

5-2018

# Advantages and Disadvantages in Spanish Immersion: A Literature Review

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## Recommended Citation

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**Advantages and Drawbacks in Spanish Immersion: A Literature Review**

by

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A Starred Paper

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Science in

Curriculum and Instruction

May, 2018

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

### **Purpose of the Starred Paper**

For eight years the school district I work for has implemented an optional, partial Spanish-Immersion program for kids to be part of in their elementary years, kindergarten through sixth grade. The immersion program is implemented within three of eight elementary schools in our district. Students must join in kindergarten in order to take part in the immersion program in our district; you cannot join in later years unless you have a background in Spanish. I have had the opportunity to be a teacher within this program for the past three of my six years in the district. I teach fourth grade reading, writing, and social studies in English, while math, art, and science are taught in Spanish by a fluent Spanish-speaking teacher. Over the years the number of students taking part in the program has fluctuated in both positive and negative ways. Speaking Spanish in the classroom has become less enforced in some of the classrooms and parents are less informed of the benefits offered to their children if they choose to be part of this program. All of these reasons have motivated me to find research that supports the benefits in being part of immersion education.

The purpose of this starred paper is to identify and examine ways to keep the Spanish-Immersion program flourishing in my district, and to hopefully encourage other districts to implement these programs as well. The research will explain the advantages and limited drawbacks of being part of an immersion program. The information provided in this research will also help families determine if immersion education is the best choice for their child and whether or not they should join and stay in the program throughout their elementary years.

Non-English speaking minority groups have often struggled and even failed to successfully complete their education in North American schools. This has been attributed in large part to an inability to learn both English and other subject matter at the same time. However, recent experiences in North America suggest that it is possible to learn both a second language and subject matter at the same time (Cohen & Swain, 1976). In recent years there has been more research and information that suggests students are encouraged to learn two languages at the same time. The model of immersion education has helped to provide a way for students to learn two languages at one time, whether English is their first or second language. Being well versed in two languages has cognitive, academic, educational, and socio-cultural benefits (Fortune, 2014). Each of these advantages will be more detailed in chapter two of this paper.

Foreign language immersion programs, first introduced in the United States in 1971, incorporate intensive second language education into public elementary schools and have gradually spread across the country (Lenker & Rhodes, 2007). There are two different options districts have if they want to implement an immersion program: total immersion, where the child's day is completely taught in the foreign language, or partial immersion where the child's day is taught for a half a day in their dominant language, and the other half is taught in the second language they are learning. Minnesota is ranked as one of the highest states offering immersion education. Our state has 71 different elementary, middle, and high schools in 22 different districts that offer Spanish, French, Mandarin, Ojibwe, German, Korean, and Hmong (Fortune, Tedick, & Miller, 2015). Being part of a state that supports immersion education makes this research an important resource for parents who are debating whether or not to enroll their children in the program, as well as seeing the benefits of staying in the program.

I never thought I would ever be part of immersion education within my district, so when I was asked if I would teach the English half of the student's day starting in the Fall of 2016, I was excited and nervous for this new opportunity. I had an amazing teaching partner that would teach the Spanish half of the day and guide me through the requirements I needed to fulfill my part of the student's day. She encouraged me when I joined, had knowledge about the language and design of the program, and had a passion for teaching and speaking Spanish with kids. She was the person who started the immersion program within our school district after just having started her career a few years prior to implementing the program, and our immersion program is still successful today. It was undeniable that I lucked out on my placement and grade level within our district's immersion program. Listening to my teammate converse with parents and other staff about the benefits of being part of immersion education gave me a strong desire to strive to learn more about what this program really is and what it does for kids. It has challenged me to dig deeper into why it is so important to inform parents and students about being part of immersion.

