

**THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
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DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

**THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPLEMENTING FOREIGN LANGUAGES INTO PUBLIC
ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS AS A MANDATORY SUBJECT**

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Abstract

Languages other than English are becoming more and more prevalent in the United States and the diversity of foreign language use will continue to have a significant impact on our culture and our society at large. Furthermore, our world is becoming increasingly global in nature with global relationships among people in different cultures that have been enabled by the World Wide Web, Facebook, Twitter, Yammer, LinkedIn, and the other social media sites. To prosper and effectively compete in this global society, the United States must focus education of its children on cultural awareness and sensitivity, including foreign languages. It is critical that this education begin during the K – 8 stage since younger children are much more inclined to learn and retain languages when they are acquired in earlier years. It is also critical to support U.S. national security interests.

This thesis explores the history of foreign language use in America and the teaching of foreign languages in U.S. schools. It traces the history of the “English Only” movement and the attempt to culturally socialize English by prohibiting other languages to be taught in U.S. schools. It also analyzes the changes in the U.S. demographic regarding language facility and bilingualism and multilingualism. Finally, it argues that we should require foreign language education to facilitate overall learning, to better prepare our future population to effectively compete and to ensure national security.

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If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head.

If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.

Nelson Mandela, 1993 Nobel Prize for Peace

Introduction

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 47 million Americans reported speaking a foreign language at home. That equates to one in five U.S. residents five years of age or older and is an increase of 15 million Americans from the 1990 Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Since 1890, the United States government has tracked the use of foreign languages in the United States once every 10 years in its decennial census through a variety of changing questions. Since 1980, the Census Bureau has used the same 3 questions (shown in Figure 1 on page 3) and through the American Community Survey they have started tracking language data annually. The survey data indicates that the percentage of the U.S. population that is speaking a language other than English at home has increased steadily over the last three decades. This significant change in the speakers of non-English languages in the United States population has been thoroughly analyzed in a report issued by Hyon Shin and Robert Kominski in April 2010 (Shin and Kominski, 2010). According to the 2007 American Community Survey, more than 55 million Americans speak a language other than English at home. 62%, or 34,547,077 of those Americans, reportedly speak Spanish. Another 18.5%, or 10,320,730, speak some other Indo-European language including French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Yiddish, Dutch, or a Scandinavian language. Almost 15%, or 8,316,426, speak an

Asian or Pacific Island language including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, or other such language. Finally, 2,260,252, or 4% of the American population, speak all other languages including African languages, native North American languages, Alaskan languages, and indigenous languages of Central and South America. The Census Bureau tracks the frequency in use of 381 different languages spoken by Americans at home every year, as well as how well those foreign language speakers speak English (Shin and Kominski, 2010).

Although the report by Shin and Kominski analyzes immigration patterns and socio-economic reasons why some foreign language use is declining in the United States while other languages have seen three to five-fold increases in use over the last three decades, the fundamental conclusion of the report is incontrovertible. Languages other than English are becoming more and more prevalent in the United States and the diversity of foreign language use will continue to have a significant impact on our culture and our society at large.

While the rapidly increasing use of foreign languages in the United States is an extremely compelling rationale to support more educational focus on foreign languages, it is not the most significant rationale. The most significant reason why we must expand our educational framework to include more foreign language education is the outwardly-focused rationale, the increasingly global nature of our planet. Although “globalization” as a mega-trend only emerged in the last 30 to 40 years with its mainstream adoption by economists and social scientists, Wikipedia ironically traces its first origins to a publication entitled Towards New Education in 1930 to propose a more holistic view of human experience in education (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2009).

Figure 1.

Reproduction of the Questions on Language from the 2007 American Community Survey

13. a. Does this person speak a language other than English at home?

Yes

No → SKIP to question 14

b. What is this language?

For example: Korean, Italian, Spanish, Vietnamese

c. How well does this person speak English?

Very well

Well

Not well

Not at all

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 American Community Survey.

In the educational context, globalization refers to the “transnational circulation of ideas, **languages** (emphasis added), and popular culture” (Wikipedia “Globalization”, 2012). It encompasses the increasingly global relationships among people in different cultures that have been enabled by the world-wide web, Facebook, Twitter, Yammer,

LinkedIn, and the other social media sites. It is built on the foundation of the “Information Age” or the “Digital Age”, where society is ordered by access to and transfer of information. In his groundbreaking book, The world is flat: A brief history of the twenty-first century, Thomas Friedman argued that the pace of globalization in the world was accelerating and old paradigms about place and function needed to give way to new paradigms (Friedman, 2005). Interestingly, Friedman devoted a whole chapter in his book to the new educational requirements needed for Americans to survive in a “flattened world” and the importance of changing our educational systems to ensure the availability of such learning. He stressed the importance of right-brain skills (like learning to think) and he explored different vehicles to higher learning, like music and language skills, and the value of being able to work cross-culturally.

