

Why Not Choose an Easy Language as a First Foreign Language?

By Nicole Else

I do think that learning any foreign language has many benefits and therefore should be encouraged. It even helps English literacy as students who know a foreign language can often analyse English much better than other students. Learning foreign languages certainly opens the mind, helps to understand other cultures, etc. Lots of different languages are spoken in the world, so which ones should we teach? I don't think we should teach only the languages most widely spoken.

There is one language well worth considering, but many people seem to know very little about it, even though there are millions of pages in or about it on the Internet. It is called Esperanto. It has been created 120 years ago and is now used by up to 2 million people from over 100 different countries. It has proven itself as a very good means of communication, it is much easier to learn than national languages, but nevertheless enables to express anything as well as other languages.

It seems to me that Esperanto would be an ideal first foreign language to teach. Many people put learning a foreign language in the too hard basket and you can't really blame them when it comes to have to learn all the irregularities of the French language, Japanese script, etc.

It is extremely time consuming to learn a foreign language if one wants to become fluent. Esperanto can be learnt much faster and therefore it boosts enormously the children's self-esteem. Furthermore it helps a lot with the learning of subsequent languages. Often it instills a love of languages and we notice that many Esperanto speakers do go on learning lots of other languages. In music, children don't start by tackling difficult instruments, in languages it should be the same, start with an easy language and then go on to more difficult ones. Furthermore thanks to Esperanto children can send messages to other people in lots of different countries and therefore get to know many cultures and not just one like it would be the case if they choose to learn Japanese, for example.

Schools have a limited amount of time, so expecting them to spend enough time to make students fluent in national languages is unrealistic. Primary schools could teach Esperanto and then high schools could offer a variety of languages.

Has Esperanto already been taught in Australian schools? Yes, a few years ago Monash University made a study about Esperanto after it had been taught at a Melbourne school. You can read the report at

http://www.springboard2languages.org/documents/ekparoli_report.htm

A Montessori school near Perth is currently teaching Esperanto with great success. A group of children from that school even went on an exchange trip to Switzerland, to a little school where Esperanto is taught and had therefore the opportunity of using Esperanto with non-English speakers. Here <http://www.hacksthps.sa.edu.au/> (then click on Esperanto on the left side) you can find comments by children who learn Esperanto at a school in South Australia.

To see what Esperanto looks like, you could check the free online course *Vojagu kun Zam* (complete with sound) at www.lernu.net

Furthermore it seems to me that teaching Esperanto would promote a fairer world, in which all cultures and languages are respected and equal. At the moment, for example, the American culture is being studied much more frequently than other equally worthwhile cultures.