



# **NUREMBERG RECOMMENDATIONS ON EARLY FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING**

**REVISED EDITION**

**Nuremberg Recommendations  
on early foreign language learning**  
Revised Edition

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Prof. Dr. Anemone Geiger-Jaillet, Gila Hoppenstedt,  
Prof. Dr. Gabriele Kniffka, Prof. Dr. Angelika Kubanek,  
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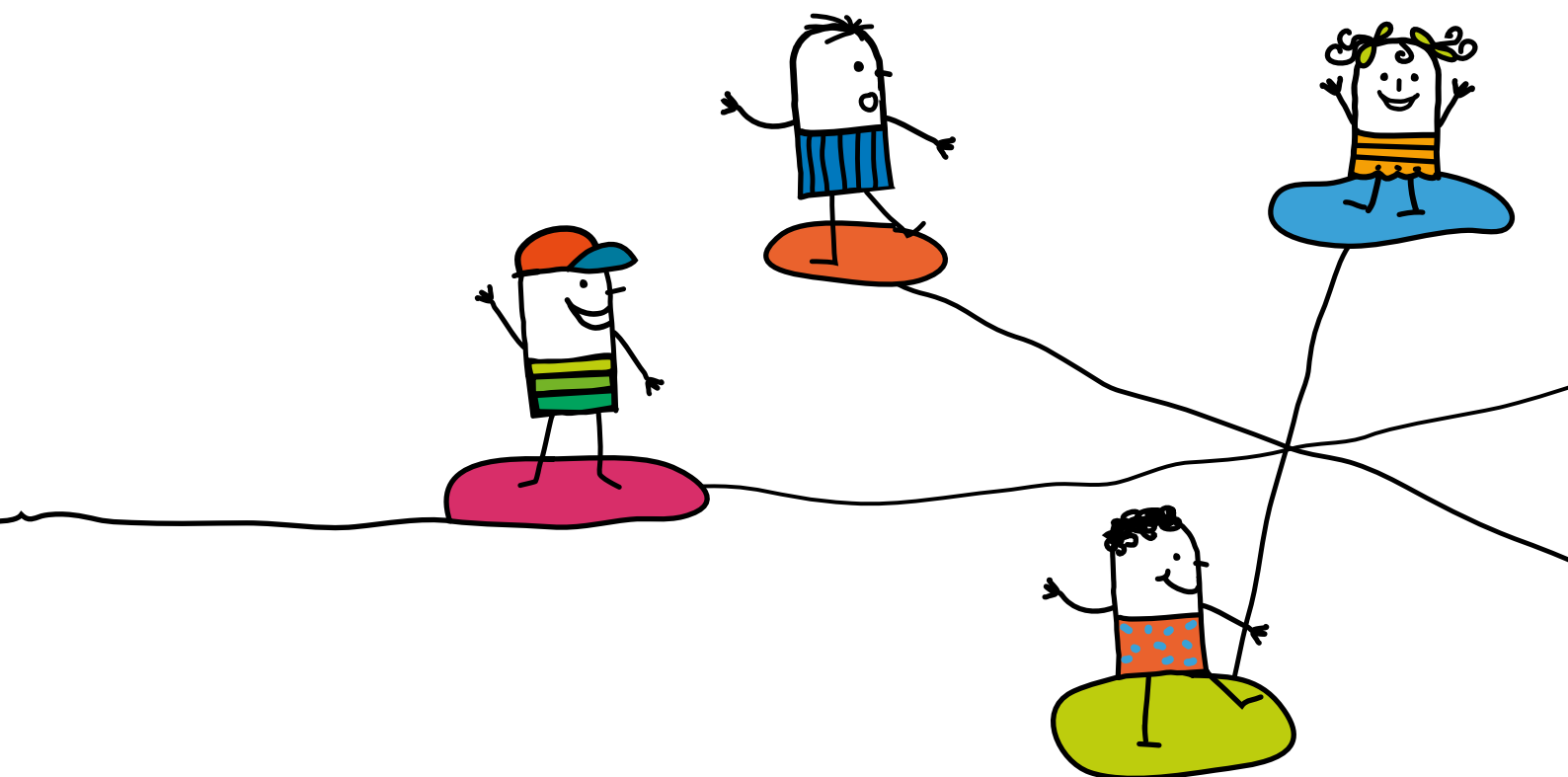


## Foreword

**The Nuremberg Recommendations for Early Foreign Language Learning**, published by the Goethe Institute in 1996 in collaboration with a large number of experts from 22 countries worldwide, were drawn up with the objective of placing early foreign language learning on the most widely acceptable curricular basis possible. Over a decade later, the propositions contained in the Nuremberg Recommendations have essentially proved valid. Nonetheless, innovations in social policy, economic and societal changes, technological advances, and the resulting proliferation of new media experiences and new expectations among children themselves are all having an impact on early learning. New insights in the field of educational psychology with regard to childhood learning behaviour are likewise becoming increasingly important for the early years of foreign language learning.

This revision of the **Nuremberg Recommendations for Early Foreign Language Learning** presents a contemporary perspective on the intricate web of factors involved in early foreign language learning, with the aim of showing both potential and needs of a four- to ten-year-old child during learning. The early start is not intended to be seen in the context of a particular education system – nor, accordingly, of a particular institution – but from the broadest perspective possible.

This publication is addressed to all who work in the field of early foreign language teaching, decision-makers, school head teachers, those working in continuing professional development and extended education, serving and trainee teachers and early years practitioners, as well as students. Its intended readership also includes parents and other actors within the various contexts in which children grow up: that is to say, individuals whose concern with the educational process is essentially indirect but who nevertheless influence children's development decisively.



# 1 New influences on the learning environment of children

**Children today live** in a highly networked environment. Global processes and new communications technologies are changing the ways in which people, including children, use language. In many parts of the world, the everyday environment even of very small children is permeated by media<sup>1</sup> and also to an increasing extent multicultural and multilingual in character. The cultural and linguistic diversity of the world we live in is experienced by children not only during education from nursery level upwards, but also at an earlier stage, in the context of the family and immediate neighbours.

