

## Why study a FL

### Foreign Languages An Essential Core Experience

#### Recent History of Our Struggle to Make Foreign Languages Core

Foreign language study is in the national education Goals 2000, which states: "By the year 2000 all American students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign language, civics and government, arts, history, and geography..." . On September 15, 1999, Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley delivered his Annual Back-to-School Address, entitled, "Changing the American High School to Fit Modern Times." Included in his remarks, Riley states, "Let me suggest one other way to raise standards. I believe that in this new economy every high school student should be close to fluent in a foreign language when he or she graduates. We should begin teaching foreign languages in our elementary schools, and then in middle schools and high schools. English is a beautiful language and every American student must be a master of it. English is surely a world language. But learning a foreign language exposes young people to new cultures and new horizons and helps them understand English better."

This is not new thinking, since the 1979 "President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies" also recommended Foreign language requirements for all colleges and universities. The College Board (1983) recommended expanding basic skills to include foreign language education for all students. In 1996, the American Association of School Administrators identified knowledge of foreign languages as one of the most important skills that K-12 students will need to develop to prosper in the 21st century. A February 1997 article in Time magazine suggested that foreign languages should be taught to children as early as possible. The American Council on Education, in a 1989 policy statement, calls on higher education leaders "to make foreign language competence an integral part of a college education. Every baccalaureate holder should be competent in a second language; we can settle for no less as we move into the next century." This fervor has not died in our century, where The Partnership for 21st Century Skills and the NEA, with its policy brief entitled "Global Competence Is a 21st Century Imperative" (+ video) are currently trying to bring about this core change through a coalition of "Leadership States". Also, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni includes foreign languages among the seven core subjects by which it rates the curriculum of hundreds of American colleges and universities in "What will they learn?" The National Council of State Supervisors for Languages has provided a good general argument, and others are catching on:

A Rationale For Foreign Language Education (NCSSFL)  
<http://www.ncssfl.org/papers/index.php?rationale>

Second-Language Learning (DA-District Administration, 12/20/2012)  
<http://www.districtadministration.com/article/second-language-learning>

A Case for Emphasizing Secondary Language Education in the United States

(April 2013)

<https://sites.psu.edu/secondlanguagebenefits/>

Why this insistence that foreign language study be a core element in American education? Americans used to have some patently ignorant and pseudo-scientific (snake-oil) views concerning foreign and second languages. There was talk of a second language taking up the memory capacity needed for the real functions of the brain, such as general intelligence. Just as ignorant was the notion that a second language was only for those were mentally gifted. My fellow Americans, let us put away all divining rods, ouija boards, and indifference towards our neighbors. **HERE ARE THE FACTS** for founding a true twenty-first century consensus about core elements for a "general" education. In its report, "College Bound Seniors: The 1992 Profile of SAT and Achievement Test Takers", the College Entrance Examination Board reported that students who averaged 4 or more years of foreign language study scored higher on the verbal section of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) than those who had studied 4 or more years in any other subject area. In addition, the average mathematics score for individuals who had taken 4 or more years of foreign language study was identical to the average score of those who had studied 4 years of mathematics. These findings are consistent with College Board profiles for previous years.

### Amazing benefits and Reasons Why

Cognitive Benefits of foreign language study? Children in foreign language programs have tended to demonstrate greater cognitive development, creativity, and divergent thinking than monolingual children. Several studies show that people who are competent in more than one language outscore those who are speakers of only one language on tests of verbal and nonverbal intelligence. (Bruck, Lambert, and Tucker, 1974; Hakuta, 1986; Weatherford, 1986). When children are adequately exposed to two languages at an early age, they are more flexible and creative (Bamford and Mizokawa, 1991, and they reach higher levels of cognitive development at an earlier age than their monolingual peers (Hamayan, 1986).

Here are research summaries about "The Effect of Second Language Learning on Test Scores, Intelligence and Achievement."

ACT and other scores also seem to fall in line:

The Sensitivity of the ACT to Instruction

<http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/2004-3.pdf>

The Relation between High School Study of Foreign Languages and ACT English and Mathematics Performance

<http://www.adfl.org/bulletin/v23n3/233047.htm>

Language Learning Correlates with Higher Academic Achievement on Standardized Test Measures

Do Majors Matter? (see effect of foreign language learning on a College Learning Assessment test)

Why, How, and When Should My Child Learn a Second Language? [with a large bibliography]

