin immersion in pre-K and kindergarten that integrates the arts, STEM, physical movement, music, and literacy; then students transition to a 50–50 model in later grades. The language allotment and rate of transition is a local decision, depending on curriculum, staffing, resources, and the community’s interests. Some programs move more gradually from total immersion to 90% of the day in Chinese in kindergarten and first grade, to 80% of the day in Mandarin in the next grades, and to 50–50 by grades 4 and 5. Stand-alone preschool programs often teach exclusively in the target language (e.g., Morningside PlayCare). See the Program Highlights (Appendix) for examples.

### ***Curriculum and Instructional Approaches***

Just as program models vary in time spent in Chinese language immersion, curricula and instructional approaches vary across schools. Some schools create their own curriculum, while some use the Montessori method. One school

uses the Nature Science curriculum, inspired by Waldorf Education.

Other schools follow the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (IBPYP) model of learning—a rigorous, inquiry-based, transdisciplinary framework that is powered by a child’s natural curiosity. Students are immersed in a language-rich, inquiry-based, and play-based learning environment that fosters their critical thinking and creativity skills and harnesses the power of curiosity to drive their experiences. Students learn in units of inquiry, a transdisciplinary approach to understanding the world around them.

Other instructional approaches mentioned include

- A focus on Chinese culture, using authentic materials
- Child-centered, student-led learning
- Theme-based learning, with integrated thematic units
- Topic-focused learning
- Integrated language, science, math, and the arts
- An advanced and evidence-based approach to math instruction
- A strong emphasis on science
- Precision observational drawing skills (executive functioning)
- Play-based learning
- Critical thinking, reasoning, and process-oriented thinking
- Social-emotional learning, with a focus on creativity, discussion, and empathy
- Differentiated instruction

### ***Teachers***

Teachers may be specialists in teaching in one language or may teach across languages. Students may have one teacher for the Chinese portion of the day and another



teacher for the English portion. In this model, the teacher who conducts instruction in Mandarin speaks Mandarin to the students (e.g., reads stories; sings songs; and gives directions, praise, and encouragement in Mandarin). The English teacher does the same things in English. Chinese and English language instruction may occur on the same day (e.g., morning Chinese, afternoon English) or may be offered on alternate days (Monday Chinese, Tuesday English, etc.) or alternate weeks. While strict separation of languages is the norm in some schools, others may permit more fluidity in language use, as some home language use allows students to call on all of their cognitive resources.

### ***Activities Beyond the Curriculum***

In addition, some programs include the following in the school day or week:

- Assemblies, with students (as young as 3 and 4 years old) going on stage and sharing in Mandarin
- Field trips
- Nature explorations
- Cross-country collaborations, in which students collaborate in different ways with students in another country to complete a project
- Yoga and other physical activities

### ***Assessments***

Schools use different assessments, depending on their focus and goals. One school uses the CLOCK assessment (Classroom Language Observation Checklist Kit, [available on the STARTALK website](#)). Other schools have developed their own tools for assessing listening and speaking. For example, Washington Yu Ying Public Charter School has developed and has been using its *own Yu Ying Oral Language Assessment*. [Avant Assessment](#) is working with CELIN to develop a classroom observation protocol for documenting children's Chinese language development.

### ***Successes***

Immersion schools have experienced a variety of successes, including

- Students who are able to communicate well in Mandarin at a young age; e.g., by age 4, some students are able to communicate using complete sentences, engage in dialogue, retell a story, and talk about their personal life; some students perform 3-4 levels above their age on specific assessments.
- Increased student attendance and engagement.
- Family engagement and commitment to their children being fluent in Chinese for the future.
- English and Chinese teachers collaborating to develop and implement an integrated curriculum, focused on emergent literacy in Chinese and English.
- A long waiting list of students whose parents want them to attend the school.

### ***Challenges***

At the same time, schools are experiencing a variety of challenges, including

- Opening a new school that doesn't have a track record in the community and attracting parents and students.
- Having limited physical space for classes and other activities.
- Bridging Chinese and English literacy, while honoring the uniqueness of both languages.
- Balancing content and language learning (e.g., vocabulary that students need to know for a particular content area and topic).
- Having reading materials in Mandarin that meet students' cognitive and language levels.
- Creating or accessing appropriate assessment tools; documenting students' oral language proficiency; and helping students maintain their Mandarin proficiency when they move from 100% Mandarin immersion in preschool to 50/50 in kindergarten or later.

- Finding, recruiting, and training Mandarin teachers and interns with strong knowledge of instructional approaches and culture.
- Preparing Mandarin teachers from mainland China to work effectively with a diverse group of students in the United States (with different backgrounds, religions, and family structures); securing visas for teachers.
- Getting families involved and engaged, helping them understand the benefits of immersion, and dispelling their concerns about English language development in a full immersion program.

## University Teacher Education Programs

Participating university programs reported that they are seeking to prepare teachers to work effectively in these early childhood education schools and programs. Program requirements depend on state educational regulations. In New York state, for example, bilingual licensure is treated as an extension to a content-area license. Two university programs are listed in the Appendix.

### *Courses Offered*

Courses and opportunities offered in these programs include the following:

- Foundations and theory of bilingual and multicultural education
- Teaching bilingual learners
- Bilingual language and literacy practicum
- Bilingual curriculum development
- Bilingual content instruction (math, science, social studies)
- Assessment and evaluation of bilingual students
- Fieldwork
- Student teaching
- Teaching language across content areas
- Teaching to develop biliteracy

### *Course Content*

In the courses, students might

- Explore the philosophical, theoretical, and practical components of bilingual and second language education.
- Develop intercultural perspectives and an understanding of how to help their students develop them.
- Learn how to provide instruction that meets the linguistic and cultural needs of emergent bilingual learners, including those with special needs, and how to assess students' progress.
- Develop a toolbox of approaches to teaching language through content.
- Become advocates for emergent bilingual children and their families within the school system.

The goal is that students will exit the programs with knowledge and experiences to bring to the classroom. Fieldwork and clinical hours provide hands-on assignments and projects for the bilingual extension certificate and prepare them to work effectively in schools.

A special project at New York University, Project Developing Chinese Language Teachers (DCLT), offers workshops for teachers across the country, and additional professional development is offered through a partnership with China Institute.

### *Degrees and Certificates*

Depending on the university and the licensing requirements of the state, a candidate may pursue an educational degree or certificate in the following areas:

- Early Childhood Education: Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education; Masters in Early Childhood Urban Education/Special Education plus bilingual extension
- Bilingual Early Childhood Education

- Bilingual Education/English as a Second Language: Bilingual Education, Extension Certificate; MA Bilingual Education with bilingual extension, early childhood certification
- Foreign Language Education: MA Foreign Language with childhood extension and state certification
- Interdisciplinary: MA TESOL and Foreign Language, leading to state certification in TESOL (PreK-12) and Foreign Language (grades 7-12)

### **Successes**

There have been high placement rates of university students in schools where Chinese is taught. For example, the internship program between Washington Yu Ying Public Charter School and New York University has been a very successful model. It has helped students understand the daily requirements and teaching approach of a Chinese immersion program as it helped Yu Ying with recruitment of qualified teachers.