Being part of this program has also guided me into becoming more informed when questions arise like, "why should I put my child in Spanish-Immersion?", or "should I pull my child out of the Spanish-Immersion program?" Surprisingly I get the "should I pull my child out of the Spanish-Immersion program?" more often than one would think. A lot of parents assume that if their child is not being 100 percent successful it is due to a language barrier, without taking into consideration other factors like behavioral or attention concerns that would happen in a general education setting as well. My own colleagues who are not part of the program, also question these circumstances and have often blamed the language as the reason for children who

are failing when various situations arise. I can understand where people would jump right to these conclusions, I did as well before I was informed and part of the program. However, I know the benefits I often find myself frustrated that others do not. I want to reach as many people as I can to share my research. Having been in both settings, the general education and immersion classroom, it is important to me to help staff in my school building to understand the significance and benefits for kids taking part in the program and gain support from them for this program.

Another concern is getting families to commit to the program from kindergarten to sixth grade, which can be challenging due to many different circumstances. Our numbers drop considerably from the start of the program in kindergarten to the end of sixth grade.

Unfortunately this drop is attributed to the independent variables which I have no control over in the years before they get to my classroom. Teaching styles, set up of the program, attitude towards the language, scheduling, and parent support are some of those variables. By the time I meet them in fourth grade I am hoping the dependent variables, the ones I can control, like my lesson plans, attitude, materials, flexibility, and management style can keep kids wanting to remain in the program and encouraging other classmates to do the same.

### **Research Question**

What are the benefits and drawbacks to being part of an immersion program?

To answer this question this study will review literature on:

- The advantages of immersion education versus only learning in one language
- If immersion is right for every child
- Where a K-12 education in immersion can lead students in their future
- What the drawbacks are for being part of an immersion program

- Is there a difference between native and non-native teachers teaching the course?

I will analyze many articles to answer these questions based on research and information other people have provided. I will use a variety of researchers' information to look at many different viewpoints.

### **Use of findings**

I will use the findings from my research with my future parents, students, and colleagues when questions concerning benefits and drawbacks arise regarding immersion education. The information I find can also be provided at conferences, kindergarten round-up, open house, district and staff meetings, professional learning communities (PLC'S), and collaborative discussions I have with my teammates.

### **Limitations**

This paper will consist of textual evidence based on articles I feel are the most accurate and relatable to me within my profession and in immersion education. There will be no questionnaires, surveys, or studies given to parents or students of mine. All information will be based on what is provided in the articles I read.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this paper the following terms will be defined as follows:

**Immersion Education.** Language immersion, or simply immersion, is a method of teaching a second language in which the learners' second language (L2) is the medium of classroom instruction. Through this method, learners study school subjects, such as math, science in their second language (Swain & Lapkin, 2005).

**Total Immersion.** Programs in which all subjects in the lower grades (K-2) are taught in the target language; instruction in English usually increases to 20%-50% in the upper elementary grades (3-6), depending on the program. Initial literacy instruction is provided in the target language. Programs may continue in middle school and high school with classes taught in the target language (Lenker & Rhodes, 2007).

**Partial Immersion.** Programs in which approximately 50% of instruction is provided in the target language. Initial literacy instruction may be provided in either the target language, English, or in both languages simultaneously. Programs may continue in middle school and high school with classes taught in the target language (Lenker & Rhodes, 2007).

**Advantage.** Any state, circumstance, opportunity, or means specifically favorable to success, interest, or any desired end. In the case of this research, advantage can be assumed as something positive about immersion education (Dictionary, n.d.).

**Drawback.** A check to progress; a reverse or defeat. In the case of this research, drawback can be assumed as something that is negative in immersion education (Dictionary, n.d.).

**Implementation.** The act of implementing, or putting into effect; fulfillment (Dictionary, n.d.).

**Sociocultural.** Of, relating to, or signifying the combination or interaction of social and cultural elements (Dictionary, n.d.).

**Cognitive.** Of or relating to the mental processes of perception, memory, judgment, and reasoning, as contrasted with emotional and volitional processes (Dictionary, n.d.).

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

### **History of Immersion Programs**

According to The Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, CARLA (2018), based out of the University of Minnesota, Tara Fortune is a strong advocate for immersion education. She states that the immersion approach first gained traction in North America because educators believed in its potential to move students further towards bilingualism. Immersion language programs started in areas such as St. Lambert, Canada and Miami, Florida, where educators felt that more than one language was needed for children's future economic and social growth. Fortune goes on to say that program designers wagered that making the second language the sole medium for teaching core subject content, instead of teaching the second language separately, would result in more students reaching higher levels of proficiency. These early immersion programs started by committing one-half or more of the school day for teachers and students to work only in the second language. Students were socialized to adopt the new language for all classroom communication and subject learning.