<http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwwgcl/whyesfl.htm>

Academic Benefits of foreign language learning? Studies also show that learning another language enhances the academic skills of students by increasing their abilities in reading, writing, and mathematics. Studies of bilingual children made by child development scholars and linguists consistently show that these children grasp linguistic concepts such as words having several meanings faster and earlier than their monolingual counterparts. Everyone knows that reading skills are transferable from one language to another, but there are other benefits. A 1994 report on the impact of magnet schools in the Kansas City Public Schools showed that students in the foreign language magnet schools had boosted achievement significantly (Eaton, 1994). It claimed that students in the language magnet's first kindergarten, starting in the program in 1988, had surpassed national averages in all subjects by the time they reached fifth grade. Oddly enough, the foreign language students performed especially well in mathematics. Nancy Rhodes, secretary of the Network for Early Language Learning, an organization that advocates foreign language study, points to research among third and fourth graders in Louisiana. Those who studied French scored higher in English testing than students in the control group who did not [See also Eileen Rafferty, *Second Language Study and Basic Skills in Louisiana*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Department of Education, 1986)]. There is abundant and recent proof of the truth in what I have said. An editorial in the Vancouver Sun of October 21, 2004 states: "Province-wide skills tests in British Columbia consistently show that French immersion students outperform their counterparts in the English stream in math, reading and writing." Also in 2004, a foreign-language consultant for Louisiana Public Schools states this in an executive summary of an assessment report, studying performance on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills: "Several important findings of this study emerged. First, and most strikingly, foreign language students significantly outperformed their non-foreign language peers on every test (English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies) of the fourth-grade LEAP 21." Research on the cognitive benefits of foreign-language study are available in online bibliographies and summaries:

Reflective Curricula: Thinking Skills in Modern Foreign Languages  
<http://www.specialeducationalneeds.com/nc/thinking/mfl.html>

The Cognitive Benefits of Being Bilingual (Dana Foundation, October 31, 2012)  
<http://dana.org/news/cerebrum/detail.aspx?id=39638>

Cognitive Benefits of Learning Language  
<http://www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=4724>

Cognitive Benefits of Learning Languages (Duke TIP)  
<http://www.tip.duke.edu/node/866>

Cognitive Benefit of Lifelong Bilingualism (January 20, 2013)

The cognitive benefits of learning a second language

<http://blog.fusionacademy.com/2011/11/27/the-cognitive-benefits-of-learning-a-second-language/>

Benefits of Language Learning (excellent ACTFL resource, with bibliography)  
<http://www.yearoflanguages.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3651>

Brain Research: Implications for Second Language Learning (ERIC Digest)  
[http://www.power-glide.com/PTA/why\\_a\\_second\\_language.pdf](http://www.power-glide.com/PTA/why_a_second_language.pdf)

Judy Foreman, "The Evidence Speaks Well of Bilingualism's Effect on Kids"

<http://www.heritagefrancais.org/documents/TheEvidenceSpeaksWellofBilingualism...JudyForemanArticle.pdf>

Kathleen M. Marcos, "Second Language Learning: Everyone Can Benefit."  
Kidlanguages.com (February 29, 2004)  
<http://www.cal.org/earlylang/benefits/marcos.html>

The Second Language Brain Debate

<http://www.positscience.com/blog/2010/03/09/the-second-language-brain-debategu/>

Studies supporting increased academic achievement (ACTFL)  
<http://www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/Index.cfm?pageID=4525>

If becoming bilingual can have a positive effect on academic achievement, the whole language acquisition and cultural immersion experience must also be positive:

Academic Outcomes of Study Abroad (2010)  
<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/07/13/abroad>

Study Abroad, Graduate on Time (2012)

<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/07/10/new-studies-link-study-abroad-time-graduation>

Brain science has discovered that functional plasticity of the human brain is driven by language, and it is beginning to find out that knowing a foreign language can actually change the brain's anatomy by adding gray matter. Dr. Andrea Mechelli is a well-known researcher at the Institute for Cognitive Neuroscience at University College London. Aided by experts from the Fondazione Santa Lucia in Rome, he recently completed research showing that brain density is affected by being bilingual or highly proficient in a second language. WebMD tells this story in a recent article:

Being Bilingual Boosts Brain Power

<http://www.webmd.com/parenting/news/20041013/being-bilingual-boosts-brain-power>

a story that is being retold even now. There are constantly new vistas opening, related to brain mapping, brain growth, and neurohumanities:

The Bilingual Advantage  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/31/science/31conversation.html>

Mapping the Bilingual Brain (Radiolab, December 12, 2012)

<http://www.radiolab.org/blogs/radiolab-blogland/2012/dec/12/mapping-the-bilingual-brain/>

