

SFIFF 52



**2009
Schools at the Festival
Study Guide**

for

Speaking in Tongues

Compiled by: Julia Queck

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Logline

4 kids become bilingual in an experience that transforms both themselves and their country.

Film Synopsis

Speaking in Tongues begins with an ordinary first day of public school kindergarten - except that the teacher speaks only Chinese. Most of her primarily white and Asian American students look confused but curious; a few nod knowingly. They are all in a language immersion class, where, from day one, they will receive 90% of their instruction in Cantonese. Remarkably, their school will test first in English and math among their district's 76 elementary schools.

The film's four protagonists come to language immersion programs for very different reasons. Jason is a first generation Mexican-American whose immigrant family embraces bilingualism as the key to full participation in the land of opportunity. Durrell is an African-American kindergartner whose mom hopes that learning Mandarin will be a way out of economic uncertainty and into possibility. Kelly is a Chinese- American recapturing the Cantonese her parents sacrificed to become American. Julian is a Caucasian 8th grader eager to expand his horizons and become a good world citizen. Together, they represent a nexus of challenges facing America today: economic and academic inequities, de facto segregation, record numbers of new immigrants, and the need to communicate across cultures. Using a verité story-telling approach, the film follows our characters as they enter the portal of language and open their minds to new ways of thinking and being in the world. In a time of globalization and changing demographics, bilingualism offers them more than an opportunity to join the global job market. Language becomes a metaphor for breaking down barriers between ourselves and our neighbors—be they around the corner or across the world.

While the kids grow in ease and skill with their second tongue, the grown-ups argue. Durrell orders his first Chinatown meal in Mandarin; an uncle at a family dinner praises bilingualism, citing the needs of the global economy. Kelly learns traditional cooking from her Chinese-speaking grandma; yet her great aunt scoffs at any form of bilingual education, citing tax burdens. Jason becomes the first in his family to read, write, and graduate elementary school; meanwhile at a school enrollment fair, a concerned Latino father asks where his daughter can learn more English. Julian travels to China and bargains for clothes in Mandarin at a Beijing marketplace; an angry Chinese dad at a school meeting bellows, "We are in America! We need English!"

To explore these contentious debates at the national level, *Speaking in Tongues* turns to Ling-chi Wang, a community activist who pioneered efforts to establish multilingual education in the United States. He takes us on a brief You Tube tour of the national discourse: critics bemoan a loss of national identity and warn of an impending Balkanization of the United States, while others warn of the national security risks of having too few Arabic speakers. Ling-chi laments the nation's stubborn attachment to monolingualism, a phenomenon that masks deeper social tensions about diversity and difference. His rallying cry is that the United States is a nation whose linguistic richness is among its greatest assets. Employers need multilingual skills, universities spend millions teaching foreign languages, and our national security apparatus pours millions into teaching "strategic languages." Yet the U.S. congress routinely considers "English-only" legislation, and 31 states have already passed such laws.

But Ling-chi doesn't have time for hand wringing; A gavel brings us to a packed school board meeting where he's spearheading an initiative to offer every public school child in San Francisco the opportunity that Jason, Durrell, Kelly, and Julian have. Will one city's bold experiment become a model for transforming Americans into global citizens?

Biography of Producers/Directors Marcia Jarmel & Ken Schneider

Ken Schneider is producer, editor, and sound recordist for PatchWorks films.

He is also an accomplished freelance editor whose credits include award winning documentaries on a broad range of subjects, from art and literature to war and peace, immigration, disability and social justice. Ken co-edited the feature documentary *Regret To Inform*, winner of the Peabody Award, Indie Spirit Award and Sundance Film Festival Directing award, as well as the IDA Award for most distinctive use of archival footage. *Regret* also was nominated for an Academy Award and a National Emmy.