In California bilingual education has become a hot topic since the schools experience an influx of immigrants. A social and political conflicting environment caused by linguistic and cultural differences in mainstream, immigrant, and minority populations play an important role in public schools. There are many immersion options offered in schools within United States: French, Spanish, Chinese, are some of the most popular.

Minnesota is not far behind with rise of immigrants coming into our communities and districts. We need to recognize this and meet the needs of all students by continuing to add immersion programs in schools. According to Minnesota Advocates for Immersion Network

(2017) in 1976 Minnesota had less than ten immersion schools. Now immersion programs, as of February 2018, accounted for more than 70 programs at preschool, elementary, and secondary levels educating an estimated 20,000 students and employing over 700 educators. These statistics show districts and schools are continuing to build more and more programs and see the benefits of supporting and encouraging more districts to join.

### **Advantages of Immersion Education**

Beyond the obvious benefits of being able to communicate with speakers of another language and developing an understanding of other cultures and cultural perspectives, studies have shown three additional benefits of learning a foreign language: increased cognitive skills, higher achievement in other academic areas, and higher standardized test scores (Stewart, 2005).

Students who study a second language are shown to have increased cognitive skills. Students tend to be more creative and better problem solvers because they are learning, hearing, and distinguishing different sounds and what those sounds mean in another language. When learning to put words and structures together to make sense in a second language, students are forced to think about why certain structures work well together or not and they naturally tend to make comparisons to their native language. Being bilingual allows a child to participate in two social worlds and become more attentive to communicative interactions (Stewart, 2005). These expanded cognitive abilities, creative thinking, and problem solving skills can be transferred to other academic areas in the classroom.

According to Roberts (2002) students also show higher achievement in other academic areas. Students of foreign languages develop an understanding of geographical and cultural perspectives that enhances learning in other classes such as social studies, science, art and

music. According to Fortune (2014) Children who are bilingual develop the ability to solve problems that contain conflicting or misleading cues at an earlier age and they can decipher them more quickly than monolinguals. When doing so, they demonstrate an advantage with selective attention and greater executive or inhibitory control. Fortune (2014) continues to explain that fully proficient bilingual children have also been found to demonstrate enhanced sensitivity to verbal and nonverbal cues between people and show greater attention to their listeners' needs relative to children who only speak one language.

Another advantage to being part of an immersion program is higher standardized test scores. According to Turnbull, Lapkin, & Hart (2001) achievement test scores were gathered in reading, writing, and mathematics of over 5,000 students in immersion programs throughout the province of Ontario, Canada. In Grade three, the test scores of immersion students were comparable to scores of students in the English-only program, however by Grade six, test scores of immersion students in mathematics and writing surpassed those of students in the English-only program. This supports that bilingual students are able to problem solve and have a better understanding for different perspectives based on the challenges that lead to strengths of learning in two languages. Standardized tests present a lot of pressure to educators and school districts. These statistics show that becoming, or remaining, part of an immersion program is beneficial to not only the kids, but also the people encouraging these programs to take place.

### **Success in Immersion for Most Students**

A statement that commonly comes up at conferences with parents or among colleagues in PLC's, is whether or not immersion is the right choice for certain children or not. Some children seem to have behavior issues and the language is commonly blamed, because kids get lost and

then turn to acting out in class as a way of gaining attention of those around them. Similarly spoken, another commonly brought up thought is that Spanish seems too hard for a child so the parents take them out of the program. The underlying question then becomes, is being part of Spanish-Immersion right for every child?

The students we seem to worry about most are at-risk. At-risk is described as below average general ability, poor first language ability, low socioeconomic status, and ethnic minority group status. Once we are able to identify these characteristics in an immersion student, we can evaluate whether learning in two languages has an effect on their academic skills or not, which does not necessarily mean that this particular student is a candidate for transferring out of the immersion program. According to Gaffney (1999) research shows that at-risk students are not only as successful in immersion education as they would be in English medium classes, but that immersion may be their only chance for acquiring a second language. The majority of parents cannot speak two languages, so an immersion education could be a child's only opportunity to learn two languages and become more culturally aware and gain understanding for people outside of their own culture.

