

the ARTICLE (for teachers)

Being Bilingual Good for the Brain

In the modern world, being bilingual (or even multilingual) has many benefits. As one example, children who speak two languages score higher in math. Or as another example related to the business world, employers tend to offer a higher salary if the employee can speak more than one language. And let's not forget that people who speak another language have also been exposed to another culture, which can bring about a greater acceptance and understanding of others. However, did you know that bilingualism benefits the brain too?

Increasingly, more and more scientists are reaching a consensus that speaking two or more languages provides measurable positives. Improved memory and decision-making skills serve as one benefit. Bilingualism also wards off Alzheimer's Disease.

The brain of multilinguals must suppress one language. In other words, let's say someone knew both Spanish and English. When he/she used Spanish in a conversation, then the brain would need to ignore the momentarily irrelevant English. This results in frequent exercise for the portion of the brain responsible for focused thought and problem-solving skills.

There's more, though. People who use two or more languages also can switch between tasks more quickly, perhaps because these people are more accustomed to the confusing back and forth between languages. And as for people with dementia, the first signs generally appear at about 71.4 years of age for monolinguals, but 75.5 years of age for bilinguals.

As research continues, scientists will likely discover even more reasons to acquire a foreign language. Being adept at two languages results in desirable consequences.

Teacher's Notes:

* Underlined words in red typeface are the recommended vocabulary for this lesson.