

# Using speaking in

Hablando en Lenguas

一口双语

ГОВОРИТЬ НА ЯЗЫКАХ

ἰφινῶπιες

# as a Tool for Language Educators

BY SUSAN REESE



The film's official website is at [speakingintonguesfilm.info](http://speakingintonguesfilm.info).

# At

the 2009 ACTFL Annual Convention and World Languages Expo last November, language educators had the opportunity to view *Speaking in Tongues*, the award-winning documentary about four children from four different backgrounds on a journey to become bilingual. The students are all in San Francisco language immersion programs where, from the first day, they receive much of their instruction in a language other than English.

As directors Ken Schneider and Marcia Jarmel explain, "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."

The film received the Audience Award for Best Documentary Feature from the San Francisco International Film Festival and has been described as "a powerful vision of what bilingualism looks like." Some educators who have viewed the film have begun using it in the classroom, and advocates of language education are finding that it can be a valuable tool for promoting the benefits of early language learning. There is now even a study guide and a host of other resources for parents and educators available at the film's website, [speakingintonguesfilm.info](http://speakingintonguesfilm.info).

The study guide is only one of the resources available on the film's website. There are also fact sheets about bilingualism, links to research, and a blog with an ongoing conversation about the issue. Soon the site will have a series of video extras that can be downloaded and

## USING THE FILM TO SUPPORT LANGUAGE LEGISLATION CURRENTLY IN CONGRESS

Supporters of the Excellence and Innovation in Language Learning Act (H.R. 6036) are encouraging letter writing, postcards, e-mails, and phone calls to legislators by their constituents, so community showings of *Speaking in Tongues* could be a very effective way to inspire such actions. For more information about H.R. 6036, see "Legislative Look" in the October issue and this issue of *The Language Educator* or go to the ACTFL website at [www.actfl.org](http://www.actfl.org).

photo credit below: Najib Joe Hakim



photo credit: Vicente Franco

Student Jason Patiño

## BRINGING IT INTO THE CLASSROOM

According to Jarmel, the San Francisco School District is planning to incorporate the film into a curriculum about the value of learning languages in K-12, and some school districts have purchased it for all of their schools to encourage multilingualism. She thinks the film is useful in education because it can help excite children about learning languages, and promote discussion about cross-cultural competency. Jarmel notes that new immigrant children can be encouraged to keep speaking their home language, even as they learn English at school. It shows all students the personal, social, and economic benefits of being bilingual.

Kathleen Hill, curriculum coordinator for world languages at the Coe-Brown Northwood Academy in Northwood, NH, showed *Speaking in Tongues* to all of her Spanish classes, and the students wrote essays on the film. She also recommended it to her Humanities Division colleagues. Hill says, "The students realized the importance of an immersion classroom after seeing the film. I use the target language almost exclusively for all levels of learners, I to AP, and it really drove home the importance of active listening in the language acquisition process."

Kim Ellis teaches seventh and eighth grade Spanish at Taylor Middle School in Millbrae, CA, and she showed the film to her classes during the school's Respect Week activities. "I have a lot of Spanish- and Chinese-speaking kids who are not literate in their home language, and I think they found the film to be a real eye opener as to the value of maintaining and becoming literate in their first language," says Ellis. "I also think that the Caucasian boy and African-American boy in the film helped to dispel some stereotypes about who speaks Chinese. I hope the idea of the importance of learning a second and third language stays with them. It's a message I try to hammer home from day one, but seeing it in action was really impressive."

## SPREADING THE WORD AT THE STATE LEVEL

The blog on the film's website features an interview with Gregg Roberts, world languages specialist with the Utah State Office of Education. Roberts notes that Utah currently has language programs in Chinese, French, and Spanish, and will add German in 2011 and another language in 2012. When asked if *Speaking in Tongues* has been useful in helping citizens to understand the goals and challenges of immersion education, Roberts says, "*Speaking in Tongues* has been extremely useful, particularly with business, government, and education leaders. We found the Chinese examples particularly useful, and worked with Patchwork Films on a special short video."



Marcia Jarmel and Ken Schneider, producers of *Speaking in Tongues*, with cinematographer Andy Black

embedded in presentations, and Jarmel says they hope to have those available by the time this article is published.

In addition to film screenings held in five cities in California this fall, *Speaking in Tongues* was shown on Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) stations across the country in September and October. It was also streamed in three languages (English, Spanish, and Chinese) on the PBS player during two weeks in September. According Jarmel, this was the first time that PBS ever made a film available in more than one language. Many educators used the film by streaming the video from the PBS broadcast, but those who missed that opportunity can still order a copy of the film from the ACTFL Online Store at [www.actfl.org](http://www.actfl.org).

The video on the Utah World Languages home page includes a few scenes from *Speaking in Tongues*, and is introduced by Jon Huntsman, Jr., former governor of Utah (2004–2009) and current the U.S. Ambassador to China. Huntsman says in his introduction, “Studying a language does something magical. It opens the mind.” He describes language study as “building bridges” that can lead to world peace, prosperity, and cures for human diseases—which is a pretty powerful argument.

