

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF BELOIT BLOG

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Learning languages is a human instinct

Early childhood brain development is geared toward learning languages. Babies respond to their mother's or father's voice and the sound patterns in the languages they speak.

Birth to five years of age is a critical for language development; children who are spoken to, read to, and are exposed to a rich language environment are better prepared for school, and later college and career. By six or seven years of age, children significantly lose the natural ability to produce sounds, grammar, and sentence structures of any language, even the language used most at home. However, they can still learn new vocabulary.

After puberty, the ability to acquire a new language is greatly diminished. This is not to say middle and high school children and adults cannot learn languages after elementary school, but it does become much more difficult. As a child or adult, the most effective way of learning a new language is through immersion. Although overwhelming at first, consistently immersing yourself in situations where the language is spoken eventually leads to a much more native-like ability to use the language.

Meeting the challenge of learning new languages is worth it

Bilingualism can provide so many opportunities and benefits which last a lifetime. Besides communicating with other people, bilingualism provides more economic opportunities, academic achievements, cognitive advantages, and protection against and delay in the onset of diseases such as dementia and Alzheimer's.

As far as economic benefits, the demand for multilingual workers in the United States is ever increasing. Bilingual employees are more readily hired and earn an average of 5-20% more than those who speak only one language.

In addition to being a desirable skill by employers, the academic abilities of students in language programs, such as dual language immersion, tend to result in higher academic gains and success, thus leading to students reaching higher educational levels.

Another advantage for bilingual workers is their ability to focus, multitask, and think outside the box, all stemming from the brain's changes that happen when people learn more than one language. These changes in the brain are what help protect it from the effects of diseases such as dementia and Alzheimer's. Because the bilingual brain relies heavily on

the executive functions of the brain to continually make decisions about language processing and language production, this nearly automatic process keeps the brain highly active.

And perhaps most importantly, learning new languages builds community among people who are seemingly different from one another

Nelson Mandela said, “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.”

Language is tied to emotions

As we learn about different emotional concepts as babies and as children, the language tied to those concepts will stay with us throughout our lives. When people speak the same language and the same dialect, there is a certain bond and recognition. With that in mind, speaking multiple languages increases a person’s ability to relate to many, many different kinds of people. It opens you up to interact with the entire world.

The Beloit Community, including our School District, is more multilingual than people realize

Twelve identified languages are spoken by our students and their families. In the School District of Beloit, we encourage students to maintain their home languages and become bilingual by offering different linguistic opportunities.

Our Dual Language Immersion program starts in 4K

Our students can begin their journey towards the Seal of Biliteracy and the Global Education Achievement Certificate offered by the State of Wisconsin when they have met specific requirements before completing high school. Students can also take the World Languages Pathway towards becoming bilingual, which begins in middle school.

We encourage and celebrate multilingualism in the School District of Beloit

Linguistic diversity is a part of the “Strengthened by Diversity” mantra that makes our community #BeloitProud.