### **Challenges**

Challenges include growing the number of student participants, finding bilingual students who want to teach in early childhood education programs, and finding Chinese-speaking students who can get visas to study in the United States. Efforts should be made to recruit domestic bilingual students who want to become teachers.

### **State Departments of Education**

One example of a state education organization that has expanded its focus to include early childhood education is the [Delaware Department of Education](#), which supports the learning of more than 140,000 students in public and public charter schools in 19 school districts. Chinese Language Immersion programs are currently established or being planned in 30% of eligible school districts across the state, including Appoquinimink, Caesar Rodney, Christina, Colonial, and Red Clay. During the 2019-20 school year, the program involved 1,291 students and 34 Chinese language teachers.

The Delaware Department of Education, Office of Early Learning starts with pre-kindergarten, with a focus on play-based and social-emotional learning. The mission is to create and sustain a comprehensive and cohesive statewide network of early learning partners to achieve desired outcomes for children, birth through age 8, and their families. The Department is seeking to address challenges that include recruiting teachers to work in the birth to age 5 program when salaries for these teachers are low, expanding the program to serve more teachers and schools, and providing access to the schools for low-income families when transportation is a challenge. The Department would like to collaborate with local early learning providers to support language learning opportunities for children, from birth to age 5.

### **Organizations Supporting Early Chinese Language Learning and Assessment**

[Avant Assessment](#) assesses real-world language proficiency by pairing innovative computer-adaptive and artificial intelligence technologies with human scoring. Avant's assessments align with the [ACTFL Proficiency Scale](#). Each assessment is designed to inspire learners to grow and teachers to be more effective. Avant is working with CELIN to develop assessments for use in Chinese preschool programs.

The Early Childhood Immersion Forum (ECCIF), established by the Chinese American International School (CAIS) and partner schools in San Francisco, to connect educators working in early childhood education, now has a national focus. Each year they hold a conference at CAIS to bring these educators together, with presentations, discussion sessions, and resource sharing sessions, covering topics that include language acquisition, literacy development, social-emotional learning, inquiry-based/project-based learning, play-based learning, uses of technology, and ways to assess student development. Here are the forums held in 2018, 2019, and 2020: <https://www.cais.org/eccif2018>; <https://www.cais.org/eccif2019>; <https://www.cais.org/ECCIF2020>.

ECCIF also hosts an *Early Childhood Chinese Edu WeChat Group*, a platform for preschool and kindergarten Chinese educators to network and support one another.

Two additional organizations that provide connections and helpful resources for those working in early childhood Chinese language education are [Chinese Early Language and Immersion Network \(CELIN\)](#) and [China Learning Initiatives at Asia Society](#). Resources include a list of exemplary Chinese immersion programs profiled on the CELIN webpages – [preschool programs](#) and [K-12 programs](#) -- in which program leaders describe in detail the design, structure, students and teachers, and key features and activities.

## A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A PRESCHOOL STUDENT IN A CHINESE IMMERSION PROGRAM

Let's follow Cleo as she attends a typical day in her class for 4-year-old students in a Chinese immersion preschool. She kisses Daddy goodbye when he drops her off in her classroom. She puts her coat and lunch box in her cubby hole and joins her classmates on the carpet for the routine morning meeting. She likes the carpet time, because she feels it helps her get ready for the day.

Cleo looks around the room, which is decorated with colorful posters, pictures, toys, and teaching aids. She loves those different stations, such as a corner for the library; a listening or computer station; science and math corners; a music corner; dress-up, art, and supermarket play areas; and bean bags and small chairs for “not in the mood” time or timeout. In one corner, the children have built a mini-zoo with blocks and inhabited it with a variety of stuffed animals and plastic zoo creatures. Cleo knows where to look when she tries to express what she wants to say; she looks at those beautiful posters for clues or the word wall that helps her connect sounds with form and meaning, although she doesn't know that those pictures and words are building her ability to read and write later.

Her teacher, Sun Laoshi (teachers are addressed as Teacher/Laoshi plus their last name in Chinese), welcomes

Cleo and each student individually, saying 早上好, Cleo (Good morning), and Cleo responds enthusiastically, 孙老师, 早上好! (Good morning, Teacher Sun). They sing their good morning song, and then Sun Laoshi reads the morning message, which is written on chart paper on an easel next to the rocking chair in which she sits. She asks a student to volunteer to share the day of the week and the date. Cleo's classmate Priya jumps up and places the card for 星期二 (Tuesday) on the calendar. Michael raises his hand and volunteers to place the number card for the date in the appropriate slot on the calendar. Next, they look out the window to check the weather – 下雨了吗? 下雪了吗? (Is it raining? snowing?) – Sun Laoshi offers options for the children to choose from. In chorus, several students cry out 下雪了 (It's snowing!), and Cleo's friend Jesse volunteers to put the snowflake on the morning message paper. The teacher reads the next line from the morning message, and Cleo smiles in response, “我很好 (I'm well).

One classmate puts her head down to indicate she is tired, others stomp their feet to show excitement. After gathering the students' attention, the morning message continues: now the teacher guides students to review what they learned or did yesterday and introduces new topics, including needed concepts, skills, and vocabulary for the day. Sun Laoshi reads: 哪个动物住在动物园里 (Which animal lives in the zoo)?

Finally, Cleo's friend Sami shares her beloved stuffed bunny that she brought from home. Sharing time, when students bring in important objects from home to share with the class, provides an important opportunity for students to develop oral language skills as they talk about something that is important to them. Today, as Sami holds up her beloved bunny, she says 我的小兔兔! 我爱她, 她很cute, 她会—here, Sami stops and makes jumping motions with her bunny (My bunny! I love her. She's cute. She can...). Sami is so eager to share her bunny that she uses all of her linguistic resources: Mandarin, English, and body language! Sun Laoshi is delighted by Sami's enthusiasm and agrees with her: Sami的小兔很可爱! 是吗? (Sami's rabbit is cute, right?) The children nod in agreement,



some calling out 很很很很可爱! (so so so cute!), while Sun Laoshi continues 她会跳! 我们一起跳吧! (She can hop! Let's hop together!) and the children join her in hopping in place, repeating with her “跳跳跳跳 (jump jump jump jump). Next, Sun Laoshi takes this opportunity to introduce a question from the story they will read during story time, reusing a question she used earlier in morning meeting, asking Sami and the class, Sami的小兔兔住在哪里? (Where does Sami's bunny live?). The children respond enthusiastically with pointing and miming.

Before moving to centers, Sun Laoshi points to each item on today's schedule as she reads the schedule aloud in Chinese: Morning Meeting, Centers, Snack Time, Story Time, etc., giving the children a sense of security as they know what to expect for the day. She asks the students 现在要去哪里? (Where do we go next?). They shout out in unison 中心 (centers).