Other editing credits include *Bolinao 52* about Vietnamese boat refugees; the PBS American Masters specials *Orozco: Man of Fire* and *Ralph Ellison: An American Journey*; P.O.V. special *Freedom Machines*, about the convergence of disability, technology and civil rights; PBS primetime special *The Good War* and *Those Who Refused to Fight It*, which aired on Martin Luther King's birthday and won best historical documentary awards from both the American Historical Association and Organization of American Historians; PBS special and Golden Gate award-winner *Store Wars: When Wal-Mart Comes to Town*; Frontline's Columbia-Dupont Award winning *School Colors*, a look at integration and segregation 40 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*; and *Ancestors in the Americas, Part 2: Pioneers in the American West*, about the Chinese-American experience.

Ken has collaborated with Nina Wise, the dancer/performance artist; Charlie Varon, the solo theater performer; Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, Academy award-winning filmmakers, and Richard Beggs, Academy award-winning sound designer, among others. Ken has consulted on dozens of documentaries, and lectures at San Francisco City College, the San Francisco Art Institute, and New York University.

Marcia Jarmel founded PatchWorks with Ken Schneider in 1994. She has been producing and directing documentaries for over 15 years. Her best-known work is the ITVS-funded *Born in the U.S.A.*, which aired on the PBS series *Independent Lens* and was hailed as the “best film on childbirth” by the former director of maternal health at the World Health Organization. The documentary has been used to educate hundreds about childbirth options, and to lobby legislators to reform midwifery laws. Nine years after its national broadcast, *Born in the U.S.A.* continues to engage families, communities, and health care professionals.

Marcia's other films include *Collateral Damage*, a mother's lament about the human costs of war that screened worldwide in theatres, museums, festivals and schools as part of *Underground Zero: Filmmakers Respond to 9/11*. Her *Return of Sarah's Daughters* examines the allure of Orthodox Judaism to secular young women. The hour-long documentary won a CINE Golden Eagle, National Educational Media Network Gold Apple, and 1st Place in the Jewish Video Competition. It screened on international public television, and at the American Cinematheque, International Documentary Film Festival, Women in the Director's Chair, Cinequest and numerous other film festivals. Her first film, *The F Word: A short video about Feminism* uses whimsical animation and interviews to foster discussion on this so-called contentious topic. Still in distribution after 15 years with Women Make Movies, *The F Word* screened on KQED's *Living Room Festival*, AFI's VideoFest, and the Judy Chicago film series at the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

Marcia's additional credits include producing and directing films for the San Francisco World Music Festival, co-editing the Academy-award nominee, *For Better or For Worse*, and assistant producing the Academy Award nominees *Berkeley in the Sixties* and *Freedom on My Mind*. She was a resident at Working Films Content + Intent Doc Institute and has guest lectured at Stanford University San Francisco City College, San Francisco State University, and New York University.

Directors' Statement

Sometimes a small idea has big implications. Consider America's resolute commitment to remaining an "English only" nation. It turns out that our attitudes about language reflect much bigger concerns: that language is a metaphor for the barriers that come between neighbors, be they across the street or around the world.

Our idea in making *Speaking in Tongues* was to showcase a world where these communication barriers are being addressed. An African-American boy from public housing learns to read, write, and speak Mandarin. A Mexican-American boy, whose parents are not literate in any language, develops professional-level Spanish while mastering English. A Chinese-American girl regains her grandparents' mother tongue—a language her parents lost through assimilation. A Caucasian teen travels to Beijing to stay with a Mandarin speaking host family. Their stories reveal the promise of a multilingual America. Each kid's world opens up when they start learning two languages on the first day of kindergarten; each is developing both bi-cultural and bi-lingual fluency.

Support for this idea comes from an odd cross section of America. Business leaders point to a "flattening" world, seeking workers with multilingual skills like those displayed by many from rising nations; the Department of Defense pours hundreds of millions of dollars into teaching languages deemed "strategic" to national security (today Mandarin, Arabic, Russian. Tomorrow, Hindi? Portuguese? Malay?). And many educators tout the improved test scores of bilingual children—whether they speak English as a first language or not. Why then, is bilingualism not *de rigeur* in the U.S. as it is in most nations?

