



TDSB and Confucius Institute

By Tam Goossen

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As the TDSB makes its final decision regarding a partnership with the Confucius Institute, it is important to remember the original intent of the International/ Heritage Languages program: to bring students and their families from diverse backgrounds together through cultural and linguistic appreciation within the multicultural Canadian context. I believe the TDSB has demonstrated its ability to implement this important program successfully without enlisting such controversial outside help.

The Heritage Languages and Black Cultural program was initiated by the former Toronto Board of Education in the mid 1970s in response to parental concern from immigrant communities that the linguistic and cultural experiences their children brought to the schools were seen not as gifts but deficits, and that their children would lose a sense of who they were once they entered an English only learning environment.

One of the opposition charges was that such a program would benefit only immigrant children. In fact, the program was designed to teach these languages in elementary schools, encouraging all students to attend. Curriculum materials were prepared by board staff with parent and community input. Results have shown that schools with such programs have higher levels of cross cultural interaction among students and staff as well as increased parental involvement from immigrant communities.

The International Languages program at the TDSB has helped our children to be proud Torontonians by knowing and understanding our diversity. Let us safeguard the Canadian content of this unique program.

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