Utah debuted its short version of the film at the Annual Utah Dual Immersion Institute, and it has since been shown to school administrators, parent groups, and business leaders to give them an inside look at dual immersion. Roberts describes the reaction to the film as extremely positive.

“We use it as an advocacy tool and as a recruitment tool for our dual immersion program,” he explains. “It shows the importance of immersion education and of starting language education at a younger age.” Most of Utah’s dual immersion programs are fairly new, so he says that showing it to parent groups helps them see how the older students in the film have progressed.

According to Roberts, some school districts have also purchased the long version of the film to show to their staffs, and he thinks that it can be helpful in convincing other teachers that world languages would be a valuable addition to their school’s curriculum. The



photo credit: Najib Joe Hakim



photo credit: Marcia Jarmel

Top right: Student Kelly Wong doing Chinese homework

Middle: Durrell Laury and his mom on the Chinese New Year

## ORDER YOUR OWN COPY OF *SPEAKING IN TONGUES*

If you haven’t seen the film yet or you want to be able to show it to a class or community group, order it online at the ACTFL Bookstore. More information on how to get your own copy is available on p. 41.

shorter version is shown to business groups, and Roberts says, “The short version is more key to economic development and creating students with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.” Or as Utah State Superintendent of Public Instruction Dr. Larry K. Shumway explains in a quote at the end of the Utah version, “With dual immersion, we have a way forward to ensure that Utah students are acquiring the skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary to be competitive in the world marketplace.”

Desa Dawson, director of world languages with the Oklahoma State Department of Education, says, “We used the film at one of our Oklahoma Foreign Language Teachers’ Association (OFLTA) meetings last spring. The Oklahoma State Department of Education purchased a copy of the DVD to then lend to school districts, community organizations, and other interested parties, including the Oklahoma Governor’s International Team. We may feature parts of the film at our upcoming International Education Summit, ‘Seeing the Future from the Mountain Top: Global Competence in Focus.’”

### SPEAKING TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

*Speaking in Tongues* is not only being utilized in K–12 education settings. “It has also been used by a number of universities, colleges, and community colleges by professors of anthropology and sociology,” notes Jarmel. In addition to being used in sociolinguistics and

diversity classes, she says that it is used by professors of education in helping teachers prepare for the diverse classrooms they will encounter. “Every teacher in this country is dealing with kids who speak other languages,” Jarmel notes. “People who are educating the educators need not just the techniques in the film, but the awareness of what the kids are going through.”

Dr. Leighton C. Peterson, assistant professor of anthropology at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, notes that since he is a linguistic anthropologist, the concerns of his courses and the concerns of his colleagues are probably somewhat different than those of language educators, but he says, “I use the film to illustrate points about ‘language ideologies’—that is, the beliefs, attitudes, and feelings that people have about languages and



Student Julian Ennis

## USING SPEAKING IN TONGUES AS A TOOL

ways of speaking, which include proper and improper ways of speaking. In the case of the movie, ideologies are illustrated by discussions of culturally specific or politicized ways to approach what we call language socialization—how one learns language in institutional, bilingual, or immersion contexts, or how one becomes the ‘monolingual American.’ The film participants exhibit a variety of language ideologies about multi/monolingualism.”

Peterson also notes that the film debunks myths about who speaks what language, and students always comment on the young African-American child speaking Mandarin, and the young Hispanic boy who seems to resist speaking Spanish. “I also use this to illustrate the related topic of linguistic inequalities, especially in the United States, where some very strong discourses and ideologies seem to place English above all other languages spoken in the United States, including Native American languages and Spanish, both of which were here before English,” he explains. “It leads to discussions of why we call non-English languages ‘foreign’ at all.”

## USEFUL, SUPPORTIVE, AND PERSONAL

Jarmel says of her film: “We’re hoping that people will bring *Speaking in Tongues* back to their communities and use it in the way that is most helpful to them.” She thinks that may include showing it to state legislators, to parents, to students, or in educating teachers.

“We made the film because our own personal lives were transformed by the experience our kids had in language immersion,” she adds, “and that’s why we want to support language educators.”



photos: Najib Joe Hakim



## AT THE ACTFL ONLINE STORE

### *Speaking in Tongues* Video From PatchWorks Films

This hour-long documentary follows four American students whose parents placed them in schools where, from the first day of kindergarten, their teachers speak only Chinese or Spanish. It was shown at the 2009 ACTFL Annual Convention and World Languages Expo in San Diego, CA, and can be used in advocacy efforts to help promote language education.

The award-winning film was selected as the winner of the San Francisco International Film Festival Audience Award. This fall, it has been featured on various PBS stations.

The ACTFL Online Store offers this DVD at a special savings for members and buying it there is also a great way to support your association. Order it today at [www.actfl.org](http://www.actfl.org)! Click on “Membership” → “Online Store” → “DVD/VHS” to locate the order form.