**Children today tend to perceive multilingualism as the norm, and realise that learning languages is useful.**

To facilitate mutual understanding, and to help conserve linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe, the European Union is calling for all its citizens to have knowledge of other languages in addition to their mother tongue<sup>2</sup>. This call is to be implemented by making it possible for all receiving education in the European Union to learn two or more modern foreign languages before reaching the minimum school-leaving age<sup>3</sup>. Accordingly, most European Union countries now make foreign language learning a compulsory part of the primary school (Grundschule) syllabus<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Spanhel (2009)

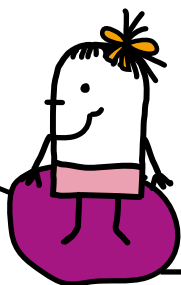
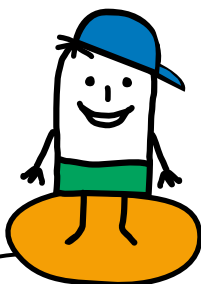
<sup>2</sup> Cf. Council of Europe (2001)

<sup>3</sup> Cf. ib., Recommendation 1383 (1998); COM (2003); COM (2005)

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Eurydice (2001, 2005) and Legutke (2009)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Early modern language learning should always be mindful that, whatever the special regional and local circumstances influencing learning programmes, children will react and learn in a way reflecting their personal environment and their individual development.



## 2 Early foreign language learning today and perspectives for the future

**There is an observable trend worldwide** for foreign language learning to begin earlier than was the case fifteen years ago. Initiatives in the planning, curricularisation and implementation of early learning programmes on a systematic and cross-institutional basis, and training of the requisite teaching personnel, are widespread. Studies conducted at national and international level are furnishing convincing evidence that early foreign language teaching can fully live up to the expectations placed on it. Children learn their new language eagerly. Given good conditions, they acquire basic communicative competences and language awareness. These successes have been shown to depend on the fulfilment of prerequisites in terms of language policy and pedagogical and language-teaching practice that in many countries and regions are still not being adequately addressed<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Edelenbos, Johnstone & Kubanek (2006); Edelenbos, Kubanek (2007); Engel, Grooth-Wilken & Thürmann (2009)



## 2.1 Language policy actors

The framework conditions governing early foreign language learning are determined to a significant extent by educational and language policy decisions originating outside the learning and teaching institutions of nursery education, pre-primary education, primary education). Decisions as to when children should start learning a first or second foreign language and how such a learning programme should ultimately be structured are made by numerous country-specific institutions and interest groups. It is, of course, possible for language policy provisions by an internationally federated body like the EU to influence the prioritisation and the attractiveness of a foreign language as a curriculum subject within a national education system. Also involved are organisations promoting languages and language-teaching, such as modern language teachers' associations, learned societies and specialist institutes, and bodies working directly to further international understanding:

all such groups seek to influence the decision-making of the political actors by adducing their respective subject-specific expert knowledge<sup>6</sup>. Political and subject-expert actors alike are to represent the interests of language communities and languages-related professional groups. It is thus particularly important that early years practitioners, teachers and other experts in the area of early foreign language learning should formulate their special interests clearly and play an active part in debating language-policy issues. Scope for this is provided e.g. through membership of specialist bodies, participation in activities that encourage the learning of languages, and participation in continuing professional development possibilities.

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<sup>6</sup> Ammon (2003)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

While the position with regard to early foreign language learning programmes differs from country to country, a number of broad recommendations can be formulated:

### **Decision-makers should ensure the following:**

- A clear and coherent languages education plan is developed, with due regard to national and regional singularities
- Clear guidelines on implementation of languages policy and the fostering of language learning are formulated
- Structural and financial provision for the training and continuing professional development of teachers is ensured
- Objectives of reform measures are made transparent to the general public
- Organisations promoting languages and language learning are integrated into the decision-making processes
- Early language learning programmes for all children should be easily accessible wherever possible

### **Organisations promoting languages and language learning should:**

- insist on active involvement in education policy decisions.

### **Linguistically qualified early years practitioners, language teachers and other language teaching and language learning experts should:**

- formulate their professional and specialist interests and make use of interest groups and specialist representatives to feed their specialist knowledge into language policy debate.

## 2.2 Language choice and language sequence

A host of factors determine which foreign languages will be learnt in a given country. Provision made for language learning depends very largely on the country's political, economic, cultural and societal profile, its international links and its degree of involvement in regional and global networks; and these factors likewise strongly influence the chronological order in which foreign languages are learnt. The foreign language that will secure first place in the learning sequence is generally the one seen as most relevant in terms of 'usefulness' – currently English, in its capacity as global lingua franca. But if the policy aim is a command of two or more modern foreign languages – as is the case in Europe, in line with the concept of **European multilingualism** – the approach used for the first foreign language will have to be modified to take more account of the role that this first language will play in the learning of further foreign languages. This is particularly true for the encounter with the first foreign language when it occurs at nursery, pre-primary, or primary level, as it has to open the door to further foreign languages<sup>7</sup>.

The majority of parents ask for English to be the entry language: this on the basis of a conviction that English is easy to learn and also, as a global communicative medium, will equip their children well for their educational career and subsequent employment. But choice on such a basis takes into account neither that professional mobility in the real world is required mainly on a regional basis, calling for languages other than English, nor that the choice of English to come first in the language sequence evidently can adversely affect motivation for learning further foreign languages.

However, if at the outset of foreign language learning a different foreign language is taught, in a manner appropriate to the age group and on a consistent basis, then a positive attitude to this language and the relevant culture can be developed. Adoption of this sequence makes it possible for English to be started later – after three to four years – and at that stage more intensively, so that the desired level of competence in English is not compromised in any way<sup>8</sup>.

From the standpoint of languages policy, the concept of regional multilingualism<sup>9</sup> has contributed substantially to the emergence of a balanced view of language choice and language sequence. At the centre are the child's individual communication and learning needs, with due regard to his or her future personal and vocational ambitions. From this perspective there is a clear need for greater diversity and flexibility in the design of early language learning programmes and language learning sequences, so that regionally valid child multilingualism profiles can be developed.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Language learning programmes should have sufficient diversity to enable children to choose from several languages.
- Given the background of individual and regional multilingualism, the language sequence should be kept flexible.
- The initial foreign language should continue to receive consistent support.
- There should be an enhanced public awareness effort with the aim of ensuring that parents in particular are better informed about the effects of the different language sequences.
- If English is to be the first foreign language, it should take on a special role with regard to continued language learning, and pave the way for the learning of further languages.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Legutke (2006)

<sup>8</sup> Some studies even furnish evidence that schoolchildren can benefit from this 'reversed' language sequence in terms of successful learning outcomes both in the first foreign language taken up and in English where it is the second foreign language (cf. Orešić 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Gehrman (2007, 2009)





### 2.3 Appropriate concepts for childhood foreign language learning

Language learning programmes for small children must have the effect of inducing a personal feel for the target language and of encouraging communication in the new and still strange language. Given the appropriate institutional facilities, intensive teaching has better prospects of success than the same content extended over a longer period. Initially, children prefer words and phrases relating to their own world and with meanings already known in the mother tongue. In this early encounter with the foreign language they will not understand grammatical structures, taking them in simply as a fixed pattern, a turn of phrase<sup>10</sup>.

