

Chinese Literacy Learning in an Immersion Program

“In this compelling and deeply researched volume, Chan Lü describes and investigates the complexities surrounding bi-literacy development in English and Chinese. Employing a case-study approach that focuses in detail on the workings of a U.S. Chinese immersion school, Lü’s chapters supply a support structure to guide the reader through the issues impacting bi-literacy development in languages employing strikingly different writing systems. Those uninitiated in immersion education or Mandarin Chinese language will welcome the chapter on the history and growth of immersion programs in the United States, and the in-depth description of the Mandarin Chinese language orthographic and sound structure and how they influence literacy development. Literacy educators and researchers of all stripes will welcome the theoretical chapter on the foundations of reading, and the review of bi-literacy research in immersion settings; those interested in how literacy develops in speakers of Chinese as a first or second language will find the most up-to-date research sources available, and gain greater insight into contentious pedagogical issues such as the use of pinyin. Moreover, Lü includes new research studies that focus on how oral language, phonological awareness and word reading relate to 2nd graders’ reading comprehension, and how morphological awareness, vocabulary knowledge, and lexical inference relate to text comprehension for 3rd graders. The volume particularly shines in concluding what the implications are for vocabulary development, program level practices, and pedagogical materials development, with a future research agenda that will challenge scholars for years to come. Importantly, the volume captures the challenges of Mandarin immersion education as expressed through the voices of the dedicated teachers in the trenches, thus putting a personal perspective on the serious challenges facing teacher education. This is a volume that all stakeholders in Chinese literacy and second language/immersion education will want close at hand.”

—Michael E. Everson, *Emeritus Associate Professor of Foreign Language Education, University of Iowa, USA*

“In 2018, we find ourselves at a point in the history of the Chinese language teaching profession in the United States where 90% of students studying the language and culture in the PreK-16+ academic pipeline are doing so at the

pre-collegiate level – and over 45% in K-12 programs. The urgency of designing better immersion programs in those primary and secondary schools is of paramount importance. Dr. Lü is to be highly commended for providing both a macro-analysis of the American language education theoretical and empirical context wherein programs such as Pacific Elementary School have been established, and a micro-level examination of how such a program may be better understood and enhanced. For program administrators to front-line teachers, and for literacy scholars to language policy advocates, this is a book of great insights and a source of true inspiration. I recommend it to the potential reader with great enthusiasm and appreciation.”

—Scott McGinnis, *Senior Academic Advisor & Professor of Chinese, Defense Language Institute, USA*

“Interest in Dual Language Immersion programs is growing rapidly throughout the United States and in an expanding number of languages, including Mandarin Chinese. Dr. Chan Lü’s book is one of the first to address the specific challenges of teaching and learning Mandarin Chinese in an early language setting with few, if any, native/heritage language speakers of Chinese. Her study addresses the major issue of developing literacy skills in two languages with very different writing systems in the context of a language immersion program teaching language through content instruction. In Seattle Public Schools we are using her timely and practical recommendations as guidelines for improving the quality and literacy outcomes of our K-12 Mandarin Dual Language Immersion programs.”

—Michele Anciaux Aoki, *International Education Administrator, Seattle Public Schools, USA*

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Foreword

The current searchable directory of the Center for Applied Linguistics (<http://webapp.cal.org/immersion/>) profiles foreign language immersion programs in 37 states and the District of Columbia and includes programs in 22 languages. This represents a huge increase since the Fall of 1966 when the first French immersion program began in the Montreal suburb of St. Lambert (Lambert & Tucker, 1972). Several years later Professor Russell Campbell from UCLA spent a portion of his sabbatical with us at McGill and visited the immersion classes on numerous occasions. Following his return to Los Angeles, he and other colleagues worked with community members in Culver City, CA to begin a Spanish immersion program—the first in the state. Then began a relative “explosion” as programs began to be offered in numerous provinces and states and in different languages.

The present monograph examines a Chinese immersion program in California offered to students from Kindergarten through grade 5. The author focuses a good deal of attention on the development of biliteracy skills on the part of the participating children as well as on the ability of participating children to extract content information (e.g., about science terms and concepts) in the target language. This is an important

contribution because many of the immersion programs to date have involved focal languages such as English and French or English and Spanish—orthographically similar languages.

The author devotes a good deal of attention to describing the Chinese writing system as well as the materials that are used by the pupils throughout the program. She also compares the typical print exposure experiences of students in this immersion program with students studying Chinese as a Heritage Language in the U.S. and with students studying in China.

In Chapter 7, the author explores the reading development of a cohort of participating grade 2 children who are tested in English and in Chinese at the beginning and the end of the school year. The study makes an important contribution to our understanding of the roles that factors such as phonological awareness and oral vocabulary knowledge play in students' development of literacy and biliteracy skills. In Chapter 8, she describes in some detail the ways in which grade 3 students are able to extract information about content materials such as science in their second language.

One of the things that we have learned in conducting studies such as this is to focus on what the students *can do* as opposed to what the student *cannot do* (Donato & Tucker, 2010) and the author is clear in this regard. She also goes to some length to describe the importance of selecting and incorporating specific vocabulary into classroom instruction in the content areas.

The author concludes with four specific, and helpful, recommendations for teachers—assure that teachers have time for, and access to, professional development; assure the development of appropriate—and realistic—goals and content for the program; assure that the reading content in Chinese is relevant and interesting for the students; and consider carefully the choice and use of script and coding practices.

The volume is one that will be of certain interest to practitioners associated with one- and two-way immersion programs; and also to teachers of Chinese as an additional or as a Heritage Language as well as to researchers who seek to examine the factors related to the development of biliteracy skills in orthographically dissimilar languages.

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