Many Americans have a different perspective. We are becoming a modern-day Babel, detractors warn; our national identity is at risk. Witness Nashville's recent vote aimed at making English the city's "official language," something 31 states have already voted to do. New York City, in turn, felt the hostility last year when street demonstrations erupted over the opening of an Arabic immersion public school named after Khalil Gibran, the Lebanese Christian writer who once lived in New York. Even liberal Palo Alto, California, had a hard time allowing a Mandarin immersion program to open. Some said there was fear it would attract too many Chinese to the neighborhood. Attitudes toward bilingualism can be a mask for complicated fears that are hard to talk about: the impact of new immigrants, and global competition, to name two hot button issues. But in our diverse country, in our increasingly international world, is knowing English enough?

The ensemble cast of *Speaking in Tongues* answers on camera. As their educational adventure unfolds, we witness how learning a second language transforms their sense of self, their families, and their communities. In a time of globalization and changing demographics, bilingualism offers these kids more than an opportunity to join the global job market. They connect with their grandparents, they communicate with their immigrant friends, they travel comfortably abroad. They are becoming global citizens.

We've witnessed this transformation in our own home. Our sons are in their fourth and eighth year in a public school Chinese immersion program. They cause a stir when they order in accent-less Chinese at local restaurants. But they also have translated for a confused Chinese speaker lost at the doctor, visited shut-in Chinese speaking elders, felt at home in a traditional Chinese home, and very important for us, helped us understand our film footage. When spoken to by a native speaker, they don't pause to translate; they think in Chinese, having learned it like a baby, by hearing it spoken around them. Their experience prompts the telling of these small stories that in turn provoke one of the most compelling questions of our day: what do we as a nation need to know in the 21st century?

Production Notes

There is always a point during the production where you look at your co-Producer, or at yourself, if you are flying solo, and say, "We've got it. We've got a movie." Fortunately for us, this happened on our first shoot. I say fortunately, because it took nearly three years from that moment to fund the movie, or, as we say on a bad day, "that damn movie."

Our "A-ha moment" came when we filmed the first day of kindergarten at a Chinese immersion public school, where the teacher speaks to the children exclusively in Cantonese. The children in her class are mostly Asian or Caucasian, with a few Latino and African-American kids. Regardless of their ethnicity, all but a few were native English speakers and most had never heard a word of Cantonese. Yet by the end of the first hour, each child had been called to the front of the class, shown the hook where they could hang their coat, the shelf where they could put their lunch, and the bucket where they could deposit their backpack. And by the end of that hour, each one of them, and each of us, knew that *shoo-bow* is the Cantonese word for backpack.

When Alex, a flaxen-haired boy born of Swedish parents, placed his *shoo-bow* in the bucket and sat down with a bewildered expression, our cinematographer, Andy Black, zoomed slowly in on his face. We each looked at each other with a knowing look: we've got a film.

Logline, Film Synopsis, Biography, Director's Statement and Production Notes from the SPEAKING IN TONGUES press kit (<http://www.speakingintonguesfilm.info>).

“Tongues” cracks the language barrier

By Michael Fox

<http://www.sf360.org/features/in-production-tongues-cracks-the-language-barrier>

If there is such a thing as good timing in the documentary world, and we daresay there is, Marcia Jarmel and Ken Schneider are poised to be major beneficiaries.

The San Francisco couple’s forthcoming film, **Speaking in Tongues**, follows four diverse local public-school students enrolled in language-immersion programs. The goal of the curricula is not merely to turn out bilingual children who will thrive in the global economy, but to dissolve the suspicion and stigma that attaches to “the other.”

“Bilingualism is a metaphor for what could be breaking down those barriers between our neighbors and us, whether it be around the corner or around the world,” Schneider explains. “This is very much about how we understand and are understood by the rest of the world—how we engage with the rest of the world. We’re talking about transformation, personal, cultural and national.”

“We’re putting out a vision of what could be,” Jarmel elaborates, “because these kids are pioneers in a world we hope is coming. San Francisco is on the cutting edge because it’s made a public-policy statement that every public school kid has the opportunity to be bilingual.”

Jarmel and Schneider (whose previous films include **The Return of Sarah’s Daughters** and **Born in the U.S.A.**) come to bilingualism from personal experience. Their children go to a language-immersion school, with the 13-year-old conversationally fluent in Mandarin, Cantonese and English while the eight-year-old speaks Cantonese and English and understands some Mandarin. (The couple makes a trip to Chinatown with the kids sound like a real hoot.)

