

The Home/School Connection:
Collaborating to Promote Best Practice in World Language Education
Issue 15

Finding Time for Language Learning

Dear Parents,

We often hear that the United States is in desperate need of more multi-language speakers in all areas, but especially in business, health care, government, and the military. Many schools want to meet this growing need to learn other languages. Many ask how this can be done when other educational programs are being cut to make time for test preparation or because of budget constraints.

In this issue we will examine different types of early language programs, how to fit a foreign language program into an already full schedule, the benefits of learning a second language, and options for learning languages outside the traditional school day.

Types of programs

In the area of early language learning there are different types of programs.

In *total immersion programs* children receive all instruction in a language other than English. An advantage to this type of program is that it does not require extra staff, so it is one of the least expensive programs. In districts where new schools are started, beginning a total immersion program could be fairly easy. Introducing an immersion program into an existing school poses more challenges, but has been done by many districts.

Children in *two-way immersion programs* spend half of the day learning subject matter in English and the other half in the second

language. This works best if half the children in the class speak the second language at home and half speak English. This program can be created by replacing English speaking teachers with teachers who speak the second language. No additional positions would be required to successfully implement this program.

Children in a *content-based Foreign Language in Elementary School (FLES) program* spend less time in the second language. The children learn a subject such as science or social studies only in the second language. Children learn content that would normally be taught, but with the added benefits of learning it in the second language.

A *FLES program* meets a minimum of 30 minutes per class, three to five times a week. Content-related FLES programs reinforce concepts taught by the classroom teacher in various subjects such as science, social studies, math, or language arts. Students have an additional opportunity to study a concept, but through the second language.

Benefits of learning a second language

Research indicates:

- The period of early childhood is considered an optimal time to begin learning a second language, as the methods and materials used in early childhood classes are multi-modal and may facilitate second language acquisition and learning (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994).

- Children in effective early second language programs show overall gains on standardized tests of basic skills, and derive additional cognitive, social, and affective benefits (Taylor-Ward, 2003).
- The integration of content and language learning and the development of positive attitudes towards people who speak other languages occur more easily when long, articulated sequences of second language instruction begin in early childhood and become an integral part of school learning (Shrum & Glisan, 2005).
- Early second language learning may result in improved phonological and phonemic awareness, two building blocks of literacy in one's native language (Bialystok, 2001).

Other Options

Even after seeing the evidence supporting early language learning, some school districts still choose not to implement programs for various reasons. Parents and teachers can develop options for learning a second language outside the school day. These include after school programs, Saturday school, tutoring, or summer camps. These options can be a starting point for implementing a second language program during the school day.

Conclusions

Most early language programs combine learning a second language with learning concepts in other content areas, thus more effectively using learning time in an already very full schedule. With the variety of early language programs available, your school should be able to find a model that meets the needs of your school community using the resources available. As we educate the next generation and future leaders of the United States, we must do everything we can to give them a complete set of skills. Communicating in more than one language is essential in this ever-changing global society.

Bialystok E. (2001). *Bilingualism in development: Language, literacy, and cognition*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bialystok, E. & Hakuta, K. (1994). In other words: *The science and psychology of second language acquisition*. New York: Basic Books.

Shrum & Glisan, 2005. *Teachers Handbook: Contextualized Language Instruction*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Taylor- Ward, Carolyn J. *The relationship between elementary school foreign language study in grades three through five and academic achievement on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) and the fourth-grade Louisiana educational assessment program for the 21st century (LEAP 21) test*. Diss. Louisiana State University, 2003.

http://etd.lsu.edu/docs/available/etd-1103103-111054/unrestricted/Taylor-Ward_dis.pdf, retrieved August 1, 2009.

NNELL can assist teachers, parents and administrators with learning and advocacy efforts. Contact your State Representative today. We would love to hear from you!

This issue of Home/School Connection was written by Tammy Dann. It is full of tips and resources that can be found at www.nnell.org. Teachers may reproduce it and send it home in their students' backpacks. Send suggestions/comments to Tammy Dann, NNELL's Early Language Advocate: trdann@q.com