



# add.a.lingua

language “proficiency” demystified

bilingual “almost adults” through dual language immersion education

## purpose

We hope this overview helps YOU understand the connections between...

- language + thinking, learning & communicating
- proficiency level + brain benefits
- dual language immersion program design + student outcomes



**Know what “bilingual” really means - at each grade level.**

add.a.lingua uses “bilingual” to describe learners who can listen, speak, write, and read equally well in TWO languages (based on the Common Core State Standards- CCSS). We consider students proficient in a second language if they can meet the CCSS in that language.

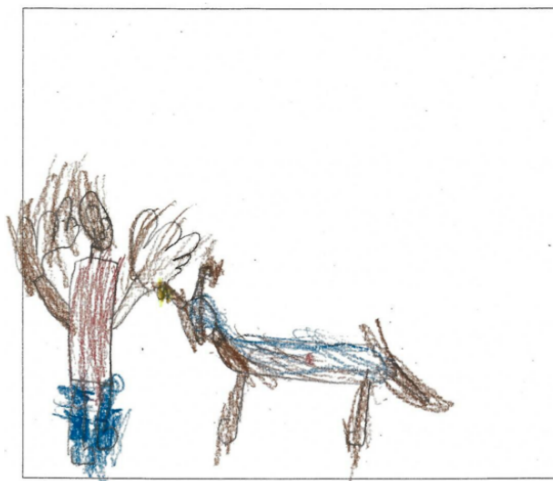
## language + thinking, learning & communicating

If you want your children to have that bilingual edge in adulthood, choose a program that expects students to demonstrate 12th grade proficiency in English AND the immersion language by the time they graduate. In order to become grade level proficient in any subject area, students need to access information (listen/read) and then communicate their thinking and learning (speak/write). Proficiency expectations change across grade levels as students’ capacity to think, learn, and communicate grows.



**BOTH these writing samples meet grade level proficiency expectations, but...**

Read these opinion pieces, written by a kindergartener and a fifth-grade student respectively, about which type of animal makes the best pet. Do fifth graders actually have stronger opinions? Or do they simply communicate their thoughts better because they’ve learned more language - and how to use it?



Dog is the BST Becs  
7th grad PURD.

Dog is the best because they bark

### Dogs are Best

Cats and dogs can be very entertaining. But when it comes down to the best pet, I would say the dog.

One reason why I think a dog is the best pet to have, is because you can talk to them. And they listen to you. You can tell them secrets, and how you feel. Kind of like a personal journal, except they actually hear what you are saying.

Another reason why I think a dog is the best pet to have, is because dogs can warn you of danger. And sometimes that danger might be life threatening. So with a dog its like you have your own danger alarm.

Also another reason why I think dogs are the best pets to have is because they keep you company. They are perfect pets to have if you love company. And with a dog, its almost like you are having your best friends over. And better yet, if you own the dog, and it’s a weekday, its like your friends are spending the night on a school night.

Another reason why I think a dog is the best pet to have is because they need to get excersise. You will have to walk your dog every day. So even if you don’t like to walk, your dog and you will get automatic excersise. Which will make you and your dog healthier.

Cats and dogs are very unique in their own fastenating way. But to choose between the both of them, I would go for the dog. Even though dogs require lots of responsibilities, and need maintenance and training, they are still worth the effort. But most importantly, they are like a best friend.