Between their experience on previous films and their familiarity with San Francisco’s language-immersion program, the filmmakers didn’t find it particularly difficult to cast **Speaking in Tongues**. “You can see which kids have a story just in the way they are,” Jarmel says nonchalantly. The tougher task was integrating personal arcs and big-picture themes into a fluid, emotionally compelling cut.

“It’s definitely been a challenge to figure out how to bring a very big question into a single story,” Jarmel admits. “Is it a social-issue or a character-driven story?” Schneider, who’s widely viewed as one the Bay Area’s top documentary editors, evinces no such ambivalence. “I learned a long time ago you can do an ensemble cast as long as the issues you’re exploring are embedded in character stories.”

The kids in **Speaking in Tongues** – an African American, Mexican American, Asian American and Caucasian—represent different facets of the complex bilingual issue, and the film invites the audience to root for each child in a different way. A different musical motif, with Jon Jang and Wayne Wallace providing Asian-fusion classical jazz and B. Quincy Griffin contributing contemporary hip-hop, has likewise been conceived for each character.

“What they collectively add up to is the core idea of the film, encouraging Americans to rethink our allegiance to English only,” Jarmel explains. “Language is a doorway to understanding other cultures. In that way, language is kind of a metaphor for Americans opening their [minds] to other ways of thinking and being in the world. It’s very concrete—you learn a skill that can help you communicate—but it also does something else to your worldview. And we’re talking about both of those things [in the film].”

The filmmakers shot throughout the 2006-07 school year, and expect to wrap postproduction with a finished film by mid-February. They’re beginning to apply to festivals while waiting for news from PBS— **Speaking in Tongues** is an ITVS project—regarding an anticipated fall broadcast date.

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Hence the documentary gods synchronizing their watches. We're about to bid a hearty goodbye to the fellow who declared himself the Education President but was more like the class clown. The new guy is a law professor who writes books and told English-only advocates on the campaign trail last July, "Understand this: instead of worrying about whether immigrants can learn English, they'll learn English, you need to make sure your child can speak Spanish."

"Certainly we're in a more favorable climate than we would have been a year ago," Jarmel concurs. "Just a few years ago, this wasn't on anyone's plate. Nobody was connecting [job opportunities] with language skills. Colleges say recruiters are looking for multilingual skills. I think part of the reason the film has taken so long is we really had to make the case for people that the issues are related, that this is not just a sweet program where kids are enjoying their education. This is a model for transforming our society into a global partner."

Mission Featured in S.F. Film Festival

By Amanda Martinez, 22 April 2009

<http://missionlocal.org/2009/04/mission-district-featured-in-san-francisco-international-film-festival/>

[...] Making its world premiere is the documentary *Speaking in Tongues* by husband-and-wife team Marcia Jarmel and Ken Schneider. [...] The film only briefly touches on the ugly politics of the English-only movement, showing a YouTube clip of Ron Unz—the man responsible for ending bilingual education in California with Proposition 227 in 1998. Instead, it presents the concrete concerns of bicultural families such as that reflected by a Latino father in the film who is concerned his child needs more English instruction in the classroom.

In San Francisco, where more than 41 percent of kindergartners are considered English-language learners, the possibility for all students to be bilingual and bicultural is not far from a reality. In 2006 the San Francisco Board of Education passed a resolution to offer bilingual education for all students by the year 2023. The district has already developed a multilingual master plan that offers a path for students to graduate from the SFUSD fluent in English and one other language.

Mission Loc@l talked to director Marcia Jarmel about her film.

Why did you decide to focus on San Francisco?

“San Francisco has a very long history with language and education since the mid ’70s. The landmark Supreme Court Case *Lau v Nichols* that created the mandate that kids have a right to learn in a language they understand took place in San Francisco when Superintendent of Schools Nichols was taken to court by a group of immigrant Chinese families. [This civil rights case established equal education opportunity for non-English speakers across the nation.] Also, San Francisco is the only urban school district in the country to pass a resolution that says they want bilingualism to be a part of the public education system.”