Teacher working 1-on-1 with a student. (Pine Street School)

Throughout the day, the children have many opportunities to explore and develop their interests through play, under the guidance of the teacher, in small groups and independently; centers offer time for independent play. Sun Laoshi reminds four students that they will play some math games with her during center time, and she pulls out her picture cards depicting the choices for centers for the other students. She holds the cards up one by one as she asks students which center they would like to visit: the supermarket or the dress-up, art, or water table.

Today, Cleo's hand shoots up when her teacher mentions the supermarket area, and she chooses to engage with her partners in imaginary play in the supermarket, using richer, more contextualized and sophisticated language than they would if they were simply naming food items in a typical classroom setting. The friends quickly fall into roles as grocer and shoppers. Cleo, who is shopping, picks up some noodles and broccoli, asking the grocer 面多少钱? Broccoli? (How much are the noodles? Broccoli?). She's never learned how to say broccoli in school, so she only knows the English word for it. Sun Laoshi whispers in her ears how to say broccoli in Chinese, 花椰菜. Cleo repeats 花椰菜, and the grocer responds in both Chinese and English with the only numbers she remembers 一! 三! (one! three!). She is not yet ready to use the measure word. Cleo counts out pretend money, 一, 二, 谢谢 (one, two, thank you!). Sami holds up eggs and apples and asks what they are. Cleo remembers the word for egg and apple from snack time and counts out 一, 二, 三个鸡蛋, 一个苹果 (one,



Circle Time (HWIS)



Students enjoying a song during Music and Movement class (Evelyn Hu, CAIS parent)

two, three eggs, one apple). Sami repeats as she tells the grocer, 我的小兔兔喜欢鸡蛋, how much for 三个鸡蛋(My bunny likes eggs. How much for 3 eggs?). The teaching assistant stops by to observe and join in the play, asking some questions about the stuffed and plastic animals which were strategically placed in the store prior to class, and which are featured in the story they have been reading during interactive read-aloud, to prime the students with needed vocabulary for read-aloud: 小袋鼠要买什么? 小狮子喜欢吃什么? (What does the kangaroo want to buy? What does the lion like to eat?)



Student and teacher practicing greetings at circle time (Gonglue Jiang, CAIS parent)

After about 20 minutes, Sun Laoshi announces that it's time to clean up for snack time and begins to sing; 收拾, 收拾, 我们一起收拾. (Clean up, clean up, everybody do their share ...). She reminds the children to clean up by the time the song is sung three times, and the children begin to put away their toys. They line up to wash their hands and then move to tables for snack, taking to the table the placemats they decorated during art time with their names (in Chinese and English), along with pictures of fruits and labels of fruit names in characters. Sun Laoshi and her teaching assistants move around to each student, offering 苹果(apple) and 西瓜 (watermelon), holding each up as they give the students options through "this or that" questions; 你要苹果还是西瓜? (Do you want apple or watermelon?). Using this or that questions not only prompts students with the fruit names in Chinese, but also prevents them from asking for something else or refusing the items altogether (a trick every parent knows). Students choose their snack by pointing to the fruit or by asking for

the fruit by name. Some point to the picture of the fruit on their placemats.

During snack time, the students talk about their likes and dislikes, either about what they are going to eat or some other topics. Counting out snack items introduces numbers and language within this meaningful context of how many items each child should receive. (The concept and language of the bigger ideas of "fairness" and "justice" might even arise during this snack time discussion!) Lunch time is another time when learning and playing occur while eating together. This is also a wonderful time for children to learn about diverse cultures and foods that they bring from home.



Students painting during art class (CAIS)

After cleanup following snack time, children line up to get their jackets and go outside to play. When they return, after the routines of hanging up jackets, washing hands, and going to the bathroom, Sun Laoshi and the children move through the transition by singing another song, the "coming to carpet song," and meet together on the carpet for the next part of the day, interactive story time. Today, they are re-reading a much-loved picture story, 最漂亮的房子 (The Most Beautiful House), about an architect who is asked to build the perfect house for all of the animals in the zoo. The architect asks each animal whether they like their current house (mostly zoo cages), and they tell him what type of house they would prefer (a prairie for the lion, a tree for the bird, etc.). In the end, he designs a zoo that looks like a forest, giving



each animal the type of home they said they prefer.

The language of the story is a bit complex, but the illustrations help the students understand it. Sun Laoshi starts by playfully pulling the book out, saying 小朋友, 猜一猜! 今天的故事是什么? 喜不喜欢? (Guess what we are going to read today! Do you like it?). The students cheer, and some call out 最漂亮的房子 (The Most Beautiful House). Others say 喜欢! (I like it!), and still others respond with thumbs up or in English, “I like it!” Sun Laoshi is pleased to see most of the students respond, as each demonstrates their comprehension skills and engagement in the way most comfortable to them at that moment. She knows that they will begin to use more Chinese as they feel comfortable with the classroom and with the topic.

Today’s interactive read-aloud was preceded by a picture walk earlier in the week. During the interactive read-aloud on that day, Sun Laoshi “walked through” the story by showing each page to students and discussing what was in each picture. They first looked at the cover of the story book as Sun Laoshi read the title aloud, and then together they identified each of the animals in the cover picture and predicted what the story might be about. Today, they are returning to the picture book for the first full reading of the story. Sun Laoshi starts by asking students to identify what they see on the cover picture and then moves on to reading the text of the story. She stops frequently to ask, 这是谁? (Who is this?), and students respond by identifying the animal she indicates. She invites students to respond 不喜欢, 不喜欢 (no, no, no), with the animals, when the architect in the story asks them if they like their current house. Sometimes she asks students to repeat important vocabulary after her, as she points to pictures that represent the word. When students ask questions in English, Sun Laoshi listens with a smile on her face and then responds in Chinese. As the story ends, she asks the students to show her how the animals feel in their new homes. The students respond by smiling, stretching out, clapping, even jumping up and down or flapping their “wings.” Finally, Sun Laoshi leads the students to the area where they’ve been building a zoo from blocks and asks them whether they think the animals

will like these homes. Together, students and the teacher strategize, in Chinese and English, what they can do to make the zoo homes more comfortable for the animals, and several decide to work on building a better zoo during choice time the next day.

Story reading, picture walks, and dialogue and discussion around stories are powerful tools in a preschool classroom, as language is learned by exploring the context of the story. New vocabulary is learned through pictures, structures are learned through repetition, and background experiences and knowledge are activated. The teacher invites all of the students to participate in the story telling, through call-and-response, encouraging the children to use question and answer forms, and providing a natural opportunity for repetition (e.g., Brown Bear, Brown Bear, what do you see?). Today, the call-and-response asks about the animals’ preferences: “狮子喜欢他的房子吗?” “不喜欢!” (Does the lion like his house? No, he doesn’t!). As they become more familiar with the story, Sun Laoshi has them act it out. Cleo feels confident to be the architect asking the questions, while other children prefer to be the lion or kangaroos, talking about what type of house they want. Acting out stories gives children the opportunity to try out the new words and sentences they have learned in the form of interpersonal communication. Everyone loves the dramatization, which breathes life into the story and brings it into the real world.