Although the competitive necessity of cross-cultural teaming may be compelling, national security interests may be paramount. The Central Intelligence Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and myriad other national security agencies rely heavily on language facility to decipher security threats and to closely follow insurgent activities throughout the world. The escalating global security risks in the post-9/11 era require us to increase our capabilities with respect to foreign languages to maintain security for the United States and many other nations who rely heavily on our country to preserve world order.

Throughout my own life, I have been afforded opportunities unique to many of my peers. I have been able to experience the world through many culturally diverse perspectives. I have lived abroad for a total of almost five years (more than 20% of my life so far), including four years in Switzerland from age 10 to 14 and one year as a

college student. I have also had the opportunity to travel extensively throughout the world and I have experienced many different cultures and languages. My experiences have enabled me to become fluent in three languages (English, French and Spanish), and to have rudimentary skills in another, Swedish. Along with these specific language skills, I also have comprehensive skills in other romantic and Germanic languages due to my other fluencies. My experience in languages has helped me in other ways as well. It has improved my confidence level in learning generally and has allowed me to tackle difficult subjects and disciplines with the knowledge that with hard work and perseverance, I can acquire skills and knowledge in almost any area that I attempt. It has also improved my intercultural skills and my sensitivity for the ideas and cultures of others. It has made me culturally attuned and helped me to look for the value in diversity. Finally, it has helped me in other educational disciplines, other than languages. The opportunities to study foreign languages during my K-8 education have prepared me to be a much more successful and much more aware global citizen. Based on my experiences, I can personally attest to the value of a multi-cultural and multi-lingual educational experience for younger Americans.

THESIS: The United States should require foreign languages to be taught in elementary schools.

History of Foreign Language Use in America

English has been the de facto “national language” in the United States ever since America was colonized by the British during the 1600s and 1700s. Although there have been several recent attempts to legislatively codify English as the official language at the federal level (Senate Amendment 1151 to Senate Bill 1348, Immigration Act of 2007, Wikipedia, 2012), those attempts have not been successful and the United States does not have an official national language. Twenty-seven of the fifty U.S. states have adopted legislation making English the official language of those states (“Languages of the United States”, Wikipedia, 2012). Hawaii has adopted both English and Hawaiian as dual-official languages.

Although languages other than English have not generally been accorded “official status” by any of the states (other than Hawaii), many states have rich histories of bilingualism or even multilingualism. In New Mexico, which has not adopted English as the official language, all government materials and services are required to be provided in both English and Spanish. The states of Texas and Arizona are similar. In Texas, which has no official language policy, all government materials are provided in English and Spanish. In Arizona, which has adopted English as the official language, laws have been passed requiring the distribution of certain government materials in several Native American languages in certain specific counties within the state (“Languages of the United States”, Wikipedia, 2012).

Even some of the northern states have significant histories of bilingualism. The State of Pennsylvania has had strong German and Dutch German population centers

dating back to the 1650s (Gavin, 2012). Likewise, in the State of New York, many of the official government documents were co-written in English and in Dutch up through the 1920s, likely as a result of the strong legacy of the New Netherlands colony in the New York area, even though it was annexed by England in 1664.

From the earliest days of its formation, the United States has been rich in language diversity. Large numbers of immigrants to the United States have spoken little or no English. The earliest settlers spoke Dutch, German, French and Spanish, as well as English. Immigrants to the United States from the mid-19th century on spoke Hungarian, Irish, Greek, Polish, Swedish, Romanian, Japanese, Yiddish, Welsh, Portuguese and Chinese. There is also a long history of bilingual local schools and local newspapers throughout America (“Languages of the United States”, Wikipedia, 2012).

Foreign Languages as part of the U.S. Education Curriculum

The development of education in the United States had its roots in the very same European imperialism that heavily influenced U.S. languages and culture. “In their quest for control of foreign lands, the imperial powers attempted to impose their schools, cultures, and languages on local populations” (Spring, 2011, p. 4). From British colonization of America to the significant European immigration in the nineteenth century and the European and Asian immigration in the twentieth century, education policy has been significantly influenced by massive movements of people from different cultures and with different languages (Spring, 2011, pp. 4-5).

The influx of immigrants, mostly from Ireland, Germany, Scandinavia, and Italy, from the 1820s through the 1860s, caused significant cultural struggles for the new nation of America. Over 5 million European immigrants swarmed to the United States from 1820 through 1860 and by 1860 almost 20 percent of the free white population of America spoke mostly their native European languages in local churches, schools and communities (Spring, 2011, pp. 108 – 109). There were different reactions in different parts of America.

In 1847, a law was passed in the state of Louisiana authorizing the teaching of French in public schools. It was interesting that this law was passed in 1847, since the United States had acquired Louisiana from the French more than 40 years before and Louisiana was a French-speaking territory (Wikipedia, “English Only Movement”, 2012). In 1868, the Indian Peace Commission recommended English-only schooling for Native Americans as a mechanism to assimilate Native Americans more fully into the U.S. culture. In the late 1880s, Wisconsin and Illinois both passed laws requiring English-only instruction for both public and parochial schools. There were cultural and language struggles going on all over America with some factions of the country strongly advocating a common English standard and others advocating multi-culturalism and supporting the diversity of different languages (Wikipedia, “English Only Movement”, 2012).

