



AN EMERGING FIELD: CHINESE IMMERSION PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

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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.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Brief is the first of a trilogy of papers that seek to build the emerging field of Chinese language learning in preschool programs. 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 this emerging field in 2021.

The Brief opens with a description of the discussion that took place during the CELIN Chinese Language Immersion Preschool Meeting at Asia Society in February 2020, which addressed these questions:

1. Who are the providers of Chinese immersion preschool programs? What is the current (2020-2021) knowledge base with information, best practices, successes, and resources of Chinese immersion preschool programs in the United States? 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?

Section 2 provides a definition of a Chinese immersion preschool. First, we focus on preschool programs that are organized and operated by professionally trained adults and in which learning is combined with play. Second, we define Chinese immersion on programs that offer Chinese language in at least 50 percent of the instructional time and in different content areas. Taken together, we take a comprehensive approach to discussing how to offer equitable and inclusive additive bilingual education to all children, starting at three or four years old until they reach age five or six and are ready to enter kindergarten or elementary school, regardless of their linguistic, cultural, religious, socio-economic backgrounds or abilities.

Section 3 describes the landscape of Chinese immersion programs in the United States as discussed in the meeting at Asia Society, including the vision and mission, school growth, immersion model, curriculum and instructional approaches, activities beyond the curriculum, assessments used in school, and the successes and challenges that these schools experience. We also describe the courses, degrees and certifications, and successes and challenges of university programs to prepare teachers to work in these schools. Finally, we describe programs and initiatives at State Departments of Education and organizations supporting early language learning and assessment.

Section 4 follows four-year-old Cleo through a day at her Chinese immersion preschool, and we see the ways that the teachers and children communicate with each other in Chinese to build relationships, negotiate meaning, and engage in learning.

Section 5 discusses the benefits of bilingualism and multilingualism. It also summarizes the research on early language immersion education and the value that this education brings to the lives of individuals, families, and communities. The research findings guide the development of high-quality PK-12 programs that promote:

1. Academic achievement: All children can succeed
2. Proficient bilingualism and biliteracy from childhood to adulthood
3. Cross-cultural and global competence
4. Critical consciousness for equitable access and social justice
5. Creativity and innovation in language immersion education
6. Engagement of U.S. citizens with the world in the 21st century

Section 6 provides a rationale for the importance of studying Chinese language and culture and makes recommendations for further building the field.

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 Immersion Preschools

Recommendation 3. Conduct research and 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 opportunities for parents, teachers, and key stakeholders

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

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

As is argued throughout the Brief, high-quality preschool programs help prepare students to be ready for school upon entering kindergarten. Adding Chinese as a medium of instruction and opportunities to interact and play in Chinese further expand children's linguistic parameters and lay a solid foundation for literacy in the first and additional languages, while also enhancing their cognitive skills and executive functions. All of this can be achieved in a natural, nurturing, and fun way, without the normal struggles that adults sometimes find themselves going through in learning another language later in life. While the United States is in search of strategies to engage with China and the world, the priority should be on making sure that U.S. citizens have the ability to communicate in Chinese or another language in addition to English, and have the global competence to be agents of change. The future of our planet depends on the actions we take today.