Tot Benefits by Extra Language

By MYRTLE M. ELDRED

December 10, 1970, The Register and Tribune

Dear Mrs. Eldred:

In reference to Mrs. B.H.O.'s letter wherein she complains about her husband and grandmother wanting to teach her 3-year-old daughter to speak Hungarian, I am compelled by my own background to offer interference by experience.

It happened that I have the same lineage, born in the Hungarian section of New York (Yorkville) and surrounded by nothing but the Hungarian language and way of life. Hungarians are noted for not easily relinquishing their tongue! I did not even know that I was an American until I went to kindergarten. My father, the more Americanized of my parents, was a little apprehensive that I would grow up unable to speak English. But my mother and my live-in aunt assured him that I would learn English soon enough and it would not hurt me to know another language.

As they predicted, I learned English instantly when I went to school. I don't even remember the transition, though still speaking and hearing Hungarian at home and with all the family. I have never lost my ability to read, speak and write (faultily) the mother tongue. Despite this, English was my favorite subject and highest marked one all through school.

When friends and family came as refugees during the past three decades, my brother and I were the only Americans who could speak with them and bridge the communication gap. They were heart-breakingly grateful. I have even been to court on behalf of a member of the family in a lawsuit, to act as her translator. She won the suit.

And in Venezuela we have relatives of Hungarian origin where the children from infancy are not only bilingual but understand four languages, Spanish, English, Hungarian and Hebrew. They are brilliant children.

A child's brain is like a blotter — and the opportunity to learn another language at an early age enhances the ability to pick up other languages. A skill in which American children are notably lacking.

Mrs. S.J.

I agree with all you said. In defense of American children you must admit that they have little or no opportunity, unless brought up by foreign parents, to hear another language and most of all to use it. Where foreign countries lie as close as our states or Canada's provinces — the necessity to speak another language becomes essential. And the inhabitants get constant practice. We learn by study, but have no such advantage. That's why our facility with foreign languages is so limited. Thank you for writing.

There are many areas of study that are excellent and fascinating to young children. Yet it is important to know when to introduce these activities to your child. Send for your copy of Mrs. Eldred's booklet, "Introducing the Arts To Your Child," which can be yours by simply sending 10 cents and a stamped, self-addressed envelope along with your request for the booklet to Myrtle Meyer Eldred in care of The Times-Picayune.