In the film you present bilingualism as an asset. Do you consider yourself an immersion program advocate?

“I am an immersion program parent. My two kids go to a Chinese immersion school at Alice Fong Yu, one of the schools in the film. We were meeting different types of kids and watching what happened to our own kids as a result of this schooling experience. We are English speakers in our home but this experience opened up a gateway to understanding and cross-cultural communication. I believe that with bilingualism your horizons are much bigger and you’re much more equipped to function in a global world.”

There is also a short film in the festival called *Immersion* that examines a 10-year-old Mexican immigrant who speaks no English and his struggle to fit in at his new school in California. (Parts were also filmed in the Mission) Why is this issue of language instruction so important right now?

“We now have an administration that is much more open to the idea of bilingualism. Also, people are recognizing the reality of the changing demographics. We have large immigrant communities not only near border towns and urban cities but also all over the country. Experts say that by the year 2025, 30 percent of students in public school won’t speak English when they start kindergarten, so there is a pressing question of how to integrate these students into the communities.”

Why did you decide to follow Jason at Buena Vista?

“We first saw Jason in a San Francisco Opera performance [a scene shown in the movie] and we were amazed that a kid who came into kindergarten knowing no English was now in fifth grade, and was comfortable enough in his English to perform comedy in front of an audience. He was very charming. We also saw in his dad that he had a story to tell and wanted to communicate it.”

**French Immersion? Russian? It may all be coming here in San Francisco
New Multilingual Master Plan by San Francisco Public Schools**

*Reported by Elizabeth Weise, Mandarin Immersion Parents Council, 25 January 2009
<http://mandarinimmersionparents.blogspot.com/2009/01/french-immersion-russian-it-may-all-be.html>*

Imagine San Francisco with a public French immersion school. A public Russian immersion school. Spanish and Chinese immersion schools in each quadrant of the City, with enough seats for all comers.

Imagine every elementary school in the district offering at least 30 minutes per day of a second language to every student whose family chooses it.

Imagine strong middle and high school language programs feeding from those immersion elementary schools, so that San Francisco students will routinely pass AP literature and language tests in other languages with a minimum score of 4. Imagine kids coming out of general ed programs with a solid grounding in a second language, even if they weren't in immersion.

When today's 2- and 3-year-olds are ready to enter school, it may not be a dream but reality. Those goals, and more, are part of the San Francisco Unified School District's Multilingual Master Plan, a draft of which was presented to the Blue Ribbon Task Force last month.

It comes in part from the School Board's resolution that "preparing students for our world of multilingualism and multiculturalism has become an integral and indispensable part of the educational process," passed on Dec. 12, 2006.

In breathtaking boldness, the plan, already endorsed by school Superintendent Carlos Garcia, envisions a San Francisco school system that builds on the City's century-old history as a cosmopolitan, polyglot culture and international gateway.

"We're trying to prepare all San Francisco Unified School District students to become global citizens," says Laurie Olsen, a well-known educational consultant who is working closely with SFUSD staff to craft the Master Plan.

Already popular

The idea of focusing on language comes from two facts about the San Francisco Public Schools:

- Half of the districts students enter school already speaking another language, generally Spanish or Chinese.
- Immersion programs are hugely popular.

This gives San Francisco a head start in the language game, and a base of students who by middle school will move smoothly between two languages. Those existing language abilities, in 49% of students, will allow the District to merge heritage learners and those from the bilingual programs with students coming from immersion.

"The pathways are going to merge in middle school, because we believe they'll have the same levels of language proficiency. Out of a middle school program they'll be doing high-level academic work in that target language," said Margaret Peterson

the new program administrator for the District's World Language / Multilingual Education department.

And there's already a huge hunger for such programs. Parents crowd the district's eight public Spanish immersion elementary schools, two Cantonese immersion, two Mandarin immersion and

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one Korean immersion. All told, 13 of the City's 72 elementary schools offer language immersion, and still there are waiting lists.

"If everybody knew they could get a slot in immersion, that would be huge for enrollment and for people being excited about the district," says Tammy Radmer, founder of San Francisco Advocates for Multilingual Excellent, a group of parents with children in immersion programs in the public schools.