In 1907, U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt wrote:

We have room for but one language in this country, and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, of American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polygot boarding house. (Roosevelt, (1926), p. 554).

This English-only movement came to a head in 1923 with a case that made it all the way to the United States Supreme Court. In 1919, the state of Nebraska passed a law prohibiting anyone from teaching any subject in any other language other than English. In addition, the law prohibited foreign languages to be taught until students had passed the eighth grade. The plaintiff, Meyer, was a teacher at Zion Parochial School. Meyer was using a German bible as a reading text to teach both German and religious instruction. Meyer was convicted under the state statute and his conviction was upheld by the Nebraska Supreme Court. It was reviewed by the United States Supreme Court under the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution which prohibits states from creating legislation that unduly restrict liberty interests of U.S. citizens when the legislation is not reasonably related to any acceptable state objectives. The U. S. Supreme Court overturned Meyer's conviction in 1923 stating that the Nebraska State Statute went too far in trying to control how parents could teach their children. The court's opinion stated:

Certainly education and the pursuit of knowledge should be encouraged. Mere knowledge of the German language cannot be looked upon as harmful. Meyer's right to teach, and the right of the parents to hire him so to teach were within the liberty of this (Fourteenth) Amendment. (United States Supreme Court , 262 U.S. 390 (1923))

The political battles over foreign languages, especially German, did not end with the Meyer v. State of Nebraska decision. World War II brought a resurgence of acrimony toward the languages of the enemy with many prohibitions against the teaching and speaking of German and Japanese. A United Nations Convention in 1960 Against Discrimination in Education "declared it a right for national minorities to conduct schools in their own languages and cultural traditions" (Spring, pp. 402 – 403). This UN

Convention, and the increasing migration of foreigners to the United States following the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act, continued to fuel the debates over multiculturalism and language policies. The increase in U.S. immigration following the passage of the 1965 Act was very different from the immigration that the U.S. had experienced during the nineteenth century. “By 1980, the top five sources of immigration to the United States were Mexico, Vietnam, the Philippines, Korea and China/Taiwan” (Spring, p. 408). By 2002, the percentage of foreign born people in the U.S. population had grown from less than 5 % in 1970 to 11.5%, with most of those immigrants coming from Mexico and Asia, not Europe (Spring, p. 408).

Introducing Claims

This thesis is supported by two specific claims:

1. Requiring foreign language education in elementary schools will facilitate learning in other disciplines and will make elementary students better learners generally.
2. Requiring foreign language education in elementary schools will substantially improve the acquisition of foreign language capabilities among Americans.
 - a. This will make U.S. citizens more culturally sensitive and will enable them to compete more effectively for jobs in the future as the world becomes smaller and as cross-cultural skills, including language skills, become more and more important.
 - b. This will also improve security within the United States and the world at large as foreign language skills are critical to preserve national security

and to ferret out security threats and to closely follow insurgent activities throughout the world.

Supporting the Claims

1) Requiring foreign language education in elementary schools will facilitate learning in other disciplines and will make elementary students better learners generally.

Significant research has shown positive correlations between foreign language study and improvement in cognitive and academic ability (Marcos and Peyton, 2000, p.1). A study by Bamford and Mizokawa at the second grade level showed that a classroom that had bilingual immersion in Spanish along with English was significantly more effective at solving complex problems than the monolingual English classroom (Bamford & Mizokawa, 1991). A study by Foster and Reeves at the sixth grade level showed that students who had received French instruction scored much higher on tasks that required evaluation than the control group who received no French instruction (Foster & Reeves, 1989). The Foster and Reeves study involved 67 sixth graders who were divided into four different groups. Three of the groups were given 30 minutes of French instruction every day following 30 minutes of English. The control group had 60 minutes of English and no French instruction. The three groups given daily French instruction participated for different lengths of time, with the first group receiving 6 and ½ months of French, the second group receiving 15 and ½ months, and the third group receiving French instruction for more than 2 years. The three groups who received French instruction all scored significantly higher than the control group on two different

standard cognitive tests (the Ross Test and the Butterfly and Moths Test) (Foster & Reeves, 1989).

Saunders analyzed the performance of third grade students in Georgia who had enrolled in the Georgia Elementary School Foreign Language Model Program compared to other fourth grade students in Georgia who had not received foreign language instruction. The third graders in her study group scored significantly higher in math than their fourth grade counterparts. They also scored better in reading (Saunders, 1998). Armstrong and Rogers also studied third graders, but they studied a group of students after only one semester of Spanish instruction for thirty minutes a day, three times per week. They showed that the students who received only one semester of Spanish scored higher in achievement test scores in both math and language than the students who did not receive any Spanish instruction. The really fascinating thing was that the students who did not receive Spanish instruction received extra math instruction for those one and one-half hours every week, yet the foreign language students performed better than them in math (Armstrong and Rogers, 1997).