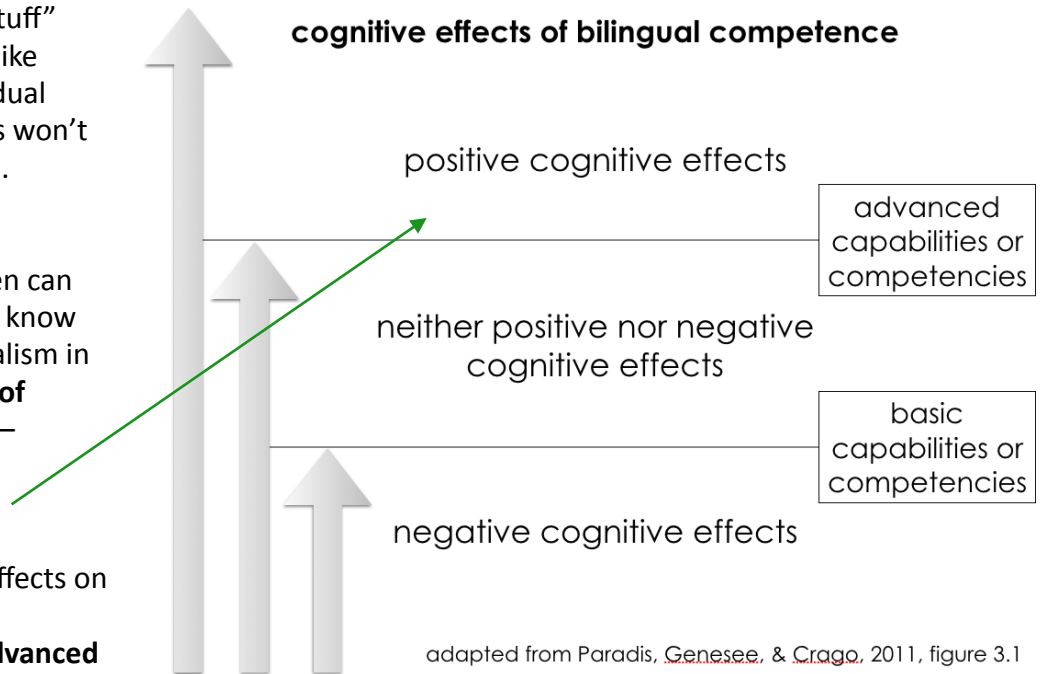
## proficiency level + brain benefits

### FULL bilinguals reap benefits.

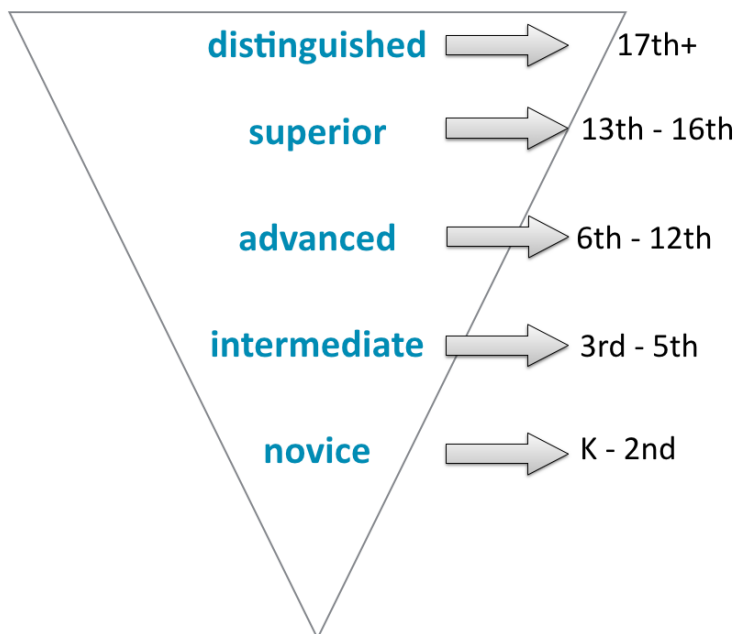
You might know that “good stuff” happens in bilingual brains - like increased [grey matter](#). BUT, dual language immersion students won't always become fully bilingual. What???? Sad...but true

Despite promises that children can be “fluent by fifth grade,” we know that developing FULL bilingualism in students not only takes a **lot of time** —an academic lifetime— but also requires sustained *meaningful* interaction. So, if we want children to experience these **POSITIVE** effects on the mind, we need to understand what “**advanced capabilities or competencies**” are - AND how students get there.