Consequently, all material used in the foreign language programme must be appropriate to the age-group and address individual interests. The younger the child, the more important it is that there should be some emotional involvement with

the learning topic and identification with the practitioner or teacher. When a child feels at ease in the learning environment and is free from fears and pressures, the natural curiosity of a child will ensure his or her increasingly active participation in the learning process.

On this basis, any activity-oriented learning programme will be useful provided that its material has play value, permits experimentation, encourages movement and creativity – in short, if it offers the child plenty of varied scope for exploring personal potential.

<sup>10</sup> Children can nonetheless be observed trying to “reduce and structure the complexity of their environment by analytical means”, in order to “establish rule-like patterns linking identified elements”. Cf. Röber (2008)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Foreign language learning programmes should have objectives, content and methodology tailored to the experience and background of the learning group.
- The teaching plan should be appropriate to the background, potential and needs of each individual child.
- The foreign language learning programme should take the children's level of knowledge of the world as its starting point and by encouraging them to engage with worthwhile topics that they perceive as relevant should simultaneously extend their competences in extra-linguistic areas too.



## 2.4 Standards in early foreign language teaching

With the adoption of the Joint European Reference Framework for Languages it has become possible for the level of language learning attainment for a particular language to be described sufficiently precisely to permit grading by reference levels. In the form of the competence level descriptions, standards have now been developed that permit comparison of learning outcomes, both within the context of a given education system and at international level, irrespective of provider, type of school, and leaving qualification concerned. However, these standards have no application to the childhood foreign language learning engaged in by four- to ten-year-olds. Such standards as are available for this age-group, for example those defined by the Beratungs-, Informations- und Gesprächskreis (BIG-Kreis) (*Consultation, Information and Discussion*

*Round Table*)<sup>11</sup>, a Munich-based expert group, offer guidance as to the competences that ten-year-olds may be expected to attain on a basis of 120 hours of teaching. The BIG-Kreis 'ability profiles' are applicable to any foreign language and cover communicative, intercultural and methodological competences as well as the description of linguistic resources. They can thus provide a foundation for further curriculum development<sup>12</sup>.

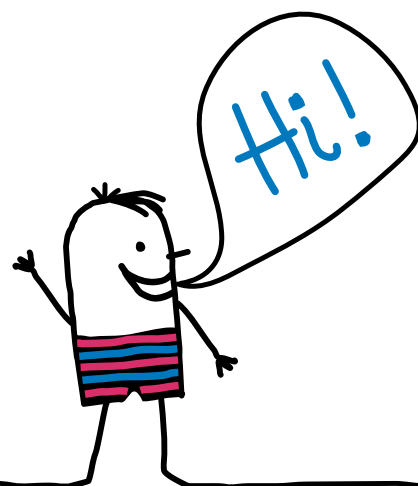
Such a description of education standards in foreign language teaching in primary schools takes no account of how learning actually proceeds, or of how much learning time is made available to every individual child. With a view to assessing and improving teaching quality, for instance, test procedures have been developed and implemented including as far as possible all participants in the educational process. For young children moving up from nursery education to primary education, language testing is arranged to ascertain the extent to which they will be able to follow the upcoming language teaching at school. Currently, prompted in many cases by the school board or other responsible authority, more and more children attending nursery education and primary education maintain a learning record or portfolio designed to provide a clear overview of their learning achievements for their own information, as well as for reference by teachers and parents.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Education standards covering foreign language teaching in primary education should form part of the curriculum documentation, thus giving teaching staff a basis and a framework for their foreign language teaching programme.
- Learning progress recording procedures should be appropriate to the age-group in both content and form, and their content and methodology should respect the principles of early foreign language learning.
- During early foreign language teaching, concern with achieving measurable linguistic outcomes should remain secondary to the objectives of fostering the all-round development of the child's personality and generating and sustaining motivation in foreign language learning.
- External and self-evaluation procedures should be planned for an extended period and continuously updated.

<sup>11</sup> The BIG-Kreis (BIG Group), initiated by Prof. Hans-Eberhard Piepho in 1999, studies the development of foreign language teaching in Germany's primary schools. Its membership is made up of experts from the relevant government departments, from teaching and research, as well as from institutes at national and regional (Land) level.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. BIG-Grundlagenpapier (White Paper) (2005)



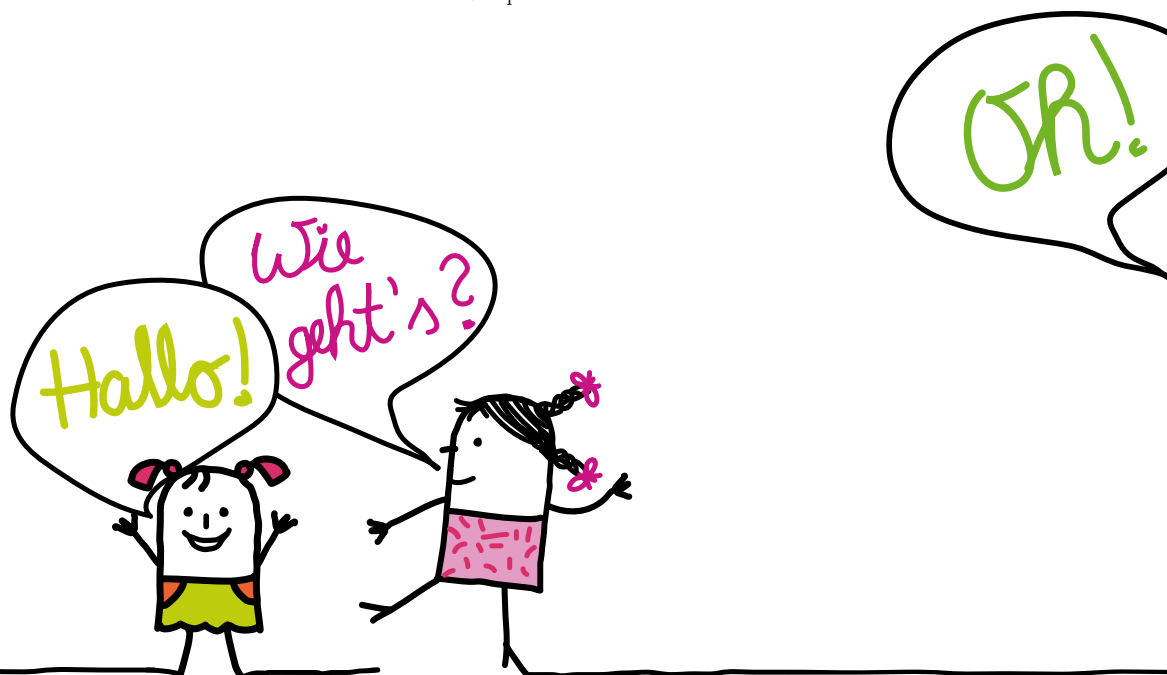
### 3 Basic conditions for early foreign language learning