On other days, the students and teacher play games, including Simon Says, Red Light Green Light, or 大风吹 Musical Chairs; or sing songs like Head and Shoulders, Knees and Toes, which support development of language along with motor skills and collaborative, competitive, and social emotional skills. Cleo and her friends also love art projects. At the beginning of the year, they decorated placemats with pictures of typical snack time foods, spoons, chopsticks, forks, bowls, and other eating utensils, along with labels in Chinese characters for each element (labeling is a simple way to introduce pre-reading skills). They play house with their newly created placemats and food items and use the placemats during snack time; hence, their knowledge of

vocabulary and concepts about supermarkets, meals, and family eating are connected and reinforced.

By now, a reader might say that this is what happens in a quality preschool classroom. Indeed, all quality preschool classes should demonstrate these characteristics. The big difference is that all of these children and the teacher are interacting in Chinese, not in English! A challenge that might arise in Cleo's class is that not all children have the Chinese language needed to accomplish all of the tasks, particularly independent play and sharing. The reality is, they may still be learning to talk about these tasks and concepts in English. Cleo and her friends are not bothered by the fact that they are in a Chinese immersion preschool, because they think that using Chinese is how school is done! Teachers know the strategies to teach children Chinese in naturalistic ways. With eagerness to get meaning across and find things to do that suit their individual interests, children may communicate in Chinese, in English, and by any means they know. Teachers circulate to spend time with each child and small groups, modeling for the children how to express their ideas or feelings in Chinese. Children imitate the teacher and internalize the new language, storing it for future use.

Some children may go home right before or after lunch, while others may stay in the full-day program. Cleo stays in school and enjoys lunch and recess with her classmates before taking a nap in the afternoon. Around 2:30, she packs up with her classmates, while Sun Laoshi reminds them what to bring home today and what to bring to school tomorrow. Enthusiastically, Cleo can't wait to tell her Mommy what happened today. Before Mommy can respond, she sees from the rear-view mirror that Cleo has fallen asleep in her car seat! It's been a full day, and Cleo's brain has been busy learning and playing in two languages.

## CHINESE IMMERSION PRESCHOOL EDUCATION: A VALUE-ADDED PROPOSITION

### Why Chinese Immersion Preschool Works

The activities described in Cleo's typical day in the

previous section are designed to help children in preschool develop the important domains that they are working on at this age: physical, social emotional, linguistic, cultural, and cognitive skills. Cognitive and social emotional development occur through reading, playing, thinking, and discussing. Linguistic and cultural skills are embedded in all activities.

Oral language and pre-literacy practices develop skills that, once developed in one language, transfer to other languages. New vocabulary and structures are used strategically and repeatedly throughout the day, across contexts: apples from snack time are drawn in art class and available to buy in the grocery store; plastic and stuffed versions of animals from the story are moved around the classroom for imaginary play during choice time; the blocks have been set up as a zoo, as reflected in the story. Print awareness, or the concept that written language represents oral language, develops in this print-rich preschool environment filled with picture books and word walls. During morning meeting and interactive read-aloud, the teacher sometimes points out characters as she reads, helping students recognize that one spoken syllable equals one character and that the writing represents oral language. Phonemic and phonological awareness, developed through pre-reading, songs, chanting, and oral language activities, contribute to pre-reading skills development. Repetitive and interactive read-alouds improve both comprehension and productive skills (McKeown & Beck, 2014). These staple pre-literacy practices of preschool classrooms contribute to the oral language and vocabulary development needed for building proficiency in any language, which are key to literacy development in both Chinese and English.

Additionally, the constant use of songs, rhymes, chants, and meaningful language chunks provide children natural language input in Chinese, while signaling to the students that it is time to shift gears: for clean-up, line-up, recess, snack and lunch, carpet time, or center activities. Through this meaningful language play, children learn to acclimate to how school is done with regard to appropriate



classroom behavior, transitions, routines, and learning. In other words, they learn the “grammar of schooling” (Tyack & Tobin, 1994) that is crucial for individual students to become successful in their educational journeys.

Research has provided strong evidence of the positive effects of immersion/dual language education. Collier and Thomas (2017, 2019) have conducted longitudinal research on one-way and two-way programs in the United States that spans four decades, while research on Canadian French immersion programs is ongoing since the inception of the programs in the 1970s. All research findings suggest that, for best results, immersion programs should be sustained over time, for at least five years (Gándara & Escamilla, 2017). Across the board, Chinese immersion programs and preschools (or those in any language) share common goals and characteristics.

Researchers have identified main goals and benefits of immersion/dual language education. They can be summarized in five points: 1) academic achievement, 2) bilingualism and biliteracy, 3) cross-cultural competence, 4) critical consciousness for equity and social justice; and 5) language immersion education taps into creativity and innovation, which are explained below.

### ***Academic Achievement: All Children Can Succeed***

With knowledgeable and skillful teachers, all students can succeed in well-designed and well-implemented immersion/dual language programs. This includes students with special needs, students from all socio-economic backgrounds, and English language learners. Even language learners with learning impairments may succeed, though the impairment may be displayed across languages (Fortune & Menke, 2010).

Students in language immersion programs have been shown to do as well as or better than their monolingual peers in the content areas and on standardized tests (Collier & Thomas, 2004; [http://www.carla.umn.edu/immersion/acie/volio/may2007\\_parentsten.html](http://www.carla.umn.edu/immersion/acie/volio/may2007_parentsten.html)). There is evidence that the achievement gap is reduced or reversed for students in dual language immersion programs (Collier &

Thomas, 2004). Skills learned in one language, including content knowledge and literacy skills, can transfer and be accessed across languages (Cummins, 2000). This includes skills that are useful across content areas and that use higher levels of cognitive knowledge, including inference, prediction, and clarification (Gándara & Escamilla, 2017). In fact, the additive bilingual and biliteracy approach may level the playing field for students of diverse language backgrounds. In preschool, this approach is especially effective as children develop strong oral language skills, building the foundation for academic success in both English and Chinese.

Data from Chinese immersion programs demonstrate that these programs help students achieve academic content and language learning. For example, a large-scale, ten-year longitudinal study conducted by Rand Corporation and Portland Public Schools (PPS) (Steele et al., 2017) shows that:

- a. Portland Public Schools (PPS) students randomly assigned to dual-language immersion programs outperformed their peers on state reading tests by 13% of a standard deviation in grade 5, and by 22% of a standard deviation in grade 8.
- b. Immersion-assigned students did not show statistically significant benefits or deficits in terms of mathematics or science performance.
- c. There were no clear differences in the effects of dual-language immersion by students' native language.
- d. English learners assigned to dual-language immersion were more likely than their peers to be classified as English proficient by grade 6. This effect was mostly attributed to English learners whose native language matched the classroom partner language.

