

Reading Reflection 7: Benefits of Second Language Study

There is a particular importance to learning a secondary language that is being under appreciated in today's schooling system. As brought up in the article, "in addition to developing a lifelong ability to communicate with people from other countries and backgrounds, other benefits include improved overall school performance and superior problem-solving skills" (Bamford & Mizokawa 1991; Hakuta 1986). Unfortunately many governments and school systems are under the old impression of language just being grammar and memorizing words, and don't give it the value of teaching anything "useful".

However, much of this overlooks the actual benefits of a secondary language, much of which comes from culture. You cannot truly teach a language without at least touching on the language of the culture involved. By doing so we can bring and understanding and exposure of other countries, which over time will lessen the racial divide and promote a more culturally sensitive populace. Some long term impacts could include bringing a higher level of interculturality to newer generations and an increase in the ability to communicate as a species globally rather than divided into race.

There are, however, limitations still in place for learning a secondary language. "Opportunities to learn about other languages and cultures are severely lacking in many low-income, minority, and urban school districts. Foreign language instruction is offered in only one-quarter of urban public schools compared with about two-thirds of suburban private schools" (NEA Research). On top of this, even the schools that do offer it don't provide enough time and quantity to actually acquire a proficient level of communication.

By limiting access to learning about secondary languages and cultures, it can lead to higher elements of inequity and negative impacts on social justice. Many of the areas that can learn a second language are often the more well off ones. Learning a second language has shown to have the side benefits of improving school performance and career opportunities, which can increase the divide when the opportunities to learn it are unequal in proportion to the wealth gap. On top of this, in terms of social justice, by limiting secondary language education it in fact can have the adverse effect of further dividing races and cultures by limiting how we understand each other. People fear and dislike what they don't understand, and by limiting cultural exchange through language it only cements those fears.

In terms of service learning, though our time is woefully short to try and teach these children to understand language and culture, at the very least we should try and teach the importance of it, and hopefully inspire them to want to spend more time and interest into the topic in the future. We need to incorporate language and culture together into our lessons, because they aren't things that can be taught separately and still be truly learned.