**The foreign language learning process in a child** must be seen in the context of a complex web of factors that will be considered in some detail in this chapter. People belonging to the child's direct environment, such as parents and family, nursery education staff and school teachers, exert influence alongside factors and institutions of which the child may be virtually unaware (e.g. head teachers, public authorities, interest groups). Education planning ensures that competence profiles and the related learning materials are prescribed at all levels from nursery education upwards. Methodologies used and the role assigned to media may have an important bearing on learning attainment. Various testing and evaluation procedures accompany the entire learning process from the start.

The image of a web or network of determining factors, with the child in the middle, is intended as a metaphor for the complexity of influences operating on the early foreign language learning process. In the centre, always, is the child, developing foreign language competence to the extent of his or her individual potential.

#### 3.1 The child-centred language programme

Any foreign language programme tailored to childhood learning must address the child's developing personality as a whole. It must foster the child's emotional, creative, social, cognitive and linguistic capabilities in equal measure with the aim of bringing about communicative acts in the foreign language. For this to be possible, every individual child must be supported in ways appropriate to his or her personal development.



### 3.1.1 Developmental psychology and language acquisition

Humans are oriented towards language even before birth. Infants adjust intuitively to the speech melody of their surroundings. Their very first imitations of sound combinations are communicative acts.

From about the second year of life, language acquisition becomes conscious. Language and thought converge. Self-

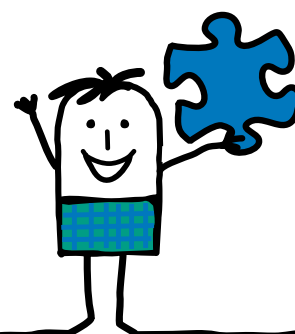
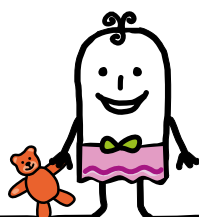
centred in play, but remaining always in continuous social interaction, the child forms an image of the world and in doing so also acquires the ordering structures of language.

The child's continued linguistic, cognitive and emotional development will depend on his or her social and cultural situation and on whether he or she is perceived as an individual and treated by others in ways appropriate to his or her needs, inclinations and capabilities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the particular developmental stage that the child has reached, the following recommendations for the foreign language learning process may be noted:

- Children's spontaneity and lack of inhibition make them exceptionally capable of enthusiasm and quick to join in playful activity. Their normal abundance of curiosity, their urge to explore, readiness to learn and capacity to absorb should all be turned to good use in the form of practical, activity-oriented learning and experimentation.
- Children are strongly focused on the here and now, on direct, tangible experience. In a non-target-language environment they need to be motivated in ways that make sense to them.
- If children are to understand, material must be presented to them in terms of tangible realities that they can visualise. Until they have reached a certain age, they cannot cope with abstract concepts. Situational and action-linked stimulus material and learning procedures are accordingly of key importance for their learning attainment and their pleasure in learning.
- Children are able to concentrate for short periods; playful means should be sought to address and further develop their usually good memory powers.
- Children's fundamentally open-minded attitude invites an engagement with intercultural topics.



### 3.1.2 The child's linguistic development

The dynamic of success in early foreign language learning varies from one individual to another, but in principle nonetheless evidently conforms to certain patterns. That said, there is still no consensus on the precise sequence of childhood language acquisition phases or levels. The Piaget stage theory, although based on a large number of empirical studies, is now viewed no less sceptically than other models<sup>13</sup>.

It is now accepted that "human beings are capable of learning one or more new languages at any time. However, findings from research on language acquisition and from brain research have produced evidence that the acquisition of an unfamiliar language should take place as early as possible. It has been shown, for instance, that children up to the age of six can learn to speak a second language without an accent. Up to the age of puberty, syntax and morphology can be acquired with less effort than subsequently."<sup>14</sup> However, many other factors also have a bearing on children's learning attainment. These include the quality of the teaching staff and the materials used, and the duration and intensity of the language contact.

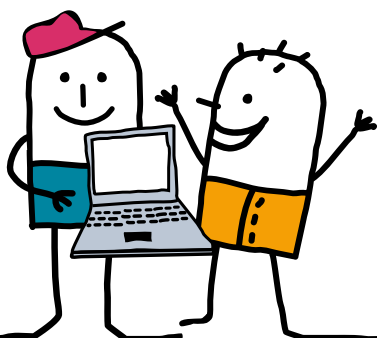
<sup>13</sup> On this issue, cf. a) Jean Piaget's stage theory, e.g. online at: <http://arbeitsblaetter.stangl-taller.at/KOGNITIVEENTWICKLUNG/default.shtml#Modell>

b) Bleyhl (2000), c) Tracy (2007)

<sup>14</sup> Apeltauer, Hoppenstedt (expected publication date 2010)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The childhood foreign language acquisition process should be viewed in as close association as possible with linguistic development in the mother tongue.
- During the language learning process, the child should be given sufficient opportunities to try out newly learnt material in social interaction, e.g. with the teacher or with fellow pupils.
- The realisation that language acquisition is clearly a phased process entails a rethink on the issue of errors arising during language-learning: errors are now seen to be development steps along the path of language acquisition: that is to say, they are a legitimate sub-aspect of the learning process, and as such should be dealt with patiently and tactfully.
- Practitioners and teachers should see errors as valuable evidence of the stage that the language acquisition process has reached, and use them to help in giving the child continued support.



