

The “Intent” of Mandarin Bilingual Programs: a Discourse Analysis in the context of Ethnic Chinese Immigrants’ Heritage Language Maintenance in the Public Schools of British Columbia

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Abstract

This paper intends to explore the intent of the Mandarin Bilingual Programs implemented in many school districts around British Columbia (B.C.).

In the past decades, Canada has witnessed a growing public awareness of multiculturalism, a trend towards globalization, and the reversal of East and West power relations. However, aside from the dominant language programs i.e. French Immersion, few minority language programs, such as Mandarin Bilingual Program and Mandarin Immersion Program, have emerged in the Vancouver, Burnaby and Coquitlam School Districts of British Columbia since September 2010 (School District 39, 41 and 43 official websites).

Despite the encouraging tendency towards newly developed Mandarin Programs in an English dominant culture, the language used to articulate the program details on the official school websites raises questions on their intentions for establishing such programs. One may wonder whether or not establishing Mandarin Bilingual and Immersion Programs has to do with governmental assistance, enhancement or support for ethnic Chinese immigrants in maintaining their heritage language in the dominant culture of a contemporary and multicultural society such as B.C. This paper will analyze the wording, phrases, and graphics of the official information on the Mandarin Immersion Programs online and in print. It may shed light on the intent and intended learners of Mandarin Programs in British Columbia.

To provide the readers with a broader comprehension and appreciation of the paper’s “plot”, the article will set up the “theme” with a historical background of immigrants’ efforts and struggles to maintain their heritage languages in the midst of the dominant culture’s assimilation process. The recent immigrant wave, demographic makeup of Western Canada, economic significance of infused Chinese populations in British Columbia, and the B.C. China Agreement in 2008, which brought free mandarin courses to public schools, will also be addressed.