In a general language study the below-average ability, students at-risk, were tested in comparison with their non-immersion peers in reading, grammar, and interpersonal communication skills. Gaffney (1999) explains the results that immersion students scored very similar to their English-only peers. It can be surmised that participation in immersion education does not impair students in either first language skills or academic achievement. This research supports that teachers should not jump to a conclusion that because students may act out in class, have little parent support, or may struggle academically, they should automatically be pulled

from an immersion program and be placed back into an English-only classroom setting. Teachers do not stop teaching kids math or reading just because it is hard for them, they should not stop teaching a child a second language for the same reasons. If the opportunity presents itself, any child should be given a chance to learn a second language and be part of an immersion program.

Parents also seem to conclude that if their child is not performing successfully in the immersion program it must be the language barrier. Through multiple conversations about different options parents might have, they automatically decide to pull their son or daughter from the program and place them in a classroom where all instruction is taught in English. They feel by doing this all of the problems will disappear. Immersion students who have transferred out of the program may have shown some improvement in academic achievement, but continue to show behavioral problems and negative attitudes toward school, thus pulling them out of the program does not fix the problem.

According to Main (2007), a better measure for parents would be to listen to educated staff members and people well versed in the language and educational background and trust that what a teacher decides or advises is always in the best interest of their child. Parents can be given resources and places to network with other parents who may struggle with the same situations their child is facing. There are websites, videos, and people that advocate for immersion programs and will sit down with families to explain benefits of keeping their children a part of the program. Minnesota Advocates for Immersion Network is one example and is a great website that provides resources for parents and teachers, better defines what immersion

education is, and gives a calendar of events people can attend to learn more about different programs.

Although most kids can be successful in an immersion program, the case where it may not be best is if a child has developmental delays in cognitive and linguistic skills. Wiss (1989) explains that if a student has problems recognizing phonetic sequences in English, this will also happen while learning a second language and will create challenges for the student. It would not be a positive practice to put a child with delays, who might already struggle in a general education setting, to then require them to learn curriculum in multiple languages. It is not the immaturity that is necessarily the problem, but the fact that immersion places too great a demand on the less developed cognitive and linguistic skills of that student.

### **Immersion Education Impact**

Being bilingual provides many opportunities for students. According to Main (2007) the cognitive benefits of knowing two languages include mental flexibility, allowing them to understand the relationship between words and their meanings and it helps them perform better on tasks requiring mental manipulation. Speaking two languages also makes students more sensitive to others, with a heightened awareness of other cultures and gives them an appreciation of other languages. A student who participates in an immersion program is opened to many experiences of other cultures provided through teacher instruction, videos, and cultural norms brought into the classroom. An example of this would be celebrating Dia de los Muertos or Cinco de Mayo. Although a student in the general English-only classroom can celebrate these cultural festivities, it is more meaningful to a child who has studied and learned about these cultural norms within the immersion program. It allows the student to become part of a festival

that is celebrated in the culture they are studying and brings real life experiences into the classroom.

Being part of an immersion program enriches travel experiences and allows people to experience other societies and cultures more meaningfully (Fortune, 2014). If students go on trips with their families to places that speak the language they are studying, they would be more knowledgeable in using their second language and have a better understanding the culture they are in. Another opportunity to travel can be presented by a student's high school. Although it will cost the student money, it is often the only opportunity a student will be given to travel abroad if their family cannot afford to go. Schools take class trips to allow students to practice speaking the language and study the culture better as a tour group. Real world travel allows students to put their knowledge of the culture and the use of the language into practice. If a student, family, or school district cannot afford to travel, students may instead have opportunities to become a pen pal with someone in another country speaking the language they are learning and share pictures of actual places they are studying. Skype is a great way to eventually meet their pen pal virtually and provides another way for students to use their language and cultural knowledge and continue to improve it.