### 3.1.3 The child's needs

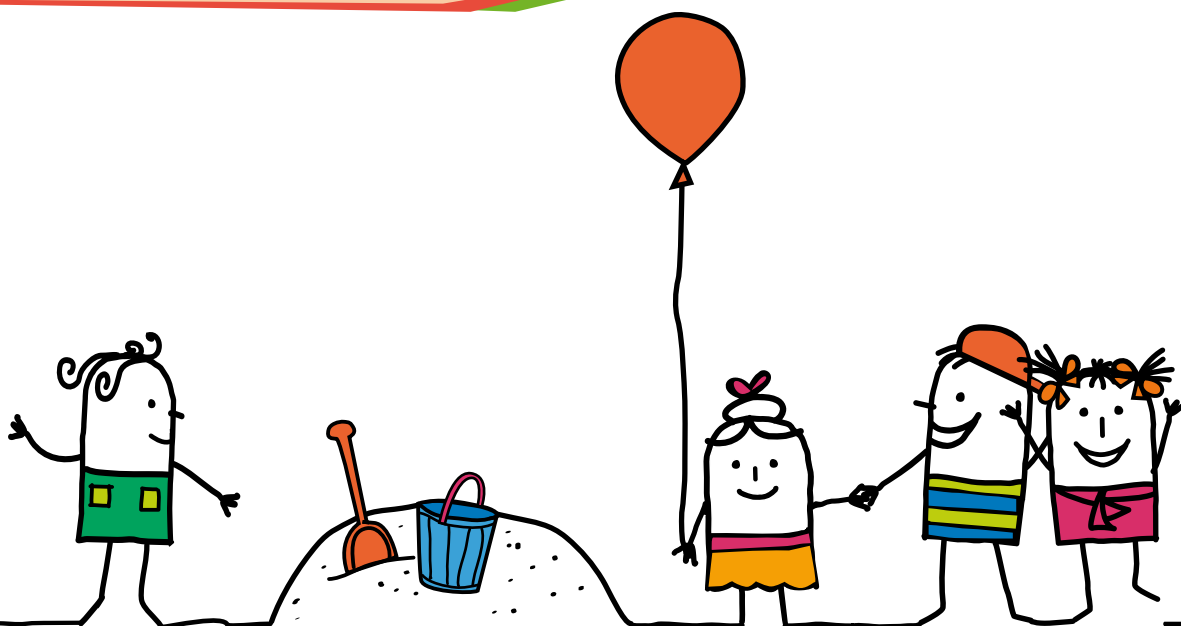
Children at the nursery education and primary reception class level are not yet very secure emotionally. They are learning for the first time to subsist in an environment beyond their familiar family circumstances. They make their first friendships, encounter new individuals to relate to, undergo an immense range of new personal experiences. This unfamiliar situation, combined with the new sounds of the foreign language, requires a sensitive approach and particular awareness of the emotional component in child development.

Together with specific capabilities, every child also has very definite needs: and these should be fed into early foreign language teaching, so that the child learner feels comfortable and the learning process can be correspondingly fruitful. A child needs –

- to feel safe and secure while in the learning environment
- to receive affection and be able to show affection
- to express feelings, be happy, and make others happy
- to communicate with others, to express thoughts and feelings
- to play, be active, move, romp about
- to express him- or herself creatively
- to experience successes and be praised
- to encounter new things by experience, by learning, by discovery, or through conscious research
- to re-run new experiences and insights in role-play (or similar) and thus assimilate these emotionally.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- In planning and implementing the aims, content and methods of early foreign language learning, the practitioner or teacher should always ensure that the child's needs are taken into account.



### 3.1.4 The child's rights

Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, primary education has a duty to make children aware of their rights. For children who develop this awareness, wide-ranging opportunities open up within their immediate social context. In this context, the basic right to linguistic education becomes the means of access to many further rights. Persons able to read and write, and to do so e.g. in one or more foreign languages as well, will learn to communicate in a more complex way and will develop social competences more easily.

The right to education, specifically the right to learn a foreign language, thus implies the opportunity to penetrate into foreign cultures, to understand the foreign and the Other more readily, to develop both curiosity and tolerance, to pursue paths that but for the knowledge of languages would remain closed, and so to develop one's personality without constraints.

Young children are unafraid of the unfamiliar, and are open-minded in their approach to language that has strange sounds. But they cannot assert for themselves their right to be given the opportunity to acquire foreign languages in child-friendly ways

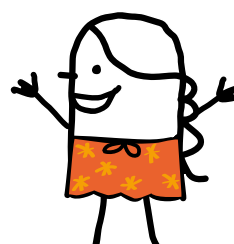
Early foreign language learning should confer on all children the following language-related rights:

- The right to early and comprehensive linguistic education (aimed at equality of opportunity). This comprises both the development of competence in the mother tongue (or language of origin) and the extension of the child's linguistic resources through early learning of foreign languages.

- The right of access to learning material of an intercultural nature and to the opportunity to engage in intercultural communication
- The right to have the child's innate potential in all its aspects developed to the maximum by the language programme. That includes learning through the use of all senses for the purpose of acquiring knowledge.
- The right to autonomous action and to participation in joint decision-making in the context of the language-learning programme
- The right to commit linguistic errors unpunished
- The right to be accepted and equally treated, irrespective of one's language, religion or culture of origin.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The early foreign languages programme should provide as many practical opportunities as possible, specifically tailored to the age-groups concerned, for children to experience and appreciate children's rights, and thus for the individual child's sense of self to be strengthened. This includes listening to children, inviting them to express themselves, permitting questions, and exercising sensitivity and discretion in the correction of errors.



### 3.2 Linguistically qualified pre-primary staff and language teachers

The key role in early foreign language learning is that of early years practitioners and primary education teachers. Next to the parents, they are the most important contact persons in the child's life; and they have crucial influence both on the prevalent atmosphere in the learning environment and on the detailed character of the child's daily circumstances. The better qualified the practitioner or teacher in terms of the many and varied – and highly specific – professional requirements, the more successful the child's learning will be.

Every language programme thus requires specific specialist competences (knowledge of language and culture, methodological and pedagogic competences). Certain transferable knowledge- and experience-based qualifications are also important. These include<sup>15</sup>:

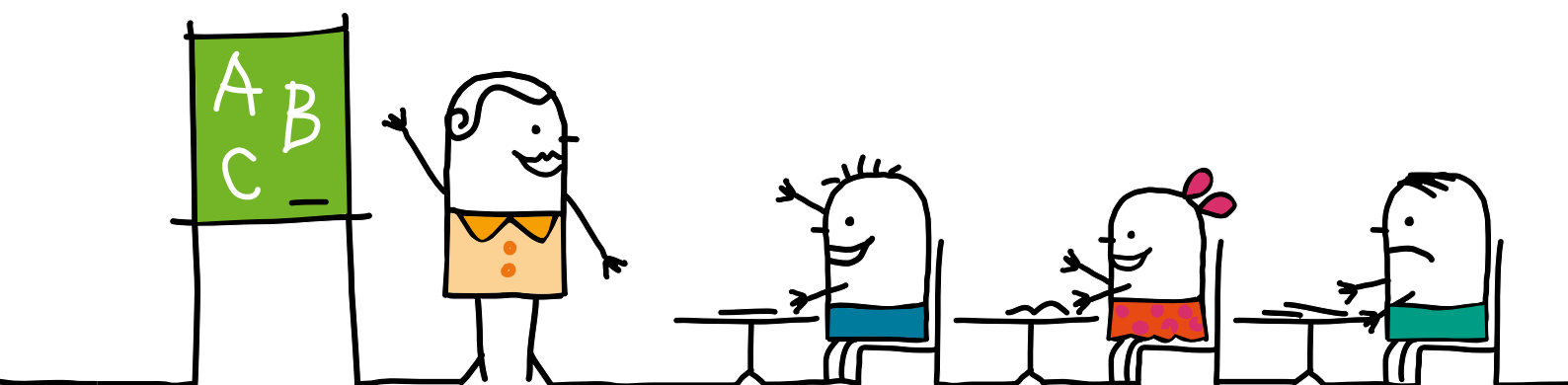
- natural enjoyment of communication
- capacity and desire for intercultural communication
- capacity for analytical, problem-oriented thought
- competence in identifying, mediating and implementing learning strategies
- endorsement of lifelong learning as a principle for oneself and all learners
- ability to inspire openness to new ways of thinking and learning
- ability to cooperate as harmoniously and productively with colleagues as with children

- constant upgrading of own media competence
- self-confident and intelligently purposive approach in fulfilment of own professional role and responsibilities together with maintenance of critical perspective
- unfailing readiness to cooperate with all involved in upbringing of children and in education.

The practitioner and the teacher are often the only persons through whom the child has contact with the target language. Their use of that language is thus the most important model for the learner. They need to be so thoroughly at home in the foreign language that it can be the exclusive language of instruction. Their target language diction needs to be exemplary not only phonetically but also with regard to speech melody and intonation.

The teacher has the responsibility of introducing the children not merely to the new language, but also, and with due circumspection, to the new culture that it represents. This role of cultural mediator demands an appropriate level of intercultural competence, combined with a broadly based cultural knowledge of the target country (e.g. familiarity with its juvenile literature). Here the practitioner's or teacher's musical and dramatic competences are of great importance for the age-appropriate delivery of the foreign language syllabus.

A special role in early foreign language learning is fulfilled by the teacher's interpersonal skills, i.e. his or her ability to





ensure a partner-like, mutually respectful working relationship in the learning environment, and to create an unafraid, trusting mindset among the learners. Aptitude for teamwork and a gift for taking or inspiring initiatives in group-work are beneficial in the interaction of adults (including teacher-parent relationships) and children during and outside school hours.

Cooperation among teachers primarily involves exchanges and the joint planning, negotiation and execution of teaching duties and cross-disciplinary projects. Such exchanges should be inter-institutional as well as internal, involving both early years practitioners and teachers, e.g. at the transition from nursery education to primary. This would contribute to establishing a logical progression in the teaching materials and to minimising the amount of repetition.

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. also BIG (2007)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

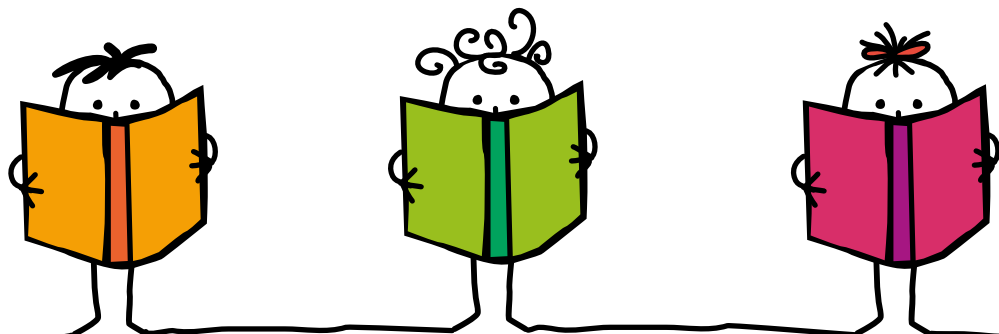
- Linguistically qualified practitioners and primary education teachers should be fully fluent in age-appropriate variants of the target language.
- Their linguistic repertoire should enable them to communicate on topics relevant to classwork while observing the priorities of appropriate content, variety and correctness of language forms, and appropriate emotional colouring.
- Pre-primary staff and teachers should work intensively and actively on (further) developing their competences and where appropriate should themselves take steps to obtain sufficient continuing professional development.
- Pre-primary staff and teachers should periodically review their central role in early foreign language learning and their area of responsibility in relation to all others involved in the learning process, including partners outside the actual learning and teaching institutions.
- Pre-primary staff and teachers should seek cooperation with parents, foster it, and make it productive for the learning process.
- Pre-primary staff and teachers also have a responsibility for the development and the good reputation of their profession, and in their own interest should be committed to upholding the status and the attractiveness of early foreign language learning.

### 3.2.1 Training linguistically qualified pre-primary staff and language teachers

Seen in an international perspective, the training of linguistically qualified pre-primary staff and language teachers proceeds along many widely varying paths, and is consequently extremely heterogeneous in structure. For instance, those teaching foreign languages at primary level may have a degree in education qualifying them for nursery education duties or primary teaching plus an extra qualification covering early foreign language learning; but they may equally well have qualified as a specialist subject teacher. Nursery education staff asked to teach a foreign language programme now often use further education programmes to obtain a qualification as a specialist teacher of languages. The training provided should first and foremost ensure that the general principles of education at the nursery education and primary education levels

are sufficiently thoroughly implanted to be reflected in due course in the planning and implementation of educative processes. This entails a good understanding of child development and of the age-appropriate delivery of learning content. During the learning processes, the activities of the children, and their spontaneous initiatives and natural appetite for learning, have an important role to play, as does their acquisition of information in the social context or from the teachers and other adults with whom they come into contact<sup>16</sup>. The studies should ideally cover all material central to the intended professional field – and, of course, always with an eye to how the material is to be taught in the foreign language.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. 'Erläuterungen zum Ansatz der Ko-Konstruktion' (Notes on the Co-Construction Approach), Fthenakis (2009)