There are many other similar studies that demonstrate the general educational value of foreign language instruction among younger students (Curtain and Dahlberg, 2004). Certain brain research connects the learning of a second language with positive brain development in younger children. This research suggests that the brains of younger children will actually develop in a manner that supports the learning of other languages and that this phenomenon is no longer possible after about age 12 (Dumas, 1999). Perhaps this is the reason why it is so much easier for younger children to

quickly learn another language, while many adults tend to struggle mightily to acquire foreign language skills.

The case of Genie is a remarkable case in point. Genie was the name given to a feral child discovered by authorities in November of 1970. Horribly, Genie was kept in captivity from birth with virtually no spoken interaction with humans. Genie was discovered by authorities at age 13, and despite significant efforts to teach Genie language and communication skills, she was never able to develop any beneficial and concrete language capability. It is crucial that languages are developed at younger ages, and in the case of Genie, so sad that this terribly abused child was unable to develop adequate language skills because of her advanced age (Curtiss, 1977).

From my own experience, I can attest to the benefit of language acquisition prior to the age of 13, as I learned to speak two foreign languages quite fluently before that age. I can also speak to the value of foreign language skills from the broader educational perspective. I believe that my facility with other languages have helped me academically, not just with English and language arts, but also with other academic disciplines. I also believe that my foreign language skills have made it easier for me to make connections with other disciplines of study. Finally, becoming fluent in other languages is an enormous confidence-builder, and I believe confident learners are the best kind. I have always been very curious when it comes to language acquisition and multi-lingual abilities, and that curiosity has carried over into other areas of study besides foreign languages.

Finally, acquisition of foreign language capabilities provide a critical link or connection for younger children that they can use in other areas of study. Most languages are basically connected at the root of several massive groups of language (such as Germanic languages, romantic languages, oriental languages, etc.). With understanding and knowledge of these connections, students can use foreign language facilities to aid in their understanding of other disciplines. For example, knowledge that certain math terms derive from ancient Greek and Latin allows students to understand the meanings behind math terms. Currently in my student teaching semester, I have explored this idea with my math students as they are studying the metric system. I have created a language appreciation in the students by relating the meaning of a particular term to the Greek or Latin derivation of the word. By linking the term to the metric that it represents, I am able to build stronger connections and a deeper understanding of the entire system. By understanding the core meanings of these terms, students can understand even better how those terms fit together in the overall metric system. Similarly, when we consider junior high school or high school education in the United States, terms in Latin, French, German and Spanish (which were the four most common languages taught in public high schools in the U.S. during the twentieth century) allow students to explore things like SAT and ACT vocabulary in a more successful manner. Again, from personal experience, I believe my achievement in vocabulary on my SAT test was aided greatly by my knowledge of both French and Spanish by using connecting words and other such general foreign language knowledge.

Another benefit of these “language groups” (Germanic, Romantic, etc.) is that the languages in each particular group are so similar in structure and sound that once

abilities in one language are acquired, it is much easier to start to develop facilities with other languages in that particular group. For example, with my background in French, I was able to quickly pick up Spanish, as well as fully understand basic Italian and Portuguese, and even attempt at learning these languages in later years. As for the Germanic languages, once I began learning Swedish, I could see such intense similarities between English and Swedish, and therefore also developed an interest in such languages as Dutch, Norwegian, Finnish, and German. The connections behind these languages are fascinating and they certainly encourage me to want to continue to learn and explore.

2. Requiring foreign language education in elementary schools will substantially improve the acquisition of foreign language capabilities among Americans.

- a. This will make U.S. citizens more culturally sensitive and will enable them to compete more effectively for jobs in the future as the world becomes smaller and as cross-cultural skills, including language skills, become more and more important.**

Foreign language skills and broader cultural understanding are fundamental requirements for U.S. citizens in the increasingly global marketplace. The world is getting smaller and smaller and jobs that used to be secure because of their location are now being threatened by people as far away as India and China. It is a “new world order” and to effectively compete, U.S. citizens must broaden their perspectives and

accelerate their learning of skills and capabilities that cannot be easily off-shored or outsourced. Foreign language skills are a critical component of the new education that must be acquired.

In his groundbreaking book, The world is flat: A brief history of the twenty-first century, Thomas Friedman issued a call to action to governments, businesses and individuals who wanted to remain competitive in the technology-fueled global economy that has emerged in the beginning of the twenty-first century (Friedman, 2005).

Friedman lists ten forces that he claims have “flattened the world” with the advent of the world-wide internet and the outsourcing and offshoring of work being three of the most significant factors (Friedman, 2005, Chapter 2).

Learning foreign languages promotes cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity. In our increasingly multicultural global society, foreign language study by younger children will enable more and deeper cultural competency skills.