Chinese American International School (CAIS) in San Francisco (CA), Washington Yu Ying Public Charter School (Washington, D.C.), Yinghua Academy in

Minneapolis (MN), and Yu Ming Charter School in Oakland (CA) have also shown outstanding student achievement data in Reading (English), Chinese, and Math on state tests. Among these schools, Yinghua Academy and Yu Ming Charter School are National Blue Ribbon Schools (see [CELIN Program Profiles, K-12](#)).

### ***Benefits of Proficient Bilingualism and Biliteracy from Childhood to Adulthood***

The benefits of bilingualism are found in those who use all languages in their repertoire on a regular basis; they do not come from studying a few years of a language in high school and using it occasionally. Becoming bilingual and biliterate takes time; this is especially true for those who wish to become bilingual and biliterate in Chinese. According to Defense Language Institute (DLI) rankings of difficulty for English-speaking adults, Chinese is considered a category IV language (Association of the United States Army, 2017), which is the category requiring the greatest number of hours for an educated English speaker to reach the native-like level. Chinese is not more difficult than many languages, but its character-based literacy system and the long cultural and literary history and references require learners to spend more time to master it. Learners of Chinese must cope with a new pronunciation system, tones, and one or two writing systems – simplified or traditional Chinese characters, and Pinyin romanization -- and different grammatical structures and sentence patterns. More information about Chinese literacy development can be found in the CELIN Briefs. Starting young provides learners the time needed to master the Chinese language, orally and in writing.

In recent years, findings from brain-based research describe additional benefits of being bilingual (e.g., Drefus, 2011). For example, researchers summarize the bilingual cognitive advantages as follows: Bilinguals show a higher degree of creativity and are better than monolinguals at solving problems and managing conflicts. They exhibit divergent thinking, or the ability to find novel or hidden meaning, and better pattern recognition (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000). They may have larger working

memory. They may be more efficient in cognitive/sensory processing and have better visual-spatial skills.

Similarly, bilingual children are found to show more cognitive flexibility and higher executive functioning, including the ability to ignore distractions and to multi-task (Bialystok, 1991; Thomas & Collier, 2012, 2017). Increased inhibitory control, or the ability to refuse a reflexive response and make another choice, has been exhibited by bilingual students as compared to monolingual students in a Head Start program. Monolingual students in the program who acquired a level of bilingualism during this time showed stronger growth in inhibitory control, compared to children who remained monolingual (Santillán & Khurana, 2018). Some studies have suggested that young bilingual children have advantages over monolingual children in perspective-taking and theory of mind, the recognition that others may hold perspectives different from one's own, and that the effects of bilingualism on the brain last a lifetime (Kamenetz, 2016). Being bilingual may even stave off the onset of Alzheimer's disease (Craik, Bialystok, & Freedman, 2010).

Childhood is an optimal time for beginning bilingualism, as described in Cleo's and her classmates' case. First, they focus on meaning making instead of on accuracy of grammar points. Their focus is on getting their meaning across so they can play with friends, eat and talk together, or get some toys. Second, they are not shy about making mistakes, regardless of which language they use. In either the first or second language, they are exploring how to say something to achieve their purpose. Third, research suggests that accent and prosody (the rhythms of speech) are more "native-like" if acquisition of an additional language starts before the teenage years, particularly when they have input from native speakers. Finally, time is on their side. They can acquire an additional language in a more naturalistic manner, through play, learning, and an eagerness to communicate.

In short, starting language learning at an early age gives children the time needed to develop high levels of bilingualism and biliteracy, provided that they have the

opportunity to continue to learn the languages. At the very least, through learning a new language early, their linguistic parameters will have been expanded, setting the stage for language acquisition, including their native language.

### ***Development of Cross-Cultural and Global Competence***

While learning the language, children are also learning about different ways of seeing, acting, and interacting with the world; in this case, from Chinese cultural perspectives. They develop empathy and understanding of other cultures and their own culture (Collier & Thomas, 2004; Genesee, 2007). Naturally, their worldviews are expanded along with their linguistic repertoire. Being able to communicate in more than one language opens a window into other ways of thinking about and engaging with differing social customs and values (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000). In short, they become more aware of who they are in the world. As their language competence increases, their intercultural communication skills increase, making them little diplomats who can negotiate between two languages and cultures to get what they want or don't want (Gándara & Escamilla, 2017; Livaccari, 2017).

To help educators operationalize the development of students' global competency, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and Asia Society created the [Global Competence Matrices](#) in Ed Steps Project (2011). Global competence is defined as the capacity and disposition to understand and act on issues of global significance. Under the guidance of the matrix, students investigate the world to identify issues, recognize perspectives from multiple groups or communities, communicate ideas to explore solutions, and take actions by translating ideas and findings into actions to improve the condition or solve problems. While young children's worlds are limited to their family, neighborhood, and school community, they too can begin to observe, think, explore, communicate, and act to be kind and compassionate with one another, solve conflicts with friends, come to agreement with parents about how to carry out daily routines, or think about

how to reduce their footprints on the environment through not wasting food or recycling and reusing materials. Being in a language immersion classroom, children have the opportunity to explore between languages, cultures, and different ways of being in the world.

### ***Enhanced Critical Consciousness for Equitable Access and Social Justice***

Preschool provides a context and time for children to begin to socialize and develop their sense of self within a group. It is a time when they develop social skills, self-awareness, and self-confidence ([Early Childhood Learning, NYC Department of Education](#)). Children bring skills as "typical" preschoolers, but also as individuals. Helping them to grow and develop means recognizing similarities as well as differences, and talking with children to learn who they are, what they value, and their individual strengths (González, 2016). In a Chinese immersion preschool, students develop conceptually and linguistically, acquiring the words to describe their experiences and socially co-constructing their world.

Children's ways of thinking and early academic skills are expanded when they play independently and with each other. Active learning occurs when they are involved in and play with teachers and trusted adults through games, shared reading, dialogue and discussion, and other structured activities that engage higher-order thinking, making predictions, and responding to thought (not just fact) questions (Frede & Barnett, 2011; Mongeau, 2017).

Sociocultural theory posits that children's development is affected by their environment: language heard from others shapes their thought, and what they think about and how they think about it are influenced by the culture and society in which they live. Together with their teachers, teacher aides, and peers, children build a community and learn social, collaborative, and cooperation skills. They learn and begin to participate in the expectations, skills, and traits of school and the larger society. Like all schools, preschools are intended to develop cultural continuity; they are institutions that reflect and make known to

children the core beliefs of their cultures (Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2011).

The ways in which caregivers and community members interact with children may differ across cultures (Miller & Sperry, 2012). Sharing the goal of teaching all students, Chinese immersion preschool educators can be more effective when they recognize and value the cultural, religious, linguistic, familial, physical, and socioeconomic diversity that young children bring to the classroom. The funds of knowledge approach shows us that all cultures have their ways of learning and sharing, which should be considered an asset to be mined and cultivated, whether they are similar to or different from the mainstream culture (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). A Culturally Sustaining approach to pedagogy (Paris, 2012) and to the linguistic practices of young children helps sustain, value, and develop all children's and families' cultural practices, languages, and literacies. Validating children's lived experiences and bringing family and community into the schools and classrooms support learning. This point is especially poignant when talking about making education equitable and inclusive.