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Practitioners and teachers who are to be involved in early foreign language learning should be trained in courses of study specifically geared to child-appropriate language teaching.
- The study courses should be competence-oriented and as comprehensive as possible both in imparting the underlying theoretical principles and in developing and fostering practical competences.
- For early foreign language learning at nursery education and primary education levels, the practitioners and teachers should have a command of the language rated at level B2 to C1 of the European Reference Framework, so that the language model delivered may be as error-free and authentic as possible.
- During the course of study the foreign language should be the working language and be used as often as possible.
- The syllabus content should have an intercultural emphasis: that is to say, the two languages and cultures – the source language and culture and the target language and culture – should both receive attention, and their relationship to each other should be explored.
- Ideally, courses should prepare students to put the didactics of multilingualism into practice – i.e. prepare them to take cognisance of, and turn to good use, all the languages that might potentially be spoken within a learning group, along with the children's past experiences of language learning.
- During the period of training there should be the opportunity to try out pedagogical principles and methods in practice and to review them critically in group discussion.
- As part of the training course, students should also be provided with the linguistic resources needed for child-relevant topics and situations, and with the lexical material they will need for directing the learning process.
- Students should be given the opportunity to acquaint themselves with relevant developments in languages policy, and to discuss such developments amongst themselves, not least with reference to their own professional situation.
- The training course should feature a period of residence abroad, either as an option or as an integral part of the syllabus.

### 3.2.2 Continuing professional development and extended education

Continuing professional development always has the aim of further development, which may be directed at several different goals. It may be concerned with new teaching methods or with new materials, or it may signify further personal development.

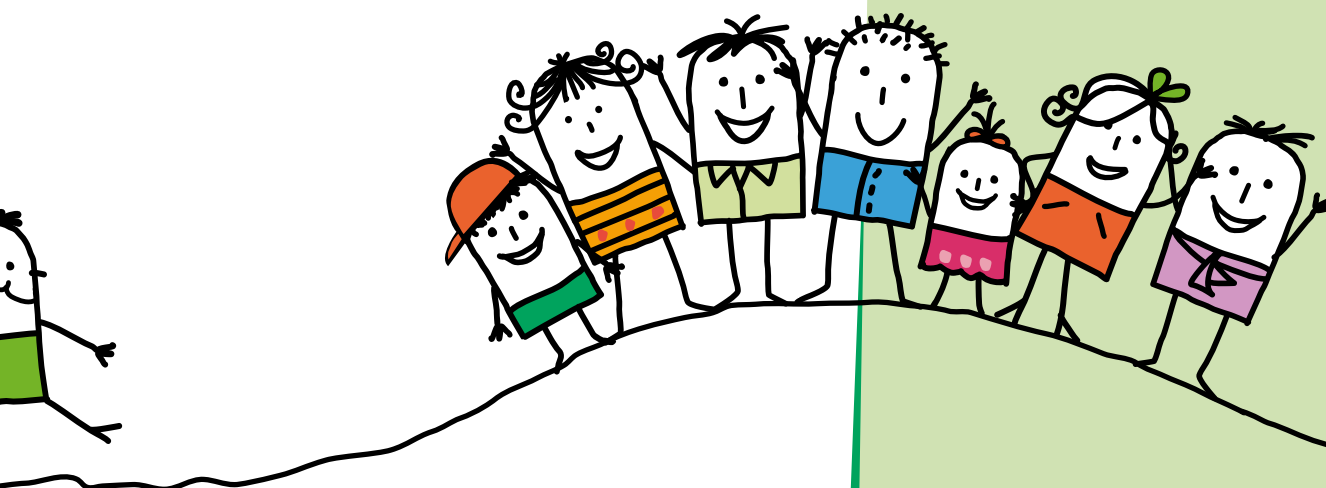
Continuing professional development delivers skills and knowledge that are practice- and experience-oriented, but it must have a valid scientific basis. Continuing professional development and extended education have succeeded only if newly acquired knowledge and skills are fed into everyday working practice. It follows that CPD content must be practice-relevant and action-oriented.

Useful contributions to CPD and extended education can be provided by sequentially arranged, well designed units, based on real practice and affording scope for discussion and exchange.

Where preparation for service as a specialist teacher in early foreign language programmes involves retraining and the undertaking of further qualifications, existing professional experience and interests should be turned to advantage, and language proficiency should be further developed. Methodology training tailored to the new specific target group should have realistic practical application and should lead to an experience of success in practice.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continuing professional development and extended education should be kept up as continuously as possible throughout the professional careers of practitioners and teachers, at their own initiative where necessary.
- Continuing professional development activities should encourage practitioners and teachers to extend their existing competences; they should help them to identify areas of inadequacy and provide guidance on how to continue with self-directed, successive further professional qualification.



### 3.3 Parents

Although a certain anxiety still surfaces from time to time among parents, and indeed teachers, to the effect that children may be overstretched by starting too early on the learning of foreign languages, most parents now see early language learning programmes as an opportunity for their children. Parents are for the most part aware that the early start has been shown to bring the child clear advantages in learning one or more additional languages faster and with less effort.

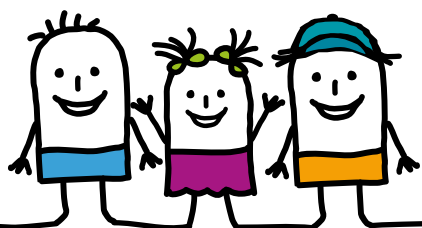
In the effort to make early foreign language learning a success, parents represent an irreplaceable cooperation partner for pre-primary education staff and primary teachers. Parents are in a position to support their children's learning process and to deliver certain prerequisites for a successful outcome. If they themselves maintain a positive attitude to foreign language learning, openly, and above all as perceived by the child, then he or she will cooperate happily and with

strong motivation. Interest shown in the teaching material, and praise and encouragement offered outside the school context, are important factors governing childhood interest in a foreign language. All types of schools should accordingly factor in the parental home in their planning, and make welcome parental support. The closer the rapport between the learning environments of nursery education, primary education and parental home, the more the child will benefit.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Parents should:

- be kept informed about the aims and content of early foreign language learning and also about the underlying principles of the psychology of learning, in language appropriate to the recipient. They should be informed regularly about the development and progress of their child. This is essential if they are to adequately understand, follow and assist the learning process.
- clearly signal their interest in their child's early foreign language learning by enquiring, encouraging, praising in response to successes, and discussion. Any prompting of the child to demonstrate learning achievements – orally or visually – should be solely to convey genuine interest, never for assessment purposes.
- not attempt to influence their children's learning process by corrections to their work. Correction of errors should be the prerogative and responsibility of practitioners and teachers, who will introduce corrections only in a precisely targeted approach and with restraint, so as not to undermine the child's confidence and disrupt the fluency of spoken delivery.
- take up, whenever possible, any opportunities to co-operate (parent evenings, briefing events, school celebrations etc.) and also voluntarily seek cooperation with teaching staff – subject, however, to the obligation on each side to respect the responsibilities and prerogatives of the other.