There are also employment benefits for immersion education. Bilingual students have access to a wider range of national and international jobs. Thousands of businesses operate in more than one language. Airline companies, import-export companies and other international businesses all require employees with second language skills and cultural sensitivity (Main, 2007). In the United States world language abilities are increasingly important to national security, economic competitiveness, delivery of healthcare, and law enforcement. Companies

are seeking bilingual candidates to build their company world-wide and reach as many customers as possible. An immersion educated student would have an upper-hand to a student who finishes their education without a language background.

Beyond economics are the countless advantages that bi- and multilingual individuals enjoy. According to Fortune (2014), immersion students are able to communicate with a much wider range of people from many different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. They have knowledge of other languages that enrich travel experiences and allows people to experience other societies and cultures more meaningfully. Besides access to foreign media, literature, and the arts, bilingual people can connect and converse more freely, becoming bilingual leads to new ways of conceptualizing yourself and others, and it expands your worldview so that you know and understand cultures differently.

### **Drawbacks of Immersion Education**

There are limited drawbacks to being part of an immersion program. The only two drawbacks that continually come up in research are: teacher turnover and lack of community knowledge and use of the language. These two drawbacks can present challenges, but can also be seen as improvements to better immersion programs in the future.

Educators and immersion specialists who can provide useful and relevant professional learning experiences for the immersion staff are in short supply. Teacher turnover and shortage continues to become a problem across our state and country with all educators. Teachers are leaving the profession because of high standards teachers are being held to by administrators and parents. Salaries are not feasible for some and the amount of work teachers take home can create unnecessary stress. Immersion teachers are no different.

According to Fortune (2014) licensing can be an issue in the hiring process of immersion educators. Some of these teachers have a K-12 Spanish or English Language license only, which forces them to take classes and get certifications in Elementary or Secondary Education. Some of these teachers cannot afford more college credit, do not have time, or simply do not want to do more. Students suffer when teachers are constantly coming in and out of the program because they cannot fulfill the college credits within the year the state gives them. In the United States, foreign language immersion program administrators also decry the lack of adequately prepared teacher candidates and its impact on the development of existing as well as newly implemented programs (Main, 2017). Locating dual language proficient, highly qualified immersion teachers is the single most important and difficult challenge to building an effective language immersion program. There tends to be significant teacher turnover in immersion classrooms for a variety of reasons, so building and keeping a talented teaching staff, and providing for their ongoing professional enrichment, remain constant concerns.

Inadequate teacher preparation for immersion programs also remains a challenge in this field. Some Spanish-Immersion teachers are forced to create their own curriculum because the district does not provide it. They are given curriculum in English and are forced to translate it or create their own activities and workbook pages. I have seen this in my own district and it forces too much pressure and burnout of teachers. Immersion teachers need specialized professional development support to meet the complex task of concurrently addressing content, language, and literacy development in an integrated, subject matter driven language program. In addition to professional development related to curriculum design and pedagogical techniques, both native and non-native teachers report the need for ongoing support for their own proficiency in the

immersion language (Fortune, 2014). Many immersion programs lack necessary resources and bilingual specialists to provide appropriate instructional support, interventions, and assessment.

Knowing these facts, the future of finding well-educated and passionate teachers remains necessary. Ways to train and educate teachers who are interested in teaching in a foreign language should rank high because these jobs are hard to fill, but are very important in making an immersion education program run smoothly. The programs would be nothing without teachers who feel valued enough to put the time and energy in creating lessons that make learning engaging and important, especially when it means they are teaching children in their second language.

Another drawback to being part of an immersion program is the lack of language use within the community and at home. In most communities the dominant language used is English, therefore students are not given many opportunities to use their second language fluently. Most parents cannot speak the second language as well, which poses challenges in helping with homework and enriching their child's education in becoming bilingual. The classroom becomes the dominant place in which students must practice and use the language with one another and the teacher to become more fluent.

There are ways to overcome the drawbacks of the lack of language practice outside of the classroom as the future falls before us. According to Main (2007) parents should listen and try not to interrupt the learning process, and allow the child to work through the transfer of language without guidance. Parents should assist in the transfer process by allowing the child to explain the concept in the native language and then support in the transfer to the second language as best as they are able. Parents and students could also use a dictionary, thesaurus, online translators,

and other books together to demonstrate research skills of the second language. Lastly parents should be patient and supportive as best as they can with the child's second language to show it is important and best to just keep practicing in order to work through these challenges.

