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NATIVE AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION AT AN EARLY AGE

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All second language learners, regardless of age, have by definition already acquired at least one language. This prior knowledge may be an advantage in the sense that the learner has an idea of how languages work. On the other hand, knowledge of other languages can also lead learners to make incorrect guesses about how the second language works, and this may cause errors which a first language learner would not make.

Young language learners begin the task of language learning without the benefit of some of the skills and knowledge which adolescent and adult learners have. The first language learner does not have the same cognitive maturity, metalinguistic awareness, or world knowledge as older second language learners. Although they are developing cognitive maturity and metalinguistic awareness, they still have a long way to go in these areas, as well as in the area of world knowledge, before they reach the levels already attained by adults and adolescents. Most child learners do not feel nervous about attempting to use the language, even when their proficiency is quite limited. Adults and adolescents, on the other hand, often find it very stressful when they are unable to express themselves clearly and correctly. Nevertheless, even very young children (pre-school) children differ in their nervousness when faced with speaking a language they do not know well. Some children happily chatter away in their new language; others prefer to listen and participate silently in social interaction with their peers. Fortunately for these children, the learning environment rarely puts pressure on them to speak when they are not ready.

One condition which appears to be common among learners of all ages – though perhaps not in equal quantities – is access to modified input. This adjusted speech style is sometimes called ‘foreigner talk’ or ‘teacher talk.’ Many people who interact regularly with language learners, such as experienced teachers, seem to have a sense of what adjustments are needed to help their learners understand.

Learning a new language at any age is an enormously rewarding experience in many ways. While language learning is an enriching experience for all ages, children have the most to gain from this wonderful adventure. Quite simply, starting early offers the widest possible set of benefits and opportunities.

Children understand intuitively that language is something to explore, to play around with and to enjoy. Their enthusiasm is both infectious and effective. The quickness with which they pick up their first language is nearly miraculous and such a joy to watch as a parent. As children grow, all parents can attest to how much fun their children continue to have as they sing new words they hear and even invent new ones with a huge, bright smile. The joy with which children explore their first language makes childhood the ideal time for a second language -- even if all the other reasons for an early start didn't exist!

But there are many other reasons, and while this list does not exhaust the number and variety of advantages starting a language early can provide, these are some of the most notable benefits.

Better and more advanced reading skills: Bilingual children's knowledge of a second language gives them an advantage in learning to read. Their ability to apply the insights and experiences of one language to the other as well as their wider experience of language gives them a big leg up. As they grow older, this advantage continues and grows. Plus, being able to read two languages is pretty impressive all by itself.

Greater confidence: Children are always discovering new things, but learning a new language is a uniquely rewarding experience at any age. For children, the feeling of accomplishment that comes with their first steps toward a second language can spur them on to a deeper and broader passion for learning in general. And because children are at a special "window of opportunity" in which language learning is intuitive and natural, the ease and pleasure of the experience may boost their confidence and their desire for new discoveries.

Gives brains a boost: Research into the effects of bilingualism on children suggests that exposure to more than one language is an excellent way of flexing those brain muscles and building them up, too. Bilingual children in one study reported in *Nature* showed a significantly larger density of grey matter in their brains. And those who had been exposed to a second language from an early age proved to have the most grey matter of all. Grey matter is responsible for processing information, including memory, speech and sensory perception. And if it can be increased by exposure to a second language, then language learning would be just like taking your brain to the gym.

Natural-sounding, native-like accent: Children are always mimicking what they hear and are surprisingly good at it! They are uniquely attuned to slight differences in tone and sound. Their sensitive ears help them pick up on and duplicate the tricky sounds adults and even adolescents often stumble over. By starting early, your children can speak smoothly and confidently from the first.

Bigger view of the world: Traveling abroad is an experience which can benefit anyone, offering not just new sites to see, but new frames of mind and new perspectives. But going abroad and feeling comfortable in the language of your destination means you're doing more than just traveling. You are going from your home to another place, and then back home. You can feel as if you're a part of the culture and the life of this new world, as if you aren't a total stranger just visiting. Like reading a poem in another tongue you know, you will hear more than just the language, you will hear the music behind it as well and the life.

Greater grasp of one's first language, including a bigger, richer vocabulary: Most of the time we use our first language with little thought to grammatical rules or constructions. This is perfectly natural, but the experience of learning a new language can bring greater understanding and perhaps even better grammar to our first language. Knowing the way another language works encourages us to examine our own language's mechanics in a positive way. By being able to compare the two, we learn more than we ever would as a monolingual. Or as Nancy Rhodes, director of foreign language education at the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, D.C., says, "The more children learn about a foreign language, the more they understand about their own language." Children use what they learn in one language to reinforce concepts and terms they've learned in the other. They can solidify their gains in their native tongue by matching them to their new adventures in another language.