The age of ten is a crucial time in the development of attitudes toward nations and groups perceived as “other” according to the research of Piaget, Lambert and others. At age 10, children are in the process of moving from egocentricity to reciprocity and information received before age 10 is eagerly received. (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004, p. 395).

My own experience living in a foreign country as an 11 year-old, certainly supports this premise. I moved with my family to the French-speaking part of Switzerland in late 2000 and I was immediately thrust into a totally unfamiliar culture and language. Although I attended an English-speaking school, for two hours each day I received French and Spanish instruction with no assistance in English. This was total foreign language immersion. Also, I joined a Swiss swim team where none of the other children or the coaches spoke English. We lived in a smaller town in Switzerland and

when we shopped or interacted with neighbors in our community, it was all in French. Finally, the events of September 11, 2001, occurred while I was living in Switzerland and I was exposed to significantly different perspectives regarding the United States and the terrorist activities committed by al- Qaeda on that fateful day.

I believe that my cultural assimilation into Switzerland (and to European cultures generally as the British International School that I attended was substantially multicultural) was significantly enhanced by the fact that I was learning foreign languages. I believe I acquired a much stronger sensitivity for other cultures because of my experience, and a much higher tolerance for differences among people. Curtain and Dalhberg maintain that “the positive impact of cultural information is significantly enhanced when that information is experienced through foreign language and accompanied by experiences in culturally authentic situations.” (Curtain and Dahlberg, 2004, p. 245).

Besides the intellectual benefits of foreign language study that were discussed in connection with my first claim, understanding and knowledge of foreign languages facilitates travel throughout the world and enhances career opportunities. The National Research Council, Center for Education, published a report to the U. S. Congress on March 27, 2007, that supported the significance of foreign language study by U. S. citizens to support economic competitiveness as well as foreign affairs and national security (National Research Council, 2007). A study in 2004 of alumni of the Thunderbird Graduate School of International Management in Glendale, Arizona found that 82% of the 581 alumni from 1970 through 2002 who responded to the survey found that their foreign language capabilities benefited them in their professional lives. 89% of

them also claimed to have an edge in their professional lives as a result of their cultural skills that they acquired through the 4 semesters of foreign language study required by Thunderbird for graduation (Grosse, 2004).

2. Requiring foreign language education in elementary schools will substantially improve the acquisition of foreign language capabilities among Americans.

b. This will also improve security within the United States and the world at large as foreign language skills are critical to preserve national security and to ferret out security threats and to closely follow insurgent activities throughout the world.

Some believe that the world experienced a catastrophic change on September 11, 2001, when nearly 3000 innocent Americans perished in the most significant terrorist attack in history. The attack caused enormous loss of life and serious damage in lower Manhattan. It also rocked world financial markets. Perhaps the most sustained impact of that fateful day was the sense that most Americans had that the world had suddenly become less safe. In the aftermath of 9-11, the U.S. government focused specific attention on the need for more and better language skills, especially language skills in Arabic and middle-eastern dialects associated with several prominent terrorist sects.

The House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence identified foreign language skills as the single greatest need in the intelligence community immediately

after the 9-11 incident (H.R. Rep. No. 107-219, 2001). Senator Paul Simon remarked that “80 federal agencies need proficiency in nearly 100 foreign languages. While the demand is great, the supply remains almost nonexistent. Only 8% of American college students study another language” (H. R. Rep. No. 107-219, 2001). President George W. Bush launched the National Language Security Initiative on January 2, 2006, in an attempt to strengthen national security and prosperity through the development of foreign language skills. President Bush stated:

(W)e must be able to communicate in other languages, a challenge for which we are unprepared...it is essential to national security...to engage foreign governments and peoples, encourage reform, promote understanding, convey respect for other cultures...we need to dramatically increase the number of Americans learning critical foreign languages...through new and expanded programs from kindergarten through the university and into the workforce. (U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, January 2, 2006)

If the United States does not strengthen their foreign language education, both the nation’s global competitiveness and national security could be at risk.

Exploring the Claims

The New Order – The Need for Foreign Language Education for the Future

The claims are compelling. The United States needs to imbed foreign language education into our national education policy. Foreign languages need to be a mandatory part of the education curriculum. Foreign language education needs to be taught early in the education process to be most effective. Ideally foreign language education should begin in kindergarten or first grade and it should be part of the curriculum all the way through high school.

Foreign language education will broaden our students and make them better learners. It will improve their cognitive skills and will help them with other areas of study. It will broaden their cultural horizons and prepare them to compete more effectively in the global world. It will also support a critical need by our government to promote national and international security interests.

The United States should start requiring foreign languages to be taught in elementary schools. The studies have shown that language learning is most effective when it is started in elementary schools (Pufahl, Rhodes, & Christian, 2001).

