

Question and Answer for the Curriculum Instruction Council, October 19, 2011

Topics: Chinese Language and Culture Pilot Report and IB German Textbook Proposal

Q: Concern was raised two years ago when, in the original proposal brought to CIC, it was stated that the DIBELS test would be used to assess this program. As stated yesterday in the meeting, a reading fluency test is being used to assess what it's not designed to assess. Knowing that this was a concern two years ago, why haven't any other quantitative assessments been developed to meaningfully evaluate this program?

A: The purpose of WMU's study is to determine whether or not instruction in Mandarin Chinese Language and Culture has an impact on reading and mathematics proficiency levels. They are not completing a program evaluation or assessing the program. Rather, they will focus solely on impact to student achievement for the students receiving instruction, as compared to the student not receiving the instruction.

The research is using DIBELS for the following reasons:

1. Fluency is a predictor of future reading comprehension skills in emerging readers.
2. It is the only standardized, locally and nationally normed assessment instrument that is completed by 1st graders. Performance Series and MEAP do not begin until 3rd grade.
3. DIBELS NEXT does have a comprehension component and the District will implement it in the 2012-2013 school year. Since this is a longitudinal study that will conclude after three years of instruction- the researcher will be able to triangulate the data with DIBELS, MEAP and Performance Series.

One concern raised when the pilot was approved was that lost instructional time and/or the addition of reading and speaking Chinese would decrease proficiency and success rates for emerging readers. The initial data collected through DIBELS does not support this assertion.

Q: It was stated in the meeting yesterday that Mandarin Chinese "had been identified" as the language Portage wanted to bring into the elementary schools. On what survey data was this identification based?

A: There was not a parent survey completed prior to planning the pilot program. Chinese was selected in a collaborative effort with the Portage Education Foundation when PPS was exploring options for funding to pilot an elementary World Language Program.

While it was not requested by parents, it was the recommendation of the administration to select a language and cultural enrichment experience at the elementary that would not track students toward a particular language that was already required in middle school and high school.

A few of the reasons for this decision are as follows:

1. The sustainability of any World Language program is unknown due to uncertainty in funding.
 - a. If sustained in a language already offered for only 3 years (French, German, and Spanish), adjustment would not need to be made to the level 1 language curricula. However, if sustained and expanded to more students and grade levels in a language already offered (French, German, and Spanish) significant adjustment would need to be made to the overall World Language program as the students in the pilot progress through the educational system.
 - b. Teachers and additional funding were only available for Chinese, not French, German or Spanish.

Q; The researcher made some pretty broad generalizations at the beginning of his statements, including one that children are more open to accept others when they are given world language instruction at an early age. While a statement such as this of course sounds reasonable, is there data that supports it and how would assessments be conducted on elementary school students to ascertain that children who are taught a world language are, in fact, more accepting of others than children who haven't had the opportunity to learn a world language at the elementary level?

A: As stated in the excerpt below, researchers have established a strong relationship between language and culture. Additionally, in other studies, students learning a language have had higher achievement on a standardized measure than their comparators who did not. However, most of the studies focus on students in immersion programs other than Chinese. Since we are not delivering an immersion program, PPS cannot generalize the results to the student population in the Chinese Language and Culture pilot program. Additionally, there are many intervening variables in school Districts that would make generalization between “even” identical programs very difficult.

In terms of students’ learning and demonstrating cultural awareness and sensitivity- as a result of receiving language and cultural instruction, there is a substantial literature base of qualitative, but little quantitative data. In one study about the study of English Language and Culture, Dr. Ismail Cakir writes the following:

The culture of people refers to all aspects of shared life in a community. A language is learned and used with a context, drawing from the culture distinctive meanings and functions which must be assimilated by language learners if they are to control the language as native speakers control it.

