Creating an Integrated Immersion School Culture

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Immersion Education: Creating an Integrated School Culture

Introduction

Sofia is a bright seven-year-old girl whose parents want their young daughter to learn Chinese. In the town where they live, there is no Chinese-English dual language immersion school. There are several fine local elementary schools, but none of them offers Chinese (or any other world language instruction). There is a school in town called Huamei, which offers a wide array of core academic and enrichment classes in Chinese each weekday beginning at 1:30 pm as well as on weekends and in the summer. However, Huamei does not offer any classes in English. Most of the students are heritage Chinese speakers, who come from Sofia’s town and other surrounding communities to attend the school. Sofia’s parents take her to visit Huamei as well as Ruth Simmons Elementary, a local neighborhood school, and she likes them both. So do her parents. The teachers are friendly and student-focused, the principals seem competent and dedicated to running good schools, and the students are engaged and seem to enjoy learning. In the end, the family strikes a deal with both schools: Sofia will attend Ruth Simmons Elementary in the morning and Huamei in the afternoon. Sofia’s parents commit to picking her up every day from one school after lunch and driving her to the other school for afternoon class and after-school activities.

Think about the scenario above. The teachers and administrators at Ruth Simmons and Huamei have no obligation at all to communicate with one another about anything.

There is no imperative to collaborate. Each school has its own distinct mission; curriculum; schedule; philosophy about student learning; and approaches to managing student behavior, assigning homework, and managing diversity, equity, and inclusion; and the list goes on. The point is this: In the absence of deliberate and intentional collaboration aimed at aligning and integrating the English and Chinese elements of Sofia’s education, how many opportunities might be missed? How much redundancy is there? What kinds of mixed messages might Sofia be receiving? If there were a Chinese-English dual language immersion school in Sofia’s home town, how might that school’s teachers and administrators work together to provide a better, more well-integrated experience for students than the kind of “silos” experience described above?

This CELIN Brief draws on the experiences of several established Chinese-English dual language immersion schools to discuss how to integrate the Chinese and English strands of a school into one cohesive educational program. The leaders in all of the schools have worked hard to break down organizational silos and to create — with varying degrees of success — integrated school cultures. The goal of the Brief is to provide some fundamental principles, as well as some practical, actionable suggestions for bridging gaps that can sometimes exist.
Chinese Early Language and Immersion Network

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Creating an Integrated Immersion School Culture

Feature #1: Leadership
Feature #2: Faculty
Feature #3: Academic, Social and Emotional Curriculum Design
Feature #4: Engaging Parents
Feature #5: A Commitment to Building and Accessing Professional Networks

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