What Some U.S. Schools Have Done

Seattle public schools created the John Stanford International School, a public elementary bilingual immersion school. Students spend half their day studying math, science, culture, and literacy in either Japanese or Spanish; they spend the other half of the day learning reading, writing, and social studies in English. The Glastonbury School District in Connecticut has a foreign language requirement for grades K-8. Ninety-three percent of students study at least one foreign language and 30% study more than one. The foreign language program integrates foreign language training with world history. The school district has a statewide and regional reputation for language training (Aoki, 2003).

The Center for Applied Linguistics conducted a survey in 1997 to determine how many public and private elementary and secondary schools in the United States were teaching foreign languages and to evaluate the methods being used and the relative success among the various methods. The survey was sent randomly to six percent of

all of the schools in the U.S. and they received responses from 1534 Elementary Schools and 1650 secondary schools (Branaman and Rhodes, 1997). The survey found that foreign language instruction in elementary schools across the United States had increased nearly 10% from 1987, when the last such survey had been conducted, and that nearly one in three elementary schools reported providing some foreign language training to their students (31% of all of the schools who had responded to the survey) (Branaman and Rhodes, 1997). Although the survey determined that teaching of foreign languages had increased in both public and private elementary schools, the most marked increase had occurred in private schools, with 53% of the 382 private elementary schools who responded to the survey reporting the teaching of foreign languages, as compared to 34% in the 1987 survey. Public school teaching of foreign languages increased from 17% in 1987 to 24% in 1997. The 1997 survey found that Spanish and French continued to be the most common languages of instruction in elementary schools. Finally, the survey found that lack of funding and shortages of qualified teachers were the two most significant issues impacting the teaching of foreign languages in elementary schools in the United States. These same two issues were identified as the two most significant barriers in the 1987 survey (Branaman and Rhodes, 1997).

The elementary schools that do offer some form of foreign language instruction generally follow the FLES* (pronounced “flestar”) programs for “early-start” teaching of foreign languages (ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, 2003).

Basically, there are four different program models which can be adapted, modified, or combined to suit the individual needs of schools and school districts. All four program models are similar in that they reflect the national foreign

language standards; provide students with some fluency in the language; help children learn about different cultures and provide them with an enlarged vision of the world; motivate them to continue foreign language study in middle school, high school, and beyond; and contribute to the K- 12 foreign language sequence. (ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, The ABCs of Elementary School Foreign Language Programs: A Guide for Parents, (2003), p.1)

Elementary schools generally set up their curriculum to be an adaptive foreign language curriculum and they try to create programs that will stay with the students from beginning to end, and units that will build off of themselves throughout the entire K-12 sequence. The four different FLES* program models are outlined below:

Sequential FLES*

- One foreign language
- Three to five times a week
- Presented as a distinct subject, such as science or social studies
- Children may attain substantial fluency

Sequential FLEX

- One foreign language
- One to two times a week
- Introduces students to the other cultures and languages as a general concept
- Limited fluency; emphasis isn't on learning the language itself

Exploratory

- Multiple introductory foreign languages
- One to two times a week
- Introduces students to other cultures and languages as a general concept
- Limited fluency; emphasis isn't on learning the language itself

Immersion

- Total immersion (all day) programs; all subjects (math, social studies, science, etc.) taught in the second language
- Partial immersion; some subjects taught in the second language
- The language is the medium for content instruction rather than the subject
- Higher level of competence than those participating in other language programs

(ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, *The ABCs of Elementary School Foreign Language Programs: A Guide for Parents*, (2003), p.2)

What We Can Learn from Foreign Language Teaching in Other Countries

Foreign language education in Europe strongly supports beginning foreign language study early to promote achievement at higher levels of language proficiency. All but two of the European Union countries mandate the study of a foreign language and most of them begin foreign language study in primary school (Eurydice, 2005). The only two who do not mandate foreign language study are English speaking countries, Ireland and Scotland (Eurydice, 2005). Also, with the exception of Italy and Wales, another English-speaking country, all European students are required to learn a foreign language during their compulsory education. Even students in Great Britain are required to learn a foreign language as a condition of graduation (Eurydice, 2005). Seven of the countries studied by Pufahl, Rhodes and Christian have compulsory education in foreign languages by age 8, and another eight countries introduce foreign language in upper elementary grades. In many cases, a second foreign language is required in elementary grades (Pufahl, Rhodes and Christian, 2001). Currently in the

United States, the majority of students do not even get introduced to a foreign language until they reach high school, usually around age 14.

Most countries that have shown significant proficiency in foreign language education cite the criticality of a well articulated curriculum framework. Many of the European countries have adapted their foreign language teaching to the Council of Europe's language policy (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching and Assessment, 2001). The framework describes objectives, methods and approaches, skills, practices, and assessments in language teaching, and it is used for planning syllabuses, examinations, teaching materials, and teaching training programs.

How To Do It – Methods

Although total or partial immersion programs have been shown to be extremely effective in accomplishing foreign language fluency, it is unlikely that public U.S. elementary schools will be able to introduce effective immersion programs into the elementary school curriculums. Some private schools may have the funding to support the hiring of language teachers who could support immersion programs, but even many private schools will have difficulty supporting the immersion model.