In an effective preschool program, children are taught to see and feel themselves in other people's shoes, to be more empathetic. In the preschool programs represented at the February 2020 Asia Society meeting, many participants emphasized that they explicitly engage children in mindfulness or [Restorative Justice](#) activities to develop their social emotional skills and sensitivity. The pedagogy of critical consciousness advocated by Palmer, Cervantes-Soon, Dorner, and Heiman (2019) is especially timely in supporting the school community, families, and children to recognize and confront the structural systems of schools that inhibit realization of equity and social justice.

### ***Language Immersion Education Taps into Creativity and Innovation***

One of the reasons why children in an immersion program achieve higher levels in academic content and languages is because the curriculum design and instructional

strategies are creative, innovative, and effective. The curriculum and instruction are based on the district or school requirements but are designed with coherence across grades and content areas and are highly contextualized. This is necessary so that students can access the content through a language they are simultaneously learning.

All immersion teachers must exhibit extra levels of creativity as they support students in developing grade-level content area knowledge and proficiency in the language of instruction (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000). Preschool immersion teachers are no exception. They use innovative and effective language learning strategies, including clear routines and directions; visuals, props, realia, and structured graphic organizers; and body language, gestures, intonations, dramatization, and lots of expression to aid comprehension – practices natural to all preschool teachers. They use the same patterns and chunks of language on a regular basis. Research-tested instructional strategies, such as think-pair-share, small-group discussion, and cooperative learning enable students with diverse language abilities and learning styles to help and learn directly from one another. Literacy instruction is not the same in both languages, and creative teachers know how to use the approach required by the language being taught (Beeman & Urow, 2013).

## **WHY STUDY CHINESE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUILDING THE FIELD**

### **Rationale for Studying Chinese Language and Culture**

China has become a superpower, sharing the world stage with the United States. The U.S.-China relationship is one of the most critical international relationships in the 21st century.

Theoretically, it should be clear why the study of Chinese language and culture is important. Yet, as we advance into the second decade of the 21st century, we still have to make a case for it: Why is the study of Chinese language and culture important for the future U.S. workforce?



First, the sheer number of people using Chinese is evident. Chinese is the language with the largest number of native speakers (Eberhard, Simons, & Fenning, 2021) and the second most useful business language, after English (Lauerman, 2011). It is used in China, Taiwan, and Singapore as the official language and by millions of those in Chinese diasporas throughout the world.

Second, studying Chinese helps children acquire grit for being persistent (Duckworth, 2018), developing learning strategies, and having an attitude and habit for lifelong learning.

Chinese is a character-based language that challenges learners cognitively and linguistically, who must tap into existing and different ways of learning and processing information. Although it is more challenging and takes a longer time for English speakers to learn than Indo-European languages, such as French or Spanish, the rewards are beyond linguistic gains.

Third, Chinese culture is one of the major ancient civilizations in the world. But it is taught only superficially in U.S. schools. Students are woefully deprived of the opportunity to learn about China and Asia, which amounts to a severe knowledge deficit about the changed and continued shifting world order.

Fourth, the development of China and its position in the world cannot be ignored by the United States. Its advancements in informational and digital technology, research in medicine, and other areas; its youth and pop cultures; and its educational, economic, social, and political policies and practices must be studied and understood. It is dangerous to rely on mass and social media for information about China and related issues.

Finally, the threat we are now facing is no longer about a specific nation, or *We vs. They*. COVID-19 is a chilling example of a global threat. Climate change, energy, air, water, health, migration, and the divide and equity between the poor and the rich are all pressing issues that require international coordination and collaboration. Global

competence for engaging in effective communication, understanding multiple perspectives, sharing ideas, finding solutions, leveraging resources, and taking actions for change are prerequisite for today's youth, who will inherit this planet from us. It is our moral responsibility to equip them with the right tools.

With a language of such magnitude and impact on the United States and the world, there are less than 500,000 students in grades K-16 (including Chinese heritage language speakers) studying Chinese in the entire K-16 spectrum in the United States (American Councils, 2017; Wang, Everson, & Peyton, 2016). In contrast, because English is a compulsory subject of study for students in Primary 3 and beyond in the Chinese national curriculum (OECD, 2016, p. 24), the 260 million primary and secondary school students in China are to a certain degree bilingual in Chinese and English. Many families in large cities rush to start their children learning English at age 3 or 4. Yet, in the United States, Chinese is still considered a Less Commonly Taught Language. The implications of this Chinese-English bilingual deficit in the United States are beyond imagination. Time is overdue that we rethink and redesign our educational policy and practice.

### Vision, Mission, and Recommendations

Our vision is that all children, age 3 and above, can enjoy equitable opportunities to be enrolled in quality Chinese or other language (in addition to English) immersion preschools, or at least learn Chinese, in urban, suburban, and rural settings in all 50 states and the territories of the United States. All children have the right to receive the highest quality preschool education, so they will develop cognitive skills and build the foundation for mastering learning in all content areas and in at least two or more languages upon entering kindergarten. They will be properly prepared to become creative global citizens, workers, and leaders, who can communicate, collaborate, and innovate with people of diverse cultures and backgrounds to find solutions to make the world a better place for all.

Our mission is to advocate for high-quality Chinese language immersion preschool education to realize this vision. To achieve this goal, and based on discussions with national experts in the CELIN at Asia Society meeting and the results of [two national surveys](#) of Chinese immersion preschools and their teachers, seven recommendations are offered, which are explained fully in the CELIN Chinese Immersion Preschool White Paper.

*Recommendation 1.* Advocate for and build the Chinese immersion preschool field through engagement and collaboration.

*Recommendation 2.* Develop a framework about *Language Immersion Preschools for All* and a *Guide for Chinese Language and Immersion Preschools*.

*Recommendation 3.* Conduct research, build the knowledge base, and disseminate information, best practices, strategies, and resources.

*Recommendation 4.* Develop Chinese language immersion preschool program evaluation and child assessment tools for preschools to grade 2.

*Recommendation 5.* Provide workshops and professional development for parents, teachers, and key stakeholders.

*Recommendation 6.* Collaborate with policy makers, universities, teacher organizations, the community-at-large, and publishers to increase the supply of teachers and materials.

*Recommendation 7.* Identify and share funding, opportunities, and resources.