### **Native versus Non-native Educators**

First and foremost it is not whether the teacher is native or non-native, there should be more focus on whether the teacher knows how to teach and manage the level of the students in their classroom, whether the teacher is passionate about what they will teach, and if they are prepared to put effort into making their class successful in the language they will teach. If a teacher has these qualities, native and non-native background should not make a major difference.

If a teacher has the qualities of being successful at their job, there are advantages and disadvantages to being a native speaking teacher in an immersion program, just like there is advantages and disadvantages to being a non-native speaking teacher. Llurda (2005) lists the advantages of a non-native speaking teachers in his research. Llurda gives three distinct advantages brought forth by non-native speaking teachers: 1) Non-native speaking teachers provide models of proficient language two (L2) users in action in the classroom. 2) Non-native speaking teachers present examples of people who have become successful L2 users. 3) Non-native speaking teachers often have more appropriate training and background. Although non-native speakers do not have the native background they can be as successful, if not more successful, than a native speaker.

Most teachers, whether native or non-native, educated in the United States get quality teacher training in areas of classroom management, curriculum, and preparation of how to reach

different learning styles. A lot of non-native immersion teachers are provided these things, as well as language practice, and then go on to student teach or visit in native speaking countries to broaden their knowledge and gain cultural experiences. Once they return to the United States and have a classroom of their own, they can bring back their experiences and gathered artifacts to make their classroom a positive and cultural experience.

Some disadvantages of being a non-native speaking teacher are that they typically do not have a native accent and might feel hesitant to use the language in front of others at first for fear of making a mistake. These things can lead to a teacher providing students inaccurate listening comprehension practice or grammar instruction. However, if a teacher demonstrates near-native proficiency and is licensed in the language, they can provide a student with a sufficient educational background of the language.

There are advantages of having a native speaking educator in an immersion setting. In her article, "Going Beyond the Native Speaker in Language Teaching," Cook (1999) quotes an author named Sterns about positive qualities possessed by native speakers. Stern lists nine qualities unique to native speakers: 1) a subconscious knowledge of grammar rules; 2) an intuitive grasp of meanings; 3) the ability to communicate within social settings; 4) a range of language skills; 5) creativity of language use; 6) identification with a language community; 7) the ability to produce fluent discourse; 8) knowledge of differences between their own speech and that of the 'standard' form of the language; 9) the ability to 'interpret and translate into the L1 of which she or he is a native speaker. Naturally a native speaker would have all of these qualities, no matter what their first language is. This research makes it seem that native speakers

do in fact have more advantages over a non-native speaking teacher, but there are disadvantages as well.

The disadvantages of a native speaking teacher is that their native fluency creates a high reaching goal for students that sometimes cannot be attained. Whereas a non-native speaking teacher has a relevant level of language which provides a more attainable goal for a student. A non-native speaking teacher also has to learn the language their students are dominant in so they are more understanding of what it takes to learn the second language. In a beginning level immersion classroom a native speaking teacher may have a hard time providing grammar and syntax for a student who is not conversationally ready (Burns, 2014). A native speaker may also have trouble explaining definitions and word meanings in a child's first language which can make learning the second language more challenging.

Burns (2014) supports that there is no right answer for who can do a better job teaching a second language to students. Being a native speaking teacher or a non-native speaking teacher has its advantages and disadvantages just like every other kind of teacher does. If a teacher is passionate, creative, engaging, and knows the language well, it should not matter who they are or what their cultural background and first language is.

### **Chapter III: Conclusions and Recommendations**

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the significance of students taking part in an immersion program versus the general education setting, justifying the advantages and drawbacks to the different sides. Chapter one provided background information about the topic, naming the purpose of the study, use of findings, limitations, research question, and definition of terms. Chapter two provided a review of the literature about the history of immersion, advantages of an immersion program, an explanation of whether it is right for every child, where a K-12 immersion education will lead students, the drawbacks of an immersion program, and if there is a difference between native and non-native speaking educators teaching in an immersion program. In chapter three I will discuss my conclusions, recommendations, implications, and summary of the research.