The most practical and likely the most feasible approach to begin introducing foreign language instruction into all U.S. elementary schools is to use some version of the Sequential FLES* Program, where the focus is on the teaching of one foreign language three to five times a week. Ideally, the language should be introduced early, likely in kindergarten or first grade. In the early years, I would recommend starting with

three times per week for 30 minutes each lesson. Foreign language instruction could be substituted for some other subject, like math or reading, and it could be offered to students who have demonstrated the capability to master the learning concepts in the core discipline that the foreign language is being substituted for. Substituting foreign language instruction for English language learning and/or reading may be the optimum approach as students will be exposed to English in all of their other courses and outside of school, so this approach would be least likely to create any significant gaps in their overall educational progress in English.

As students progress into the third through fifth grades, the amount of foreign language training could be increased, perhaps to five times per week for 30 minutes or to three or four times per week for 40 or 45 minutes, as the students will have more facility to focus their foreign language training and will likely start to speak to each other in the foreign language.

Technology could also be used to help improve or enhance the foreign language instruction with students listening to language tapes and undertaking listening and speaking exercises on a one-on-one basis using technology. In that way, the foreign language teacher can focus attention on those students whose needs are greatest or who require some special focus or attention.

Finally, schools which are located in areas where there are significant ethnic populations could consider offering foreign languages that reflect the ethnic diversity in that region. For instance, schools in the Southwestern region of the United States could consider offering Spanish as a core subject as there is a significant Hispanic population

in that region. One public elementary school in Seattle is offering Japanese or Spanish to their students since both ethnicities feature prominently in their regional demographic.

During my Spring Semester I was student teaching in a 5th grade class at Mount Nittany Elementary School. My mentor teacher, Timothy Kamats, allowed me to introduce a mini-unit on a topic of my choice, and I chose French Language and Culture. I started by introducing the class to the French culture and the country of France. I created bulletin boards with maps of France and I had each of them bring in a passport-sized photo so they could each make a French Passport for themselves. I posted photographs of France on the bulletin board and we discussed some of the different famous French monuments, like the *Arc de Triumph* and the *Tour Eiffel*. I was amazed at how interested and engaged the class was and by the level of effort they put forth in the mini-unit. I had each of them select a famous French icon from a list provided that included artists, philosophers, leaders, athletes and celebrities. They were required to do research regarding the icon they selected and to come into class, dressed appropriately, and to present to the class as if they were the individual that they selected. The students all exceeded my expectations by doing significantly more research than I had ever anticipated them doing and by doing exceptional presentations to their classmates, some of which lasted more than 5 minutes and provided minute details of the lives of the icons that they represented. The most surprising results for me were from the three learning support students in the class who each showed significant improvement in their presentation and writing skills. Mr. Kamats was amazed at their interest level and the effort they put forth.

I introduced some very basic French language skills as part of this mini-unit. First, I had each student select a French name from a list of common French boys' and girls' names. We then learned the pronunciation of the names and how to present themselves formally using their French names. For instance, "Bonjour, je *m'appelle Pierre*". During each lesson, each student would take turns formally introducing themselves to the rest of the class. We also learned counting from 1 to 10 in French and some other basic vocabulary such as fruits, common phrases and basic questions. Again, I was impressed with how quickly the students mastered the skills and retained the information that they learned. During the parent/teacher conferences after the mini-unit, many of the parents mentioned how interested their children were in the French mini-unit and many of them indicated that their children often practiced speaking French at home.

Barriers and Issues

As strongly as I feel about the need to introduce foreign language education into U.S. elementary schools, I recognize that there are significant barriers and issues to overcome. Perhaps the most compelling issue is the financial one. Hiring qualified foreign language teachers to teach in elementary schools will cost money and many U.S. school systems are already financially strapped. It will be difficult to find sufficient budget dollars to support a new core subject in foreign languages. One option would be for school districts to leverage their junior high school and high school language teachers more effectively and to have those teachers spend a portion of their school day at the elementary school providing introductory language training at that level.

Another significant barrier to adding foreign language training into the elementary school curriculum is in deciding what core subject areas should be cut or contracted to allow the time for the foreign language education. Many school districts around the country are already cutting back on arts programs and mandatory physical education programs to make room for core subject areas. Compelling the introduction of foreign language education as a core subject area will only intensify the pressure to cut other subject areas from the curriculum. As I explained in the methods section above, for younger children (grades kindergarten through second grade) foreign language might be substituted for English language learning and/or reading since the students at that level already have significant exposure to English in all of their other subjects and outside of the school. Candidly, this issue will probably be much more difficult to resolve starting with the third grade curriculum and moving into the middle school grades since there are many core subject matter areas that are necessary and appropriate to ensure a broad, holistic education for a child. I believe foreign language education is so critical, though, that it may even be worth considering an extension to the school day for these students to ensure that they get exposure to and opportunity to acquire skills in foreign languages.