Building and keeping cultural connections: Some of us are lucky enough to have a relative who still speaks their mother tongue frequently. To be able to communicate with them in that language builds a bridge not only to that person, but to the heritage and history they represent. To maintain that connection keeps alive so much, memories, stories and traditions, and brings to life new memories, stories and traditions as well.

An all-family activity: Modern life is hectic; its demands are frequent and often contradictory. Learning a language together as a family provides a unifying activity which doesn't require you to drive your kids anywhere and doesn't make it necessary to be in 10 places at once. Starting this process early with your child or children provides your family with an activity and an experience it can return to and grow with over the years.

It is proposed that language acquisition improves if beginning students are allowed to experience three stages of acquisition: comprehension (preproduction), early speech production, and speech emergence. Each stage requires a different kind of activity building on the previous stage's development.

The recurring ideas of contemporary methodologies of language teaching are also recurring ideas of history, like starting instruction at an early age for instance. Both the success of the audio-lingual approach and the views of its contemporary detractors can be understood through historical perspective. The many innovative methods currently in use, including Total Physical Response and the Silent Way, also owe their distinctive appeal to one or more time honored principles of foreign language instruction.

Bilingual capacity is a very important subject in a world that is changing and becoming more global. Knowing and learning the language of each person's roots is a way of getting in touch with a culture and keeping it alive. It is never too early to start teaching your child a new language. Babies can differentiate between different languages based on the different facial expressions and speaking patterns that people have when speaking different languages to them. The key is not strictly to teach babies another language, but to allow them to experience the world in another language. Bilingual advancement can seem frustrating at first but on the long run it is worth and it can be a very enriching experience.

Studies have shown that teaching any second language to children at an early age greatly improves their chances of achieving fluency and a native-like accent very fast. The benefit of having a different lens from which to view and experience the world is a wonderful gift for a child. In fact, all of the scientific evidence points to children having nothing to lose and everything to gain by learning a foreign language. This is why it is important to fully support early immersion programs into a foreign idiom, which are the most effective ways for learning a foreign language. Field trips may also not seem like advanced educational strategy, but they work a lot like the educational tools and strategies of what is known as multi-sensory learning. Multi-sensory learning takes advantage of the way our senses - hearing, sight, and touch, primarily - reinforce one another while learning. Each sense builds toward a more complete experience of a concept or idea. Because it offers more than one way of experiencing something, it is ideal for children who naturally engage multiple senses in both learning and play. It is also ideal for the creation of the type of immersive environment that is so crucial for learning a second language.

According to researchers, young children who are raised with a second or third language will occasionally "mix up" words between the languages during the early stages of learning the language. This effect is referred to as language "code-switching." Associate Professor of Linguistics Carmen Fought explained that "Code-switching occurs in bilingual communities all over the world, and seems to be a way of exploiting linguistic resources that comes naturally to the human brain."

Like mentioned in the beginning, people learn foreign languages with the same side of the brain that they learn mathematics, therefore the rewards are endless! Besides that, introducing any second language to children gives them a special talent, and they may be eager to prove their new skills. Psychologist Ellen Bialystok PhD, a leading expert on the cognitive effects of bilingualism, also stressed the fact that occasional intermixing of the two languages does not mean the child is confused. To the contrary, the mixing of different languages was often an indication that bilingual children were showing off. "They show how clever they are in taking advantage of all the things they know how to communicate," Bialystok said.

It may be hard for a child to understand the need to learn a language that has no use when they are so young to understand it, but once they realize that the language is necessary to communicate or that it is fun to be able to use another language, they then enjoy the progress that can be achieved by getting this knowledge that developing a language skill.

Also according to linguistic experts Kendall King, PhD, and Alison Mackey, PhD, "one of the most common misconceptions about early language learning is that it will result in language delay." Children begin speaking their first language anywhere from 8 to 16 months, a very wide range in

age, and teaching another second language to a child does not alter this. Dr. King and Dr. Mackey report, "There is no scientific evidence to show that hearing two, three or more languages will lead to any delays. On average, bilinguals and monolinguals enter the one-word and two-word stages, for instance, at around the same time." At an early age, bilingual and monolingual children are believed to acquire new vocabulary at roughly the same rate. Very young bilinguals typically know the same number of words overall; but the total pool of words may initially be split between two languages. Even so, Dr. King and Dr. Mackey report that any "initially smaller vocabulary in each language at an early age is typically overcome by age four or five".

Children can become multilingual in a superior way than adults. All they need is to discover a rich environment where they can search and investigate while playing. The National Research Council's study of Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children states that children who are exposed to reading at an earlier age make the symbol and language connection sooner and are more likely to be reading at the appropriate age level by the end of third grade. Because the goal is also to encourage self-esteem, it is fundamental that any bilingual environment starts by practicing basic pre and early reading skills. It is in addition recommended that children be systematically familiar with basic skills in their first language before beginning the methodical study of a second and a third language. Any language teaching method for little people should be designed to be fun, exciting, and to inspire confidence as they learn how to read.

