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Current Issue Reflection Paper

Should Students Be Required to Learn a Secondary Language From Grades 1-12?

Section 1:

In order to present my topic, I created a PowerPoint that included many statistics about how students learn a secondary language all around the world. After presenting my PowerPoint, the class was placed into breakout rooms where they discussed their own personal views on the topic above. When everyone came back to the main room, I started off by asking if anyone had any experience with learning a secondary language in school. Many people said that they mainly studied a secondary language, other than English, between the periods of 7-12 grade. Those who did study a language reported that they did not gain much from the classes. Their reasoning was that because they were forced to take the language classes to look better to colleges, they viewed the classes as a way to fill a requirement, not a learning opportunity. They also claimed that once those classes ended, they barely retained any information and could barely speak the language. Many of them even made the point that because the classes were required, students did not put true effort into the class and some students even believed that they were not even capable of learning a new language. Some of the information I presented in the PowerPoint stated that, when learning a secondary language, the earlier students start learning it, the easier it is to retain the information. The younger a child is, the more their brain is like a sponge, the higher chance they will remember information given to them.

Before I asked for my peer's opinions, I presented information from my PowerPoint that compared an American education and a European education when it comes to teaching secondary languages. Many European countries start teaching their students a secondary language between the ages of 6-9. Once those students reach secondary education school, most of the European student population is participating in a secondary language course in comparison to only a small fraction of the entire student population in America. After hearing this, many of my peers had varying opinions. Some believed that a language was important, but it shouldn't be required for students to participate in if they were only learning it for a few years. Some believed that languages should be required but should start around middle school (grade 5-7) because if it was implemented earlier then children would mix up their native language and the secondary language. Only a select few believed that a secondary language should be required starting early on, around kindergarten or first grade. Those who believed it should be required also believed that students should be allowed to choose the language they study, however, the choices should include some of the most commonly spoken languages in the world (Mandarin, Spanish, French, etc.). We also discussed how learning a second language at a younger age would allow children to become fluent in that language which would help in the future with job opportunities and communicating with people from around the world.

Section 2:

As to my opinion, I was part of the majority who believed learning a secondary language was useful, however, I was part of the minority who believed learning a second language at a younger age should be required. As I said during my presentation, I grew up speaking Portuguese at home before I started school. When I started kindergarten, I was considered an

ELL student, so I was in special classes that helped me learn English. Except, over time I ended up losing Portuguese and still had trouble with English. If there were teachers or even other students who spoke Portuguese, I would have had an easier time throughout elementary school and wouldn't be struggling to get my Portuguese back. Requiring students to learn a secondary language from grades 1-12 introduces students to new cultures, new people, and new experiences. Learning a secondary language in the American education system can be very beneficial in the long run because of how diverse the United States has gotten over the past few centuries. Although adding a secondary language course to the American curriculum takes away time from other crucial courses, learning a secondary language should be considered one of these crucial courses and should be required for all students in the American education system.