## CONCLUSION

In this Brief, we describe an emerging field in the United States that connects preschool and Chinese immersion education. In addition to defining what we mean by preschool and Chinese immersion education, we describe the players and initiatives in the landscape of Chinese immersion preschool education in the 2020-2021 school year. For readers to develop a sense of what Chinese

immersion preschool programs look like, we follow a young child, Cleo, as she participates in her Chinese immersion preschool for a day. We review the research supporting the benefits of bilingualism and multilingualism in education and provide the reasons why it is valuable and doable for a preschool to add a second language to its programming and instruction. Specifically, we highlight why Chinese language and cultural learning for American citizens is critical in the 21st century. We close with a set of recommendations for ways we can move forward together.

As a field, all stakeholders -- including language programs in schools, institutions of higher education and preparatory programs for teachers, public (federal, state, and district) and private sectors, foundations, and communities and parents -- may consider how to coordinate and collaborate to build the field of Chinese immersion preschool education. As a nation, we should have the vision and political will to develop a globally competent multilingual citizenry who can be successful navigating through a world that is simultaneously expanding and shrinking. As each child comes to the door of learning, let us give them a key to explore beyond our physical and mental borders.

## ENDNOTES

1. Depending on the source or orientation of policy and funding, there are two traditions with which immersion programs have been associated: bilingual education and world language/foreign language education. Bilingual education seeks to ensure that students learning English receive adequate service and instruction to develop English language proficiency and achieve academically while they are learning another language. In recent years, Thomas and Collier advocate for using the term dual language to replace the use of immersion, particularly for two-way immersion programs, emphasizing that all students (regardless of linguistic background) are learning two languages and learning through these languages simultaneously (Collier & Thomas, 2018; Thomas &

Collier, 2012). Howard, Olague, and Rogers (2018; 2007) developed a more inclusive model for dual language education, which includes four program types: one-way world language immersion (students all come from one language background), two-way bilingual immersion (half of the students come from the target language and the other half from English), maintenance (developmental) bilingual, and heritage language/indigenous language. The Center for Applied Linguistics also uses [this terminology](#), stating that *dual language* refers to programs in which the goals are bilingualism and biliteracy. Fortune and Tedick (2003) use the term *language immersion* to refer to one-way foreign/world language, two-way bilingual, and indigenous language programs.

In the World Language field (traditionally called Foreign Language and referring to programs that seek to teach all students a language in addition to English), one-way immersion programs have become increasingly popular. For example, in the Canadian model of French immersion, established more than 50 years ago, non-French speaking students do all of their coursework in French. Among these immersion programs, if instructional time in English and Chinese follows the 50:50 ratio, they often call themselves dual language immersion, as in the case of Utah and Delaware Departments of Education.

## REFERENCES

- American Councils. (2017). *The National K-16 foreign language enrollment survey report*. Washington, DC: Author. <https://www.americancouncils.org/sites/default/files/FLE-report.pdf>.
- Association of the United States Army. (2017, November 16). *DLI's language guidelines*. Author. <https://www.ausa.org/articles/dlis-language-guidelines>
- Beeman, K., & Urow, C. (2013). *Teaching for biliteracy: Strengthening bridges between languages*. Philadelphia: Caslon Publishing.
- Bialystok, E. (Ed.). (1991). *Language processing in bilingual children*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cloud, N., Genesee, F., & Hamayan, E. (2000). *Dual language instruction: A handbook for enriched education*. Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.
- Collier, V. P., & Thomas, W. P. (2004). The astounding effectiveness of dual language education for all. *NABE Journal of Research and Practice*, 2(1), 1–20.
- Collier, V. P., & Thomas, W. P. (2017). Validating the power of bilingual schooling: Thirty-two years of large-scale, longitudinal research. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 37, 203–217.
- Collier, V. P., & Thomas, W. P. (2018). *Transforming secondary education: Middle and high school dual language programs*. Albuquerque, NM: Dual Language Education of New Mexico Fuente Press.
- Craik, F., Bialystok, E., & Freedman, M. (2010). Delaying the onset of Alzheimer disease: Bilingualism as a form of cognitive reserve. *Neurology*, 75(19), 1726–1729.
- Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power, and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Dreifus, D. (2011, May 31). The bilingual advantage. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/31/science/31conversation.html>
- Duckworth, A. (2018). *Grit: The power of passion and perseverance*. NY, NY: Scribner.
- Eberhard, D. M., Simons, G. F., & Fenning, C. D. (2021). Most spoken languages. *Ethnologue: Languages of the world*. Twenty-fourth edition. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. [What is the most spoken language? | Ethnologue](#)
- Fortune, T. W., & Menke, M. (2010). *Struggling learners and language immersion education: Research-based, practitioner-informed responses to educators' top questions*. Minneapolis, MN: CARLA.
- Fortune, T. W., & Tedick, D. J. (2003). What parents want to know about foreign language immersion programs. *ERIC Digest*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics. [ERIC - ED482493 - What Parents Want To Know about Foreign Language Immersion Programs. ERIC Digest., 2003-Aug](#)
- Frede, E., & Barnett, W. S. (2011). Why pre-K is critical to closing the achievement gap: High-quality, universal pre-K can impact the nation's international ranking. *Principal*. National Association of Elementary School Principals. <https://www.naesp.org/principal-mayjune-2011-early-childhood/why-pre-k-critical-closing-achievement-gap>
- Gándara P., & Escamilla K. (2017). Bilingual education in the United States. In O. Garcia, A. Lin, & S. May (Eds.), *Bilingual and multilingual education. Encyclopedia of language and education* (3rd ed.). Springer, Cham. [https://doi-org.proxy.library.nyu.edu/10.1007/978-3-319-02324-3\\_33-2](https://doi-org.proxy.library.nyu.edu/10.1007/978-3-319-02324-3_33-2)
- Genesee, F. (2007). Top ten most consistent findings from research on foreign language immersion. *The ACIE Newsletter*, 10(3). [http://www.carla.umn.edu/immersion/acie/vol10/may2007\\_researchfindings.html](http://www.carla.umn.edu/immersion/acie/vol10/may2007_researchfindings.html)
- González, N., Moll, L., & Amanti, C. (2005). *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practices in households, communities, and classrooms*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

González, S. (2016). Preschoolers need more play and fewer scripted lessons, says early childhood educator Erika Christakis. *Yale News*. <https://news.yale.edu/2016/02/09/preschoolers-need-more-play-and-fewer-scripted-lessons-says-early-childhood-educator-erik>

Howard, E. R., Lindholm-Leary, K. J., Rogers, D., Olague, N., Medina, J., Kennedy, B., Sugarman, J., & Christian, D. (2018). *Guiding principles for dual language education*. Third edition. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. [Guiding Principles for Dual Language Education – Third Edition \(cal.org\)](https://www.cal.org/guiding-principles-for-dual-language-education-third-edition)

Howard, E. R., Sugarman, J., Christian, D., Lindholm-Leary, K. J., & Rogers, D. (2007). *Guiding principles for dual language education*. Second edition. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics. <https://www.hsd.k12.or.us/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=537&dataid=405&FileName=DualGuiding%20Principles%20of%20Dual%20Language%20Education%20-%20Center%20for%20Applied%20Linguistics.pdf>

Kamenetz, A. (2016). 6 potential brain benefits of bilingual education. *NPR Ed.* (<https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/11/29/497943749/6-potential-brain-benefits-of-bilingual-education>).

