

## **“Hot” on Chinese, Dual Language Programs Are a Hit**

During Chinese Prime Minister Hu Jing Tao’s visit to the US, Obama’s nine-year old daughter Sasha also attended the ceremony. She grasped the once-in-a-life-time opportunity to practice her Chinese and greeted the Prime Minister with, “Ni hao.” In recent years, as China’s presence has continued to grow, and US schools, ranging from kindergarten to college and from private to public, as well as other education organizations have been strongly advocating for Chinese language instruction. The teaching methods vary –some language programs take place during the school day, others after school or during the weekends. PS 173’s dual language programs have demonstrated positive results.

According to Molly Wang, Principal of PS 173, Asian students make up over 60% of the student population. When she started her position seven years ago, parents had already been requesting Chinese language instruction. Based on the financial resources and human capital at the time, she started a weekend language class. Soon after, parents felt that a few hours of Chinese a week was not enough. Realizing that the rise of China would bring about a wave of interest in Chinese, she turned her focus to a more intensive teaching method.

After doing a year of research on French and Spanish dual language programs, PS 173 launched their first Chinese/English bilingual program three years ago. Currently, one in five of each class from grades 1 through 3 participates in the bilingual program. Every class has 25 students—native speakers represent half the class, and the other half by non-native speakers.

Wang emphasizes that “dual language” and “bilingual” both translate to the same phrase in Chinese, but the meanings are completely different. Bilingual classes are typically created to help immigrant children that have a weaker foundation in English. The purpose of these classes is to help integrate these children into American society. The purpose of dual language classes, however, is to teach all subjects in both languages.

According to Ms. Hong, Professor in Chinese, although there are many vibrant ancient Chinese legends, education materials for young children are lacking, and thus she usually rewrites or invents stories that cater to the age level of her students. At first, students were not used to it because it required them to use their imagination, but now, when they listen to these stories in Chinese, they are able to focus more, also

strengthening their ability to tell these Chinese stories in English.

Wang notes that dual language instructors usually have very good communication. She and her partner study the materials provided by Teachers College at Columbia and work together very well. As an example, on the first day of classes, students learn how to express numerical fractions in Chinese, and on the second day, the English teacher reviews the material quickly before explaining how to add fractions in English.

In order to avoid repeating the curriculum, teachers spend half an hour everyday to go over the materials. Theresa Maillard, a 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher, says, “This undoubtedly raises expectations for the teacher. I have to understand what the Chinese teacher is teaching and then focus on my responsibilities. My students and their parents all like this a lot, and I as well.”

Wang also says, one of the challenges of dual language programs is the difficulty to find certified Chinese teachers. Currently, at her school, there is only one Asian teacher. But the good thing is that American students are “hot” on Chinese now, and this will encourage more Asians to venture into education and become certified to be a dual language teacher. According to Ms. Lee, who currently studies at Teachers College and works at PS 173, the dual language programs at Columbia focus mostly on Spanish, but Chinese has become increasingly popular in recent years.

Every May, the students at PS 173 attend an information session where parents can learn more about the registration process for these dual language programs. Based on the students’ levels, the school will select the candidates by analyzing factors such as academic performance, teacher recommendation and a lottery system.

## **GLP Promotes Free Chinese Language Instruction**

In recent years, the rise of China has prompted many new Chinese/English dual language programs, and many Asian immigrants have begun to incorporate Chinese classes into the normal school day. However, Global Language Project, a NY-based nonprofit, chose to work with three NYC public schools and advocate Chinese language instruction through their after-school programs.

According to Angela Jackson, founder of GLP, Chinese speakers make up a large part

of the world's total population. American students need to compete in a global economy, which is more than just learning to speak Chinese. Jackson is an African American that grew up in Harlem. Prior to starting GLP, she worked at cell phone provider and often traveled to Europe and China for business. When she visited these countries, she discovered that all of the children often spoke several different languages. According to Jackson, the US job market needs employees with knowledge of foreign languages. While she was at her previous position, her company was unsuccessful in entering the China market. After several tries, they realized that due to domestic restrictions, they especially needed Chinese employees to help them make this work. Ultimately, Jackson decided to focus on learning a foreign language, and she studied in Paris before returning to NY to start GLP, which provides public school students an opportunity to learn a second language.

Jackson first targeted Harlem and partnered with an elementary school, where GLP offered two after-school programs in Chinese and Spanish. She believed that these students did not have many resources and that foreign language instruction could help expand their minds and their global perspectives, which would in turn help them compete in the global economy later in life. According to Kaya Arnoux, a Chinese teacher from Taiwan, foreign language instruction is expensive in the US – in the past, only wealthier families had this luxury. This is why GLP chose to promote these language programs in low-income areas, helping these children become more competitive.

Since September 2009, GLP has been offering Chinese and Spanish after-language programs at PS 368. Currently, they also offer Chinese, Spanish, and Arabic programs at PS 110, PS 261, and Harlem YMCA. According to Jackson, though Chinese is very popular among students and parents, PS 368 only has two Chinese classes, and the other schools only have one each. Many parents of kindergarten students are eager and hopeful that soon each grade will have a language program.

Kaya notes that after-school programs are not part of the schools' formal curriculum. The purpose is rather, to foster children's interest in Chinese culture through different activities. Last year, many students had vacation during Chinese New Year, and many of her students told Kaya that they went to Chinatown to see the lion dance. In addition, Jackson suggested that students learn the traditional Chinese New Year song. After the third grade students' performance of, "Gong Xi Gong Xi" (transl. Congratulations), GLP received a growing interest from other parents and students.

Last year, GLP won a \$50,000 Pepsi Refresh Grant and used this money to expand their program at PS 368. According to Kaya, the curriculum was developed by an NYU language professor and focuses on fundamental reading and listening skills. She also developed several activities to promote the students' interest in class.

Jackson notes that NYC public schools only begin to offer language instruction in high school, whereas it is proven that young children can learn a second language much more quickly. She says, "They don't know that it is hard, so it's not for long until they begin to speak it." She boasts that her students spend 4.5 hours a week on language instruction, more than what a typical weekend class can offer. Angela's biggest hope is that in five years time, her students will all become fluent in Chinese.