

Learning language young

Business



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BUSTER**

In the United States, the idea of globalization is often minimized with patriotism and prejudice toward non-English speaking individuals. As I walk down the streets of my Indiana hometown, I hear English voices everywhere, with a small mix of Spanish. Even on a visit to Washington D. C.

- the capital of the United States- I heard mainly English. I heard one small group of friends chatting in German, and university students practicing their foreign language after class. Where I live, in Indiana, schools do not offer foreign language programs for English speakers until eighth grade. English as a New Language classes, however, are offered from the beginning of schooling. If those students who speak a language other than English at home have the opportunity to learn a new language, why not allow children the option to learn another language from an elementary age? In European countries foreign language education begins in elementary schools.

In Switzerland, children begin a second language as soon as they begin schooling. German, French and Italian are all official languages in Switzerland, and all three must be learned during schooling. In Germany, states have different ages for beginning foreign language studies ranging from first to fifth grade. Not surprisingly, these countries also have far better international relations than the United States. If children in the US were to learn a foreign language younger, our country may lose American biases and learn to think globally.

When learning a new language, individuals learn the culture too. They learn how grammar rules change, learn about the fluctuation in tone, about the formality of speaking to new people. Simple knowledge of another culture

provides a new perception of life, allowing a child to be less self-absorbed, thinking of the entire world rather than the personal one he or she creates. I do not suggest that children take up a full time language course in elementary. It could act as an elective such as music, art or physical education, having one class each day on an alternating schedule.

There would be art Monday one week, then music Tuesday, language Wednesday, P. E. Thursday and art again Friday, and the next week would start with music. Such a schedule would provide learning time for children, but would also give them time to practice outside of school, and would not overwhelm the young students. In intermediate school, the foreign language classes should be offered daily to promote faster learning, and a wider option of languages should be taught. Although it may take years for the majority of Americans to realize the benefits of a foreign language, I believe children should learn about other languages and cultures from a young age.

Such learning improves their understanding of the world as a whole, as well as their learning in any language, native or not. I feel if international-mindedness begins with the youth, the older generations will also learn to be more open to new ideas, customs and cultures, rather than remain closed to new concepts.