Another issue that would need to be addressed is the decision about what foreign languages should be provided for elementary schools. We already discussed the potential of offering foreign language training commensurate with the demographic ethnicity of the particular region. Obviously elementary schools cannot possibly provide education options in 300 or more different foreign languages. One option is to provide Spanish since we already have more than 30 million Spanish speakers in the U.S.

today. Another option is to provide some limited choices of languages, like Spanish, French and German. Ultimately, the decision of what foreign languages to offer will likely be based on economics and demographics. Hopefully the decision will also be based on the long-term best interests of the students.

Another significant issue and potential barrier to consider is the economic disparity between wealthier areas and school districts and more economically disadvantaged areas and school districts. Opportunities to learn other languages and cultures will be much more difficult to support in the more economically disadvantaged areas of the United States. Today, foreign language instruction is offered in only one-quarter of the urban public schools, which tend to be more economically disadvantaged, compared to two-thirds of suburban public schools. Clearly government, both state and local, needs to get directly involved to eliminate, or at least moderate, this impact. Redistribution of education dollars to ensure that the economically disadvantaged have the same opportunities as all other students is imperative. Preparing our economically disadvantaged students to compete effectively in the “fattened world” is clearly a priority.

Finally, a direct barrier that is preventing the teaching of foreign language education in public elementary schools lies in the lack of available, qualified professionals who would be able to teach such languages adequately. Schools in areas around the U.S. have been making cuts to deal with the recession in the economy, and language is always an area that seems to be cut out without questions. Other schools have made “alterations” to their language set-up, such as eliminating language positions and augmenting language teaching with technology solutions, such as Rosetta Stone.

When things like this occur, it is hard not to get frustrated with the school system, the community, and governing bodies for allowing things like this to happen. What schools need is a set of available, trained professionals who would be able to introduce languages to students K-8. Increasing the demand for qualified teachers would ensure that more college students would prepare themselves adequately for these new roles. More education-focused professionals would ensure that they acquire the necessary skills to be able to supply the new demand coming from the schools. Also, as previously mentioned, school districts can “share the wealth” in a sense and use high school teachers in the K-8 classes.

Conclusion

Today’s elementary and middle school children will be thrust into a world that will be totally different from the world that I experienced as a child. The World Wide Web was only being launched around the time I was born. Today, billions of people on our planet are socially connected and many of them use the Internet on a daily basis. We are living in a much closer, much more transparent, and much more globalized world. And it seems to be getting closer and more globalized at an accelerating pace.

The bottom line is that the curriculum today is not adequately preparing our students for this new world order. We are not adequately equipping our students with the skills they will need to effectively compete for jobs in future generations. We must start now to provide our students with more international knowledge and skills, including languages other than English. Not only will the acquisition of language skills help them to succeed in an increasingly globalized world, but language skills will also help them to foster respect for other peoples and other cultures. Language skills will help them to

develop some of the “softer skills”, such as the relationship-building skills that will help them be more empathetic and better team players when working with diverse peoples and cultures.

Shockingly few U.S. students graduate with skills in languages that large numbers of people on earth speak (like Chinese – 1.3 billion people – and Arabic – 246 million people). Unless and until the United States makes foreign language education compulsory, this will not change. We must require foreign language education and we should begin in elementary school. It is good for our students and it is necessary for our global competitiveness and our national and international security.

You live a new life for every new language you speak.

If you only know one language, you live only once.

Czech Proverb, author unknown

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Major: Elementary Education
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Shadyside Academy, Pittsburgh, PA: November 2006 – June 2008
Graduated June 2008
Highest Honor Roll every semester
Captain of the Swim Team
Chatham College Women in Sports Award 2008

Weston High School, Weston, CT: September 2004 – November 2006
Highest Honor Roll every semester
Placed 10th in USA in *Le Grand Concours* National French Competition in 2006
Rookie of the Year, Swim Team, 2004
MVP of High School Swim Team, 2005 and 2006
Connecticut All-State Swim Team, 2006

Activities:

Penn State Varsity Swim Team – September 2008 – April 2010
Member of Athletic Director's Leadership Institute
Member of Athlete's in Action Bible Study
Member of SAAB, PLA and Atlas THON groups
Member of Schreyer Honors College Student Council
Special Olympics (Summer 2009; Winter 2010)
Friendship Tutoring Program (Tutor since Fall 2009)
Member of Autism Speaks 2008-present

Work Experience:

Lifeguard and Swim Instructor, Hampton Community Pool: 2006-2010
Lifeguard, Swim Instructor, and Head Coach, Ingomar Pool: 2008-2011
Swim Camp Instructor (Summer 2009) Penn State University Park

Honors/Awards:

Member of Phi Kappa Phi
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Freshmen President's Award for 4.0 GPA
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All-Academic Big Ten Recognition for Division 1 Athletes, 2008-2010
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Languages:

French – Written and verbal
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