If language is described as a mode of human behaviour and culture as “patterned behaviour”, it is evident that language is a vital constituent of culture. As mentioned earlier, each culture has a unique pattern and the behavior of an individual, linguistic or otherwise, manifested through that is also unique. Foreign language will mean, therefore, changing the learner’s behaviour and injecting a new way of life and new values of life into his already settled behaviour pattern (Lado: 1963: 110). So, there is a close relationship between the language and culture. This relationship of language and culture is widely recognized, communicative behaviour and cultural systems are interrelated, as there is relation between the form and content of a language and the beliefs, values, and needs present in the culture of its speakers.

It is also known that the students, who are in need of developing cultural awareness and cultural sensitiveness, are normally those who are least disposed toward these goals. Teacher’s task is to make students aware of cultural differences, not pass value judgments on

these differences. Students learning a foreign language have to assimilate many new categorizations and codifications if they are to understand and speak the language as its native speakers do. This does not mean that the native language of the students could not have established such distinctions for them. All languages which have been closely studied seem to possess the potentiality for expressing all kinds of ideas and making all kinds of distinctions (Rivers, 1982). Learners should be exposed to these distinctions as much as possible in the foreign language teaching classrooms.

Excerpt from the article, Developing Cultural Awareness In Foreign Language Teaching; Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education-TOJDE, July 2006, Volume: 7, Number: 3 Article: 12, p. 157. For full text version go to http://tojde.anadolu.edu.tr/tojde23/pdf/article_12.pdf

Q: According to this report, student enrollment in the Pilot is listed as 177. When this pilot was approved by CIC two years ago, it was for 2 classrooms each at Amberly and Lake Center Elementaries. That should put the number of students in this program anywhere from 80-100 depending on 1st grade class sizes last year. Why is the initial number 177?

A: The pilot report includes data on students who are in the program, as well as 1st graders at Amberly and Lake Center elementary schools that are not receiving the Chinese Language and Culture Instruction. The students in the pilot group are the “treatment” group, while the other students are the “control group”. All results will compare the treatment group to the control group.

Q: The student enrollment is listed as 177 for the 1st quarter, then 171 for the 2nd and 4th quarters. To what is the decline in this number attributed?

A: According to the research, 6 students left the 1st grades at Amberly and Lake Center elementaries. The reasons are not known by the researcher and FERPA rights would not allow the researcher to obtain this information.

Q: Are there future plans to expand the Chinese program beyond just Amberly and Lake Center? If so, how will this be funded?

A: At this time there are not future plans to expand the elementary program beyond the pilot. After the final pilot report, a recommendation could be made to abandon, continue, or expand. This would go to CIC and then the Board for affirmation. The program is being expanded to the high school level this year in applicable subject areas and units of study. Funding for the high school program is being provided through a grant of up to \$600,000 that the District is receiving.

Should either program expand or extend beyond the period of the grant (5 years), the administration would make a recommendation. This would be made based upon available funding and recommendations from CIC and affirmation from the Board of Education.

Q: Why has elementary Spanish instruction been changed to only include 5th graders this year?

A: Due to a change in planning minutes, the length of each Special, and the inclusion of media and reading consultants as Specials teachers, some teachers were unassigned. By allocating more time to Specials, other than Spanish, teachers were able to maintain their position and PPS was able to absorb the reduction through reassignment and attrition.

Q: Is the German textbook proposed available in hard cover? Our only concern is the book will not survive 8 years of student use.

A: No, it is not available in hard cover; however, students are charged for lost and destroyed textbooks. Many IB books (college level) are soft cover. Most soft cover textbooks that we have in circulation have held up equivalently to hard cover textbooks (excludes some novels).

Q: Are the Confucius Institutes throughout the United States funded by the Chinese government? Is there comparative data?

A: Yes, all of the Confucius Institutes throughout the United States are partially funded and established in cooperation with a university and the Chinese government. In terms of comparative data, clarification is needed on what type of data and the focus of it, prior to answering the question relative to comparative data.