"I don't know how many parents I've talked to who are stressed out because they know they probably won't get into immersion. So people are pessimistic even enrolling," she says.

When parents can't get languages in the city's schools, they leave the system. San Francisco is home to numerous private language immersion schools, including two French, one Mandarin, at least one Russian as well as Chinese, Scandinavian, Italian and German immersion preschools.

When they can, they stay. A full quarter of parents in the city's two Mandarin immersion schools say they would have gone private or left the district entirely had they not had an immersion alternative. With it, they stayed and are contributing to the growing vibrancy and excitement of one of the nation's most forward-thinking school districts.

But however popular languages are, currently 27 elementary schools have no language program outside of English. So the District plans to build on this vast base of parental interest to create a school system that prepares all students "to become global citizens in a multilingual world," in the words of the original Blue Ribbon Task Force report presented to the School Board in April of 2008.

This would put San Francisco schools on par with many in Europe, where competency and fluency in second and even third languages isn't considered surprising but merely expected in a world where speaking more than one language is presumed.

Not Just Immersion

The plan isn't all about immersion. While a choice of immersion programs would be available in every quadrant of the city, every school in the district would have at least one language program available in addition to standard academic English.

That would mean daily 30 minute classes in the target language, allowing all students in the system who follow the program through until 12th grade to attain a basic level of proficiency by graduation, something rarely attained in most schools nationwide.

"The programs won't be mandatory," says Peterson.

"It's about access, it's not about a mandate or a requirement."

"The district will work closely with administrators and teachers to make sure they can contribute their know-how and experience to building powerful programs," says Francisca Sanchez, the Associate Superintendent.

German, anyone? Arabic?

And the languages don't have to be Spanish, Mandarin or Cantonese, says Peterson. "The district is very open to additional languages. We're going to start where there's some demand, where parents are saying they want it, or teachers and principals are interested."

For parents whose kids aren't in those programs, especially parents whose children aren't yet in school, the possibilities are tantalizing. Already, the director of an Italian immersion preschool in

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San Francisco has contacted the district about beginning an Italian program. Given the numerous, well-organized language groups in the city, the possibilities seem endless for parents who begin organizing now.

It's been done before, recently. The District's two now over-subscribed Mandarin immersion schools, which currently have 140 students and will fill up at 360 students in 2011, were created by committed parents approaching the district just six years ago, in 2003.

But how?

In a time of budgetary constraints, implementing such an ambitious plan seems difficult in the extreme. Peterson says the idea is to be implementing it in already existing language programs with the aid of the committed parent populations already in place, "building from the bottom up to strengthen existing programs."

That will include working on the Middle and High School portion of immersion programs, creating them in Mandarin and Cantonese as well as broadening the programs in place for Spanish.

It will also mean bringing together bilingual, heritage speakers and immersion program students at Middle School, when their language abilities should be nearly equal. This will create a broader pool of students (especially in Cantonese and Mandarin) at designated schools making class creation easier.

The plan is ambitious and the District realizes that it can't create such a broad plan out of thin air. One thing it has going for it is that it's teacher population is already linguistically rich, something not every school district can say. But even so, the District plans to begin working with university teaching programs across the state to begin a pipeline that will create the teachers it will need.

The students will feed back into those same universities. In middle school and high school they will take actual courses in the language they learned in elementary school, so social studies taught in Spanish or math taught in Chinese, plus an additional language arts class in that language.

That's crucial to raising students' abilities in the language through increasingly sophisticated course material. It pays off. In the University of Oregon and at UC Berkeley, Chinese programs have had to add two grade levels to their Chinese course work, because students coming out of immersion schools were so advanced they ran out of courses to take.

But how to pay for it? Clearly, there's going to be a lot less money going to California public schools in the coming years. The District hopes that community and civic partnerships can be formed around languages, schools and programs. That could mean money from the federal government, which pays to support languages it considers crucial (Chinese, Arabic, Russian, etc), money from China, which supports Mandarin studies worldwide, and money from community groups, parents and foundations.