Neuroscience and the Bilingual Brain (Edutopia, MARCH 22, 2012)  
<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/neuroscience-bilingual-brain-judy-willis-md>

Learning A Language Makes The Brain Bigger (Business Insider - Science)

<http://www.businessinsider.com/language-learning-makes-for-bigger-brains-2012-10>

Swedish Researchers Suggest Learning Foreign Language Can Make Your Brain Grow

Language Learning Makes the Brain Grow, Swedish Study Suggests

Learning New Languages Helps The Brain Grow (Medical News Today, Oct. 2012)

from Volume 63, Issue 1, Pages 1-622 (15 October 2012) Neuroimage

Bilingual kids gain benefits in literacy skills (CBS News - Health)  
<http://www.cbc.ca/news/health/story/2012/02/08/bilingual-children-brain.html>

The Bilingual Brain Is Sharper and More Focused, Study Says (Wall Street Journal Health Blog)

Thinking in a Foreign Language Makes Decisions More Rational  
<http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2012/04/language-and-bias/>

Thinking in a foreign language helps economic decision-making (UChicago News)

<http://news.uchicago.edu/article/2012/04/25/thinking-foreign-language-helps-economic-decision-making>

The bilingual edge: Abilene children learning foreign languages early

<http://www.reporternews.com/news/2012/mar/04/some-abilene-kids-learning-foreign-language-as-2/>

Bilingual Children Have a Better 'Working Memory' than Monolingual Children (Science Daily)

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/02/130220084444.htm>

Being Bilingual May Boost Your Brain Power

<http://www.npr.org/2011/04/04/135043787/being-bilingual-may-boost-your-brain-power>

Benefits of Being Bilingual

<http://www.buzzle.com/articles/benefits-of-being-bilingual.html>

2 languages make your brain buff

<http://thechart.blogs.cnn.com/2011/02/18/foreign-language-learning-good-for-your-brain/>

Bilingual brain brilliance

<http://www.worldaccent.com/blog/2011/02/bilingual-brain-brilliance.html>

Bilingual Brains – Smarter & Faster (Psychology Today, Nov. 22, 2012))

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/radical-teaching/201211/bilingual-brains-smarter-faster>

Why Bilinguals Are Smarter (New York Times, March 17, 2012)

[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/18/opinion/sunday/the-benefits-of-bilingualism.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/18/opinion/sunday/the-benefits-of-bilingualism.html?_r=0)

Bilingual Children Switch Tasks Faster Than Speakers of a Single Language

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/04/120403112006.htm>

Research suggests bilingualism benefits cognition

<http://cogsciblog.wordpress.com/2011/04/07/research-suggests-bilingualism-benefits-cognition/>

Speaking two languages also benefits low-income children

<http://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-08-languages-benefits-low-income-children.html>

Thinking in a Foreign Language Makes Decisions More Rational

<http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2012/04/language-and-bias/>

How Knowing a Foreign Language Can Improve Your Decisions (Scientific American, 2012)

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=foreign-language-improve-decisions>

The Effect of a Second Language on the Brain (Cerebral Hacks, JULY 21, 2012)

<http://www.cerebralhacks.com/brain-exercises/the-effect-of-a-second-language-on-the-brain/>

Why It's Smart to Be Bilingual

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2011/08/07/why-it-s-smart-to-be-bilingual.html>

Why We Need to Learn a Foreign Language Young!

<http://crackingthelearningcode.com/bonus7.html>

One may well ask if the city of Glastonbury, Connecticut, where foreign-language study has begun in elementary school since 1957, does not provide massive anecdotal evidence of Mechelli's science discovered in a controlled environment. The proof undoubtedly lies in details of the success of its children:

A Case for Foreign Languages: The Glastonbury Language Program (ERIC)

Brain research in Canada has recently revealed that bilinguals and individuals highly proficient in a second language showed a markedly slower decline in mental powers with age:

Speaking Foreign Languages May Help Protect Your Memory (American Medical Network, Feb. 2011)

<http://www.health.am/ab/more/speaking-foreign-languages-may-help-protect-your-memory/>

Being bilingual 'protects brain'

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/3794479.stm>

Bilingualism May Be Neuroprotective (Brain-Blogger, 2013)

<http://brainblogger.com/2013/03/29/bilingualism-may-be-neuroprotective/>

How bilingualism could benefit the brain (delay a decline in brain power)

<http://bostinno.com/channels/how-bilingualism-could-benefit-the-brain/>

The Bilingual Advantage (delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease symptoms)

[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/31/science/31conversation.html?\\_r=1&emc=eta1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/31/science/31conversation.html?_r=1&emc=eta1)

Speaking More Than One Language Could Prevent Alzheimer's (Jan. 10, 2013)

Learning a language can protect and heal the brain other ways:

Can Bilingualism Counteract Effects of Poverty?