#### **Conclusions**

Through the literature review one could conclude that there are more advantages than drawbacks to being part of an immersion program. It is important to note both sides to truly understand if it is the right fit for a particular school or a specific child.

History shows that immersion programs are continuing to develop and are becoming more popular among different states and districts within them. According to Minnesota Advocates for Immersion Network, as of February 2017, there are 70 programs at each education level and they are educating an estimated 20,000 students and employing over 700 educators. Those statistics show that these programs are growing and there are an increasing number of students participating in immersion education and staff being hired to support these programs.

There are many advantages of a student being part of an immersion program. If a student chooses to participate, they will be able to communicate with speakers of another language and develop an understanding of other cultures and cultural perspectives. Studies have shown additional benefits of learning in a foreign language include increased cognitive skills, higher achievement in other academic areas, and higher standardized test scores (Stewart, 2005). Other advantages include students being better problem solvers and creative thinkers because they are learning more than one language at a time. It challenges them to learn different sounds and distinguish between the different languages, building on their cognitive skills.

One can also conclude immersion education is right for most every child. The only exception is students who have developmental delays because learning in their first language can be challenging enough, so adding another language on top of it can add unnecessary stress to the student. A student with behavior or academic needs should not be denied an immersion program. No teacher should tell a student they cannot teach them math or reading, so nobody should be told they cannot learn or be taught another language. Many findings show that at-risk students are not only as successful in immersion education as they would be in English medium classes, but that an education in immersion may be their only chance for acquiring a second language (Gaffney, 1999). Every child deserves a chance to learn another language.

A K-12 education in immersion will lead students to many things. There are cognitive benefits of knowing two languages. It allows them to understand the relationship between words and their meanings. It also helps students perform better on tasks requiring manipulation. Speaking two languages makes students more sensitive to others, with a greater awareness of other cultures, it also gives them an appreciation of other languages (Main, 2007). Being part of

immersion education will lead to better travel experiences because students are familiar with the culture and know how to speak the native language of the place they are visiting. Lastly, an education in immersion will present better and more job opportunities to a student because many companies look for candidates to be bilingual so they can better meet the needs of their customers.

The drawbacks of being part of immersion education are that teachers are in short supply and there are limitations to students being able to use their second language in their community and with their family. There is a high rate of teacher turnover in general education, but adding the requirement of knowing a language and having to teach it to the students adds more difficulty to finding and replacing teachers if they choose to leave a district. Language teachers are required to be certified in the language and have a background in education. They need to stay informed and current with changing requirements in education and with the language, and often time's teachers also have to create their own curriculum in the second language if the district does not provide it. The other drawback is that students do not have many opportunities to use their second language outside of the classroom. Students are typically asked to speak in the classroom 100 percent in their second language, which can be the only time the language is practiced. Most communities and families cannot speak in the student's second language, so providing the opportunities in the classroom is even more important.

The last conclusion is that there differences between having a native versus a non-native teacher within the classroom, but they should not make a difference within the classroom. The most important part is that a teacher, no matter native or not, is passionate, patient, and prepared to make their classroom a positive learning environment. According to Cook (1999) native

speaking teachers have the advantage of a subconscious knowledge of grammar rules, an intuitive grasp of meanings, the ability to communicate within social settings, a range of language skills, creativity of language use, identification with a language community, the ability to produce fluent discourse, knowledge of differences between their own speech and that of the 'standard' form of the language, the ability to interpret and translate into the L1 of which she or he is a native speaker. The advantages of being a non-native speaking teacher provide models of proficient language two users in action in the classroom, they present examples of people who have become successful language two users, and non-native speaking teachers often have more appropriate training and background (Llurda, 2005).

### **Recommendations**

After a review of the literature, a study that follows a group of students over a period of time within their education would be recommended to demonstrate the literature true. A future study, or multiple studies, could be designed to follow a specific set of immersion students from kindergarten through post-college. Multiple studies could provide insights of many things like how many students left the program early or how many completed the program and how, if at all, did they benefit by it. Did students learn from native or non-native speaking teachers and did it make a difference. Lastly, where did students end up and with what kind of job, following their high school and college graduation?