To frustrated Spanish immersion parents whose children often find no suitable classes when they get to middle school, such ambitious planning might seem premature. But the District sees plans to focus first on those existing programs, to strengthen them and build them up as showcases that can be used to spin off new programs as the plan is implemented.

Next steps

Over the next two months the District plans to present its plan to interested parent groups, including Parents for Public Schools (PPS), San Francisco Advocates for Multilingual Excellent (SF AME), District English Learners Advisory Council (DELAC), Chinese for Affirmative Action, Bilingual Community Council (BCC), the Mandarin Immersion Parents Council and the San Francisco chapter of the California Association of Bilingual Educators (SF-ABE) to name a few.

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The student assignment redesign team is working closely with Multilingual Education /World Language and English Learners Support Services to create a system that takes into account language pathways.

One goal is to ensure that once a student begins in a given language, they will have the opportunity to continue in it through high school. For example, “A kid who started in Japanese gets priority placement to a middle school with Japanese,” said Olsen.

This is all meant to happen quickly. The District hopes to have gotten input from parent and other groups by April, so that during the 2009-2010 school year schools can plan and by 2010-2011 “we’ll begin to see implementation,” said Peterson.

The goal is that by 2023 “all schools will have this continuous pathway in place,” she says. That would mean that two- and three-year olds in San Francisco today would graduate from a school system that presumes languages are crucial to a 21st century life.

But some things will happen more quickly. For example, Peterson wants to emphasize the importance of students who already speak two languages, and will present a plan to the Board of Education to award Seals of Biliteracy for students graduating with those skills as early as the end of this year.

There’s certainly buy-in at the top. When the plan was presented to school superintendent Carlos Garcia, his reaction was “This is a dream come true,” said Peterson.

Bilingual kids not slowed by second tongue

ABC Science Online, 7 November 2002

<http://www.abc.net.au/science/news/stories/s720173.htm>

Learning a second language does not slow language development in children, according to a study presented to an American neuroscience conference.

In fact, the earlier and more intensively the languages are introduced, the better.

The study, by researchers at the Department of Psychological and Brain Science at Dartmouth College, in the USA, looked at children who had been exposed to different combinations of languages at different ages and in different environmental settings.

"We found that if children are exposed to two languages from a very early age, they will essentially grow as if there were two mono-linguals housed in one brain," Professor Laura-Ann Petitto told delegates. "This will occur without any of the dreaded 'language contamination' often attributed to early bilingual exposure."

Scientists have long debated whether a child's language ability is hindered by learning two languages at the same time from an early age. Some experts argue that a second language should only be introduced after the child has a full grasp of a primary language.

Professor Petitto's findings, produced with graduate student Ioulia Kovelman, were presented at the Society for Neuroscience's annual meeting held in Orlando, Florida this week.

The researchers looked at 15 bilingual children exposed to two languages from varying ages. Each age group of young bilinguals was at a different stage in child brain development.

The researchers split the children into four groups depending on when intensive exposure to the second language began: at birth, between the ages of two to three, four to six years, and seven to nine years.

This meant the researchers were able to match the time of bilingual language exposure to key stages of brain development. "We anchor[ed] our findings in the biology of the way the brain grows," she said.

The children spoke various combinations of languages, including Spanish and French, French and English, Russian and French and sign language and French.

To obtain a wider cross section, the researchers used children who had been exposed to their second language in different places – at home, a new language community, or in an instructional classroom setting.

"We wanted to study how all of the children's basic knowledge of their two languages developed over time and thus, in our attempt to be as comprehensive as possible, we examined children across multiple languages, ages and contexts," she said.

The results found something many school students struggling with French could tell you: late exposure to a second language, coupled with restricted input – such as in a classroom – may never allow a child full mastery in that language.

But don't panic if you want to introduce your child to a second language later, she said: all they need is extensive exposure to both languages.

Classroom Discussion and Activities

To enrich the students' experience, we recommend post-viewing discussions and activities for *Speaking in Tongues*. Teachers are encouraged to adapt the study guide to meet their own learning objectives for their students.

Grade Levels

We recommend *Speaking in Tongues* for grades 5-12.

