

German Immersion Testimonial, Annie Silva.

Just this morning I finished writing a paper on Wagner's "Ring des Nibelungen". Of course Wagner himself is a fairly controversial figure but there's no denying the Ring Cycle is a marvellous work on all fronts, integrating the libretto (unusually sophisticated for German opera) with the music and drama by developing a handful of short symbolic phrases called Leitmotive. It is the textbook definition of a Gesamtkunstwerk. I am a music student. I have the fortune of studying in one of the many fields where the borders between languages are hopelessly smudged. I have the even greater fortune of language not being a hindrance. Whatever your interests, there is so much useful, interesting, evocative material out there which was created outside of the English language that the question really should not be "Why learn a language?" as it usually is, but "Why limit yourself to that which exists in your language?"

We grow by exposing ourselves to more and by leaving and extending our comfort zones. German Immersion at Ferny Grove High provides a strong community and a safe environment so that it never feels like you are out of your depth. Sure, it pushes you a tiny bit harder than mainstream, but the whole idea of "immersion" is that after a while you forget that you are doing something "unusual". Your focus soon turns to other things. In my experience the "other thing" ended up being the friendship of my class. It was probably inevitable; we were a fairly small class seeing each other nearly all day every day at school. Add to that group assignments, and study dates soon became German Immersion parties. My cohort has been out of school for about a year now but we make a point of getting back together every couple of months.



Another opportunity the program provided me with was the 2012 PASCH Winterjugendkurs in Freiburg, Germany. Basically the Goethe Institut funds high school students in the PASCH network all over the world to go to Germany to participate in intensive 3-week German language courses. Mine happened just after I finished Immersion at Ferny Grove so it happened at the perfect time for me to put three

years into context. It was my first real chance to meet anyone without reputations and preconceptions getting in the way. I made friends from all over the Southern Hemisphere, many of whom I am still close with. I actually visited some of them in South America just after graduating. My German improved out of sight. I figured out how to be more independent. I suddenly became aware of my identity as an Australian, particularly one of mixed race. I picked up some Spanish and Portuguese, marking the beginning of my somewhat nerdy hobby of learning languages. The cultural melting pot that was the Freiburg Goethe Institut was the catalyst for many things.

Of course I'm not at all saying that German Immersion will do these things for you. My experience is unique, as is that of everyone else who has done it. That's the point of doing anything at all. I



could not have known the kind of places it would take me when I started. I cannot know the kind of person I would be now if I hadn't done it. If you decide to jump into it, the very worst thing that could happen is that you have some handy vocab at the tip of your tongue 😊

Oh, and make sure you read Goethe. He will blow your mind.

