

About Families

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When Should Children Learn a Second Language? Experts Say: When They're Learning Their First!

Remember high school? You could choose French or Spanish. What you couldn't choose was to be the right age to learn a new language easily. You memorized verbs. But you probably didn't learn to speak fluently.

Today, enlightened school systems know better. Second languages are intro-

"All of the research suggests that from birth through eight to 10 years of age is the best time to introduce new languages to a young child. Yet, for some reason, most school systems introduce a new language around age 12," states Beth Butler, creator of the BOCA BETH Program, an integrated program of bilin-



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duced in elementary school. Little kids do learn more easily than high school students. But current research says: *to really do it right, start even earlier.* Start when the child is learning a first language. It's easier. It's more fun. Babies have an astonishing ability to absorb. And in today's complex world, a second language is not a luxury – it's a necessity.

We know now that studying a second language offers surprising benefits to children. Research has demonstrated improved ability to communicate, better cognitive development, richer cultural awareness and, ultimately, better job opportunities for those who know a second language. What's more, today's children will all be required to have command of two languages by the time they reach college.

gual educational materials designed to give young children a head start on becoming bilingual. "If you introduce a new language early in life, children will learn it faster, retain it better, and most often speak it with near-native pronunciation."

What language should your child learn? It's pretty easy to make a clear case for Spanish. Spanish is the native tongue for the largest growing segment of the American population today, with over 26 million American homes using Spanish as a first language. "Learning Spanish as a second language allows a child to be able to communicate with over 300 million more people worldwide," said Butler.

Beth Butler says you can't start too

early. "During pregnancy is a fine time to begin," she says. "And anywhere from birth to eight years of age is just right. These are the years when language is developing. Children are not confused by learning two names for objects. In fact, they think it's a wonderful game. And the fun factor is what makes learning so easy at these ages."

"There are two ways to learn a new language," says Butler. "Bilingual education – teaching English and Spanish side-by-side – is the best way to work with small children. For adults, immersion – where the new language is spoken exclusively – is usually the only way to learn. That's why so many of us spent our junior year abroad. It's why language summer camps work for teens.

"But when you're working with babies and little children, the bilingual approach is more effective, because it provides continuing education in the child's native tongue while acquiring skills in the new one. Children develop a sense of pride in learning both languages. The bilingual method ultimately provides better retention. And it's a whole lot more fun."

Beth Butler motivates and assists educators in developing a bilingual environment for children. Having lived in both Chile and Mexico, Butler has had Spanish as a second language for over 25 years. She also spent over 10 years in the classroom, teaching kindergarten through fourth grade. By combining her talents and experiences, she was able to develop one of the most effective, and delightful, second language programs currently available to parents who believe, as she does, that two languages are better than one for every baby. Log onto the Web site at www.bocabeth.com or call toll free 1-877-625-2622 (BOCA) for more information.