

DEBUNKING COMMON IMMERSION MYTHS: AN INFORMATIVE FAQ



I want a great immersion program for my students—what should I look for?

The keys to a great immersion program are:

- 1) Strong support services for academics and emotional adjustment
- 2) Space for social adjustment and practicing language skills outside of the classroom
- 3) An inspiring location that helps to motivate students and keep them excited

That is why we have built the team we have at Young World Leaders, and run our campuses for our summer and winter programs from New York City and such campuses at Georgetown University and Sandy Spring Friends School. With homestay options and on-campus living arrangements, and with the in-program support of professionals,

Why don't you put my students in full English classrooms for the duration of their program? Won't they learn the most in that setting?

English language immersion in the classroom is much more difficult than language immersion in social settings. We only encourage English language immersion in a formal classroom setting (that is, separately from an ESL program) in a few situations:

- 1) When ESL opportunities are included as part of the process
- 2) When the student are enrolled in at least a full semester of a class
- 3) When they have access to support services, and
- 4) When they are enrolled in a classroom that is predominantly native English speakers

Placing a dozen traveling students in a classroom for two weeks does not give them a chance to benefit from the experience, and distorts the classroom experience heavily for the students in that class. But it also distorts their classroom experience and does not provide them a learning experience. It is proven that such experiences do not enhance someone's ability to learn a language—in fact, they often discourage the individual from pursuing it further.

I want my students to focus on academics only—why don't you offer that?

Again, the fastest way to learning a language is to build the basics through ordinary interactions. This prepares students for academic success beyond just the English language. Students need to be able to form questions, process responses in real time, and do more than study and take notes. Those skills begin with ordinary interactions that build their confidence. So we focus our programs on supportive classroom building blocks followed by real-world applications. This gives students the opportunity to make mistakes and learn, so that they can better prepare for academic settings in the future, where our students have flourished.

I want all of my students to go to Harvard—can you provide that?

In short, even if all of your students were qualified to go to Harvard, they would not all get in—in fact, it is possible that none of them would. Ivy League schools have the same number of seats as they did decades ago, but they have many times as many applicants and qualified applicants applying. In such a setting, they are looking to construct classes of people with varied experiences—it's often difficult for more than one student from the same high school to get into

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the same. Harvard receives about 40,000 applications for just 1,600 places. There are dozens of other exceptional academic institutions in the United States, each with their own specialties. Our emphasis is for students to find a place where they can thrive and define success for themselves in a way that is aware of their place globally and the many opportunities to thrive in a global setting (whether in business, diplomacy, or otherwise).

Our experiences enable students to show their value and their uniqueness to the universities they apply to, and we encourage them to build skills for their long-term success around international experience and awareness, leadership training, and problem-solving skills. If Harvard is your only goal, we are not the program for you—but beware of others that tell you they can guarantee that for you.

Your program can do everything I need it to, right? I'm sending students across the globe and will need to assure their parents that their specific requests are being honored.

We know what works and what doesn't, so we stick to that. In short, we have a few ground rules for partners:

- 1) We have to be entrusted with academic and programmatic decisions and those need to be conveyed, as we explain them, to families
- 2) We will define the program together before we agree to share it more broadly, once it is set, only limited modifications will be possible
- 3) We do require that our marketing materials are used as is, unless those changes are approved by us

Our core program includes 3 key components that can be customized:

- 1) ESL learning and English language immersion
- 2) Travel from either our New York or DC campus to schools, sites, and
- 3) Skills training (diplomacy, entrepreneurship, and an add-on program like the arts, athletics, or STEM)

Our program is very specifically defined for a purpose, and it is important for our partners to understand what we can be flexible on and what we can't. We look to our partners as a critical part of our success, but we also rely on them to be closely aligned with our program. It is very disruptive to deviate from the plan in the middle of the program, so we generally will need to decline those sorts of adjustments—where those pose challenges, we are always happy to convey the academic reasons for that directly to the parents. But most importantly, we look to our partners to set those expectations clearly from the start and assure parents that the experts here at Young World Leaders are best positioned to assure a positive, educational, and transformative experience for their children.

To learn more about our approach to immersion, visit www.youngworldleaders.org or email us at ywl@ssfs.org