According to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development; phonemic awareness, systematic phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and motivation are the support for an ideal base of any contemporary methods of language teaching. Activities, songs and books complement their interest by creating an atmosphere of entertaining and enthusiasm that infuses all aspects of learning. Another proposal in our modern lives is to use online and printed activities as a tool for positive reinforcement that guides little ones into making correct responses. When kids find fun activities, they are motivated to want to learn more.

As a child masters speech sounds, she/he will be able to apply them to letters in predictable ways. Therefore with a basic understanding of letter-sound relationships, most children can explore a variety of genres and topics. Enthusiasm is imperative, so by developing settings and feelings of wonderment and play, their speaking, reading, and writing vocabulary development can grow alongside new concepts. Most vocabulary controlled stories introduce children to words they will frequently encounter in reading or just by listening. Selections read in their whole model the qualities of fluent reading through intonation, expression, inflection and rate.

Phonemic Awareness is another way for children to explore and interact with speech songs and sounds. Systematic Phonics occurs as they master speech sounds and are able to apply them to letters, in a more predictable way when kids come to recognize the relationship between letters and sounds. This is the Alphabetic Principle, the foundation of phonics. Although it is recommended that a child's progress sequentially, there is no harm in allowing him/her to follow his own interests and create a unique path when learning a language. Vocabulary really increases when children start learning to speak, read and write since it increases alongside new concepts and cultivates inquisitiveness. When they get ready to start reading, it is significant to encourage imaginative open-ended writing exercises supported by picture dictionaries. A journal can be used to meet the needs of students at many different reading and writing levels and is also perfect for those studying a second language.

Fluency then gets reinforced by a higher frequency of words in sentences, rather than in isolation. This supports early improvement into making meaningful associations with these words and more easily assign them to memory. For that reason it is essential to model the qualities of fluent reading by intonation, expression, inflection and rate. These activities will help expand vocabulary and develop more comprehension through reading fluency especially in beginning and advancing readers. In conclusion, comprehension of a language finally happens when children develop the mentioned above skills while transitioning from **learning to read** into **reading to learn**.

Talking about their experience is another great way to support a child's sense of accomplishment while allowing him/her to share what has been learned. Sometimes simply by turning off the TV and the computer and singing or reading in another language to children, can become a wonderful way to introduce them to pronunciation and basic vocabulary, especially when they start getting used to experience the awareness of a foreign sound and word. Why not enjoy even more these books by for instance, giving the characters distinct voices, accents or acting out scenarios from the stories?

The first experiences with other languages and cultures are very important to stimulate a language development later on in life. In order to have conversations about what is read, it is more fun if a joyful experience with a foreign language is formed.

Learning a language is an extraordinary accomplishment for anybody. Yet everyone completes this process and does so successfully at least once in their life with their native language at least. Linguists call the learning process "doubtless the greatest intellectual feat any one of us is ever required to perform." Yet this achievement is often taken completely for granted for non-linguists to whom the magnitude of this accomplishment only becomes apparent when they can step back and think of everything that goes into the first few teaching steps necessary toward language development and input; let alone the acquisition of a second, third or fourth language that can be typical of children from migrant backgrounds.

Knowing another language expands the mind and opens doors to future opportunity.

Language is at the very center of human communication and interaction. It is the bridge that connects us or the gap that may divide us.

Language is at the very center of human communication and interaction. It is the bridge that connects us or the gap that may divide us. Language acquisition shapes a child's perception of the world and lays the foundation for much of what follows in life: identity, friendship, work and travel. Whether there is still hope to better enable a child to form friendships worldwide or to open the door for a more fully appreciate world literature and arts, the most important benefit of learning a second language may simply be the different perspective and cross-cultural awareness that comes with it.

It is reassuring for parents to know that linguistic experts all agree that there is no reason to delay the introduction of a second language and that the benefits of a second language grow with practice and fluency. Nancy Rhodes, Director of Foreign Language Education at the leading US organization for language research, Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, D.C., adds, "The more children learn about a foreign language the more they understand their own language."

Kids learn to read through a long series of tiny steps. When a child reveals and deciphers even just a few words, it is a moment to be very proud! A great reason to celebrate his or her small successes and it may be the only motivation required for some children to open up to the world of knowledge: Foreign Languages teach and introduce people, traditions, lifestyles, food, clothing, landscapes, scents and increases children's interest in traveling.

It awakes curiosity about others and develops empathy. Language teaching helps children connect with new things, open their minds and show respect for other cultures. It nurtures their appreciation for cultural diversity and therefore develops a better character. It shows them how to relate and understand the world around them. Verbal communication can make them learn about each other and become very early, citizens of the world. In conclusion it demonstrates that we all share the same world; we all have hopes and dreams and therefore can come together as one!

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