Lauerman, J. (2011). Mandarin Chinese most useful business language after English. *Bloomberg Business*.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2011-08-30/mandarin-chinese-most-useful-business-language-after-english-1#:~:text=Mandarin%2C%20China's%20official%20tongue%2C%20is,English%2C%20based%20on%20business%20usefulness>

Livaccari, C., (2017). *New ways of seeing: How multilingualism opens our eyes and trains our minds for a complex world*. New York: Asia Society. [https://www.amazon.com/New-Ways-Seeing-Multilingualism-Complex/dp/0692829075?\\_encoding=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&linkCode=ur2&tag=storypodca-20&linkId=2P4S6EY6B462X4AR](https://www.amazon.com/New-Ways-Seeing-Multilingualism-Complex/dp/0692829075?_encoding=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&linkCode=ur2&tag=storypodca-20&linkId=2P4S6EY6B462X4AR)

McKeown, M. G., & Beck, I. L. (2014). Effects of vocabulary instruction on measures of language processing: Comparing two approaches. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 29(4), 520–530.

Miller, P. J., & Sperry, D. E. (2012). Déjà vu: The continuing misrecognition of low-income children's verbal abilities. In S. T. Fiske & H. R. Markus (Eds.), *Facing social class: How societal rank influences interaction* (pp. 109–130). Russell Sage Foundation.

Mongeau, L. (2017). New research finds “Magic 8” preschool classroom practices. *Hechinger Report*. <https://hechingerreport.org/new-research-finds-magic-8-preschool-classroom-practices>

OECD. (2016). *Education in China: A snapshot*. <https://www.oecd.org/china/Education-in-China-a-snapshot.pdf>

Palmer, D. K., Cervantes-Soon, C., Dorner, L. & Heiman, D. (2019). Bilingualism, biliteracy, biculturalism, and critical consciousness for all: Proposing a fourth fundamental goal for two-way

dual language education. *Theory Into Practice*, 58(112), 121–133.

Paris, D. (2012). Culturally sustaining pedagogy: A needed change in stance, terminology, and practice. *Educational Researcher*, 41(3), 93–97. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X12441244>

Santillán J., & Khurana A. (2018). Developmental associations between bilingual experience and inhibitory control trajectories in Head Start children. *Dev Sci.*, 21(4), 12624. [Developmental associations between bilingual experience and inhibitory control trajectories in Head Start children - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30111111/)

Steele, J. L., Slater, R. O., Zamarro, G., Miller, T., Li, J., Burkhauser, S., & Bacon, M. (2017). Effects of dual-language immersion programs on student achievement: Evidence from lottery data. *American Educational Research Journal*, 54 (1), 1–9. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED577026.pdf>

Thomas, W.P., & Collier, V.P. (2012). *Dual Language Education for a Transformed World*. Albuquerque, NM: Dual Language Education of New Mexico Fuente Press.

Thomas, W.P. & Collier, V.P. (2017). *Why Dual Language Schooling*. Albuquerque, NM: Dual Language Education of New Mexico – Fuente Press.

Tobin, J. J., Hsueh, Y., & Karasawa, M. (2011). *Preschool in three cultures revisited: China, Japan, and the United States*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Tyack, D., & Tobin, W. (1994). The “grammar” of schooling: Why has it been so hard to change? *American Educational Research Journal*, 31(3), 453–479. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1163222>

Wang, S.C., Everson, M., & Peyton, J. K. (2016). *State of the Chinese language field in U.S. K-12 schools: Reaching a tipping point*. College Board and ELE Consulting International. Unpublished manuscript.

## APPENDIX

CELIN at Asia Society Early Childhood Chinese Immersion Education Meeting (Friday, February 21, 2020)

### Meeting Participants

- Jeff Bissell, Head of School, Chinese American International School (CAIS), <https://www.cais.org>
- Kevin Chang, Chinese Program Director, Chinese American International School (CAIS), <https://www.cais.org>
- Panpan Cui, Morningside PlayCare Toddler Language Project, <https://www.morningsideplaycare.com/toddler-project>
- Kyle Ennis, VP, Products and Technology, Avant Assessment, <https://avantassessment.com>
- Gail Foster, Executive Director, Morningside PlayCare Toddler Language Project, <https://www.morningsideplaycare.com>
- Gregory Fulkerson, Education Associate, World Languages & Dual Language Immersion,



- Delaware Department of Education, <https://www.doe.k12.de.us/Page/1090>
- Sue Ha, Head of School, Hudson Way Immersion School, <http://hwis.org>
- Robin Harvey, Clinical Assistant Professor, New York University
- Melissa Hong, Director, LC and Lower Division Admissions, Avenues, <https://www.avenues.org>
- Sharon Huang, Founder, Admissions and Marketing Director, HudsonWay Immersion School, <http://Hwis.org>
- Kimberly Krzanowski, Executive Director, Delaware Office of Early Learning, [https://education.delaware.gov/families/office\\_of\\_early\\_learning](https://education.delaware.gov/families/office_of_early_learning)
- Shenzhan Liao, Senior Vice President, Education, China Institute, <https://www.chinainstitute.org/mandarin-immersion-preschool>
- Sarah Lorya, Director of Enrollment and Marketing Operations, Science, Language & Arts International School, <https://slaschool.org>
- Yibo Lu, Chinese Immersion Coordinator, Avenues, <https://www.avenues.org>
- Britta Pells, Early Childhood Director, Chinese American International School (CAIS), <https://www.cais.org>
- Amy Quinn, Director of Teaching and Learning, Washington Yu Ying PCS, <https://www.washingtonyuying.org>
- Cindy Qiongwei Rang, Preschool Mandarin Teacher, Pine Street School, <https://www.pinestreetschool.com>
- Hongying Shen, Director of ELL (retired), Manhattan Borough, New York City Department of Education
- Yu (Jade) Song, Pre K4 Teacher, Washington Yu Ying Public Charter School, <https://www.washingtonyuying.org>
- Xiaoning Wang, Founder, ChinaSprout, <https://chinasprout.com>
- Kevin Wong, Clinical Faculty, Monroe College, <https://monroe-college.edu/Degrees/Undergraduate-Degrees/Education-Degree>
- Sirong Wu, Mandarin Coordinator, Pine Street School, <https://www.pinestreetschool.com>
- Yonglian Xiao, Associate Director, China Institute, <https://www.chinainstitute.org/mandarin-immersion-preschool>
- Ran Xu, Director of Mandarin Programs, Science Language & Arts International School, <https://slaschool.org>
- Shuhan Wang, Project Director, CELIN@Asia Society
- Joy Kreeft Peyton, Senior Project Associate, CELIN@Asia Society
- Ting Shen, Project Associate, CELIN@Asia Society
- Cleopatra Wise, Director, China Learning Initiatives, Asia Society