Suggested Subject Areas

Chinese	Journalism	Social Studies
English	Peer/Youth Issues	Spanish
ESL	Political Science	

Pre-Viewing

You can share the film synopsis and introduce information on the filmmaker as well as on immersion programs and the issue of bilingualism.

Questions for the filmmaker

- How did you become a filmmaker?
- Where did you learn your own filmmaking skills and style?
- Why have you chosen to do documentaries as opposed to feature films?
- What kind of challenges did you face in making this film?

Post-Viewing Discussion

To get the student discussion going, pose some general questions such as:

- What new insights or knowledge did you gain from this film?
- What is your personal background? How does it affect your viewing of the film?
- Did anything in this film surprise you? If so, what was it?
- Which scene did you find most interesting and why? Use the following questions to make notes: What do you see? What do you hear? What do you think? What do you feel?
- What did you take away from the film? Does this correspond to what the filmmakers were trying to get across to the audience?
- Watch the trailer for *Speaking in Tongues*. How does the trailer promote the film?
- Find out more about the filmmakers and learn about their other films by visiting the film's official website at <http://www.speakingintonguesfilm.info/>.

About the subjects:

- What do you learn about Julian, Jason, Kelly and Durrell. How are the subjects introduced and what does each scene tell you about their intention becoming bilingual?
- What does Julian/Jason/Kelly/Durrell want for himself/herself now and in the future? Use statements from the film to endorse your answer.
- Writing from Julian's, Jason's, Kelly's or Durrell's perspective, what advantages and disadvantages result from speaking a second language?

About the topic:

- What is the significance of the film's title?
- What views and values are endorsed in *Speaking in Tongues*? What views and values are challenged? What views and values are left unanswered?

SAN FRANCISCO FILM SOCIETY Study Guide – Speaking in Tongues

“There is no country that has more linguistic assests. But we seem to take pride in being monolingual and we even try to amend our constitutions to make sure that we remain monolingual when the rest of the world under globalization is learning second and third languages while we essentially shooting our own feet. It is a national question. What does it mean to be an educated person in America today?” – Dr. Ling-chi Wang (Scholar & Activist)

“U.S. businesses eagerly seek bilingual workers. The Department of Defense spends millions to teach strategic languages. Yet voters have passed ‘English Only’ laws in 31 states.”

“In this country, so much is offered to the children to speak other languages. We don’t have to teach it in school. We really don’t. It’s taken away from their other curriculum. In America we should speak English. This is America. I don’t think I should be paying my taxes for someone else to learn a language.” – Kelly’s Great-Aunt

“San Francisco’s School Board unanimously passed the resolution offering all students the opportunity to become bilingual. With needs growing and resources shrinking, they are working to make this idea a reality.”

- Use the quotations to discuss the Pros and Cons of Foreign Language Immersion Programs.
- Use the internet to learn more about immersion programs. Discuss parents, teachers and administrators arguments over how and why becoming bilingual.
- The “English-only” movement, which advocates that English be the official and only language used in the United States, influences the life of language minority children, their families, and educators working with them. Do you agree or disagree with the “English-only” legislation? Why or why not?
- Research other countries. What are the differences and similarities in bilingual education? How is immersion different from bilingual?

Post-Viewing Activities

- Write a review of *Speaking in Tongues*. Draw on the structure and subjects to develop your review.
- Come up with a topic you think would be an interesting subject for a documentary. Research it and develop a script.
- Classroom Debate: Split the class into two groups, (1) in support of the immersion program, and (2) in support of the English-only education policies. Then have the groups research their respective arguments. When the class comes back together, hold a debate between the two sides.

Websites

Film’s website:

<http://www.speakingintonguesfilm.info/>

Where Education and Assimilation Collide, By Ginger Thompson, March 15, 2009:

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/15/us/15immig.html?_r=2&pagewanted=print

Multilingual Chicago Speaks, By Janet Nolan and Maria Vargas April 15, 2009:

http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/letters/chi-090415nolanvargas_briefs,0,5974645,print.story

Please feel free to contact Keith Zwölfer (kzwolfer@sffs.org) for feedback on the screening, thoughts, comments, requests for future activities, etc.

Keith Zwölfer

Education Program Manager

San Francisco Film Society