### cognitive effects of bilingual competence



It's a long journey to really build students' second language proficiency. Whew - look at what it takes to reach **advanced**—a **lot of time** during those middle and high school years)



### Here's where it gets a little tricky.

You see, ACTFL developed a whole different set of descriptors to measure *STUDENT performance toward proficiency*. SO, **advanced** for students in K-8 is NOT the same. [Take a peek](#).

### [American Council on Teaching Foreign Languages](#)

ACTFL exists to help educators or employers know how well a student or a potential employee will use a language. Each rating or “level” describes just how proficient an **adult** really is. You might think about the proficiency levels using this math analogy: **novice low** is to counting as **distinguished** is to solving calculus problems.

Here's another way to understand ACTFL proficiency ratings. Let's pretend you've taken high school and college French classes, studied in France for a few months and feel quite “fluent” — capable of using French better than a kindergarten student writes an opinion piece. You then decide to apply for a “bilingual” job position which requires an ACTFL rating on the resume. So, you take an ACTFL approved assessment and receive an “**intermediate high**” rating. This is what you'd [write and sound](#) like. Yeah..., once the person hiring saw your rating, you wouldn't even get an interview. Pssst..Go back to France for a year (or five) and REALLY engage with French, take the ACTFL test again and rate “**advanced high**,” [like this](#).

Now, **GET that job!**

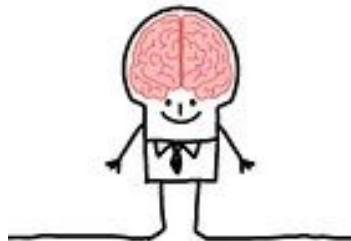
But how do ratings work for students whose brains aren't fully developed, you ask?

## dual language immersion program design + student outcomes

It takes A LOT of expertise to build and sustain a truly quality dual language immersion program!

### Here's what we've learned in our twenty+ years of experience:

- you'll know how much the goal of bilingualism is valued by understanding the program design - check out the [early total one-way](#) and [90-10 two-way](#) models add.a.lingua has developed.
- students won't graduate equally proficient in English and additional languages unless educational models provide SUFFICIENT quality time in the immersion or minority language ALL the way through [HIGH SCHOOL](#) (half the day **every** day) - hmmm... that's **way** more time than most U.S. programs currently offer. In fact, you might want to read the current research written by our add.a.lingua academic advisory board members: [study conducted by researchers, Dr. Tara Fortune and Dr. Diane J. Tedick](#). Based on this study, we can assume that immersion students in the U.S., even if participating in what are considered established "quality" programs, are only reaching that **intermediate proficiency** level we were talking about in our bilingual job position scenario. YIKES!
- more QUALITY time in the immersion language correlates with STRONGER academic performance on standardized assessments in ENGLISH for both home language speakers of English and Spanish. We know it sounds crazy, but it's true! Read the [FAQs](#) again! And study that [immersion program "to do" checklist](#).
- strong leaders willing to work with immersion experts, educators who believe students can achieve bilingualism and INFORMED parents (YOU) are essential to making it all happen - Oh, *and* QUALITY instructional and student materials designed specifically for the immersion language (not just translations).
- knowledge is power....Respected psychologist and researcher Ellen Bialystok says, "Knowing more has never been a disadvantage when compared with knowing less..." The **MORE** students "know" how to experience life through both languages, the better. Why? Because when you, as parents, KNOW its **possible** for them to graduate with ADVANCED HIGH proficiency in the immersion language—given sufficient quality opportunities and TIME to do so—program leaders and educators will need to make sure their immersion program models, teaching practices, and promised student outcomes ALL align to that goal!



Now, go forth: **KNOW MORE** and say **NO MORE** to weak bilingual immersion educational models that are really only interested in English monolingualism—with a dash of minority or second language development thrown in. We told you we'd give it to you straight!