A study broken down into two groups focusing on how many students left the program early versus how many finished the full K-12 program would show the statistics about whether or not immersion programs are continuing to grow and why. A survey could be given to students and parents in both groups asking questions about why they chose to leave the program early or

stay and whether or not they believe it had an impact on their child's education. The survey could be given at the end of their child's elementary years and again after their secondary years to evaluate any differences in information. The provided information could then build a portfolio that could show benefits to future immersion teachers, families, and students.

Another study could determine if there is a true difference between native and non-native speaking teachers. To show this difference, the same (or different) group of students could be followed in their elementary years and then beyond by their standardized tests, grades, and again surveys based on a student's preference. Over the course of multiple years research could show whether there is a true difference between the two types of teachers. Although my literature review shows the advantages and disadvantages of both, this study could provide deeper insight from different students' perspectives. The only discrepancy in this study could be personal or biased opinions from the students based on whether or not they liked their teacher, despite them being native or non-native.

The last study I would recommend is to see where an immersion student's education leads them post-college. It would be important to follow the students through their desired degree and whether or not they had an advantage of getting a job after college based on their education in immersion. Questioning students on whether or not they chose a specific job based on their immersion background would also play a role in this research. It would also be required to gather information on whether or not any student that held a K-12 education in immersion chose to continue studying it in college and their reasons why or why not. With the information gathered, a portfolio could be created in this study as well to demonstrate the significance and

importance of advantages in taking part in immersion education which could be shown to teachers, parents, and students.

Other recommendations would be continued research on how to help students with developmental delays be successful in an immersion program so that all students can truly participate and nobody is excluded. Research on how to encourage teachers to gain an education in immersion and retain teachers in the program should also be conducted so we have less turnover in schools. Research on how to get communities more involved in a school-wide program would benefit students because the language can be better used outside of the classroom. This would also be an advantage to people of the community and those visiting it. Lastly, research conducted on finding ways to reach more families, provide resources for them, and continue to motivate and welcome families to join immersion education would also be recommended so the programs can continue to strengthen. This research would then be provided to communities, families, and schools which would hopefully build more programs and gain statistics in districts integrating them into their schools.

### **Implications**

Parents and teachers within my building often do not understand the benefits of being part of immersion education. As a teacher that has been in both a general and immersion setting, I would provide my research as informative and influential to my colleagues and parents. Hopefully they would see the benefits of an immersion program and more students and staff would want to be a part of it. Nobody understands information about any program unless it is provided to them, so I would be the one to provide it.

Parents can be some of the toughest to persuade when it comes to proving the benefits of being part of an immersion program. They often claim it does not do a child any good to learn in a second language when they need to learn it all in English too. Parents will say they do not see the benefit of their child joining because they do not want them to be their own entity in a school and they do not want their child to be singled out or known as an immersion student if it will give them a reputation by their peers. By showing parents my research, I would demonstrate to them the benefits of joining and staying in the program. I would also explain to them that even though some of their concerns exist, if more and more kids become part of the immersion program these unfortunate classifications will disappear.

The other implication my research has is on my colleagues. A lot of them do not see the buy-in of the program and often name it in a negative manner. Some believe it is taking away from the general population of students because they think all of the most intelligent students join immersion. They also seem to believe that no child with a behavior problem can or will join the program because it would be too challenging for them, thus again leaving most of the behavioral kids in the general population. The truth comes out when my research is applied to show that the program is not only inclusive to every child, but also includes and supports every type of child no matter their intelligence or behavioral level.

### **Summary**

Immersion education has many advantages and limited drawbacks. Knowing the advantages will determine many positive aspects in joining immersion. I believe the limited drawbacks will not hold families back from joining because the advantages outweigh them. All family needs are different and each student may learn differently, but immersion education has

many things to offer all students. There are many features within a program that should be described and detailed to families before making the decision on whether or not their child should join, but all things considered, immersion education is the way to go.

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