<http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/learning-the-language/>

Cognition and behavior: Bilingualism aids people with autism (SFARI, 2 October 2012)

<http://sfari.org/news-and-opinion/in-brief/2012/cognition-and-behavior-bilingualism-aids-people-with-autism>

Research studies in Canada, India and Hong Kong, whose results were released in June 2004, showed that bilingual speakers are better able to deal with distractions than are monolingual speakers:

Bilingual speakers are better able to deal with distractions

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A39338-2004Jun13.html>

Is it possible that these benefits may come to language learners as they evolve towards bilingualism because their exposure and training have enabled different approaches to knowledge, a different way of looking at things?

Bilingual Cognition and Language Teaching (bilinguals actually "think" differently)

<http://homepage.ntlworld.com/vivian.c/Writings/Papers/BilCog&Teaching.htm>

Of course, nobody can receive any of the benefits of foreign language study if they give credence to the myth that it is so difficult it should be reserved for gifted children among the privileged. There is no evidence to support this

untenable argument. Many millions of people from all walks of life and at all ranges of intelligence become bilingual or develop a practical knowledge of another language. We are often ourselves the source of intimidation and anxiety associated with the foreign language class. The following research article demonstrates that studying a foreign language is less difficult than you might think:

Learning a Second Language May Not be as Laborious as Believed  
[http://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2004-06/uow-baw061104.php](http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2004-06/uow-baw061104.php)

Can't learn a foreign language? Not true, say scientists

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/science-news/8200956/Cant-learn-a-foreign-language-Not-true-say-scientists.html>

In spite of the proven neurological and cognitive benefits, Americans are relatively unresponsive to their own need to put foreign languages at the core of their learning experience. They do this at the peril of their own security, since it is our lapse in linguistic and cultural skills which will likely provide the opportunity for the next terrorist strike:

The Language Crisis in the War on Terror

[http://www.eisenhowerinstitute.org/events/past\\_events/old\\_events/102102Brecht.dot](http://www.eisenhowerinstitute.org/events/past_events/old_events/102102Brecht.dot)

DoD Studies Foreign Language Needs of Future  
<http://www.defendamerica.mil/articles/jun2004/a062204b.html>

CIA Director Calls for a National Commitment to Language Proficiency at Foreign Language Summit

<https://www.cia.gov/news-information/press-releases-statements/press-release-2010/foreign-language-summit.html>

Russell A. Berman, "Foreign Language for Foreign Policy?" Inside Higher Ed.  
<http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2010/11/23/berman>

Berman also underscores the need for policy which unambiguously tags foreign language study as essential and core in the following:

The Real Language Crisis (Russell A. Berman)  
<http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2011/SO/Feat/berm.htm>

Russell Berman, "Through Languages to Literacy" (rpt. Spring 2011 MLA Newsletter)  
<http://www.mla.org/blog?topic=139>

About 66% of the world's population is at least bilingual. Less than 30% of internet users are primarily English speakers. There are too many obvious instrumental values to learning a language and too many scientific and correlation studies showing the cognitive benefits of being bilingual to claim that the validity of any single study is challenged by similar results for studying in another discipline. It is proven common sense that cognitive development fostered by language study, often a combination of conscious learning and acquisition, is unique. There is no legitimate reason for school officials to pretend that foreign language study is not essential and core, like



basic sciences and history, except perhaps their unworthiness to be in charge of our children's education. You can find other arguments for the "core" status of foreign languages in Robert D. Peckham, "Getting Down to the Core with Foreign Language Advocacy," The Language Journal - NYSAFLT 61, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 7-9: <http://www.nysaflt.org/publications/documents/pdf/journal/2010/summer2010.pdf> .

Join your own arguments with some of these for a local or school newspaper article, a statement before the school board, your dean or principal. Wherever you see "core" subjects listed which do not include foreign languages, write a correction to the author, web master or institution which proposed the list. Now is the time. If the arguments sit inactive in your head or on this web page, they will do about as much good as a closet full of unused body armor in a police precinct. Within the context of modern education, nobody who has not at least tried to learn a foreign language can be considered an "educated" person. The modern workplace has no room for the "uneducated".

Outside of its core imperative, there are compelling arguments for the utility of foreign language instruction. Read one of these: "\$\$World Languages = Career Opportunities\$\$" or "Foreign Languages and the Post-Recession Economy".

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