### 3.4 Physical environments for learning

Early foreign language learning takes place in nursery schools, primary schools and other educational establishments. To meet the criteria for qualified learning programmes, the locations provided must ensure a safe environment for the children in terms of size, furnishings and equipment, must allow the learning processes to be directed in child-appropriate ways, and must be so designed as to exclude any risk of impairment of children's health as they learn.

Design for each learning group to consist of the smallest possible number of children, accommodated in an age-appro-

priate physical setting, is the best way to ensure that every child finds sufficient opportunities to speak and can be cared for as appropriate to his or her needs. A stable learning atmosphere in, if possible, the same room for every meeting underpins the continuity of the learning process.

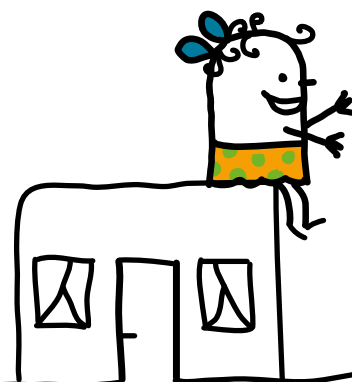
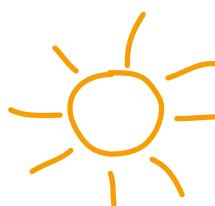
Every institution should have sufficient space to permit the reaching of clear understandings with all relevant practitioners and teaching staff on modalities of child supervision, learning objectives, methodology and teaching content, particularly if the foreign languages programme is to be delivered by an additional specialist teacher.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The classrooms in which children learn should be used on as sustained a basis as possible, so that the children can develop in an environment where they can feel secure.

**Specialist teachers responsible for different learning levels should keep each other mutually informed. The following means are recommended:**

- Exchange of teaching plans, guidelines, targets, teaching content and topics
- Cross-institutional use of learner portfolios
- Coordination meetings
- Reciprocal inter-institutional study visits and joint CPD events



### 3.4.1 Transitions<sup>17</sup>

From the point of view of continuity in early foreign language learning, the interface between nursery education and pre-primary or primary education tends to be problematic.

One major aid to delivering continuity of learning processes between institutions is cross-institutional harmonisation of foreign language programme curricula. Teachers at primary schools must seek precise information from the linguistically qualified early years practitioners regarding the content areas already covered and the actual work done if they are to be able to pick up usefully in their new teaching from the know-

ledge of foreign languages that the children have already acquired, and to avoid overlap. Specialist teachers at the institution attended first have a corresponding duty to prepare the children for the transition to the next level.

This entails curricular provisions designed to impose a clear progression and continuity on foreign language learning.

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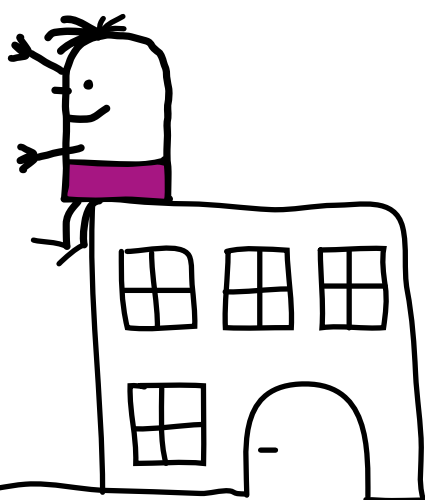
<sup>17</sup> Cf. also BIG (2009)

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Wastilios Pthenakis (01/2010)

<sup>19</sup> Cf. ib.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Curricula (time of learning commencement, choice, range and sequence of languages, final target profiles) need to be harmonised in detail. The entire educational process related to early foreign language learning should be underpinned by a unified concept in educational theory<sup>18</sup>.
- University-level training of practitioners and teachers side-by-side during at least part of the course, already under trial in some countries, could contribute to a more coherent educational system<sup>19</sup>.
- Transitions should be the subject of advance cross-institutional planning so as to ensure continuity in the learning process.
- Teaching materials and textbooks for use at more than one level should be developed.



### 3.5 Objective: the interculturally aware child

The early start involves calling up all available resources in order to give children the best possible prospects for development in the foreign language learning process; this involves the emotional, creative, social, cognitive and linguistic dimensions of overall childhood development. But it also very much involves intercultural communicative competence.

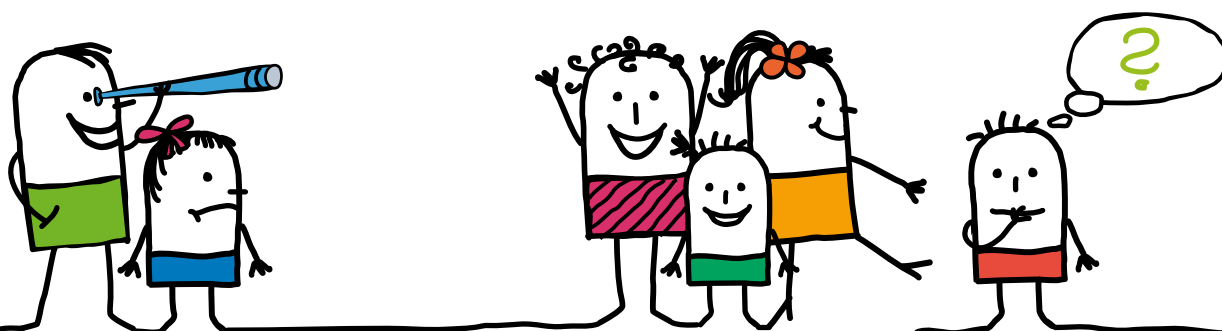
A child who is alert to and interested in the intercultural dimension has the potential to develop later into an intercultural speaker<sup>20</sup>, and this is a declared aim of current foreign language teaching. The learner's foreign language competence is no longer measured solely against the linguistic competence

of native speakers, but in terms of his or her ability to master the multiple and various tasks of intercultural communication. For the child learner, and in early foreign language teaching, the types of stimulus and educational content provided should form a basis on which the open-mindedness and tolerance of the intercultural speaker can find scope to develop. The early encounter with the foreign language must awaken interest in languages, foster enjoyment in language-learning, and 'motivate the child to converse meaningfully in a language not his or her own'.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. e.g. Zarate (1997); Krumm (2003); House (2008)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The early start in foreign language learning, while concentrating on development of linguistic competences, should also foster general and intercultural abilities and learning strategies.





### 3.5.1 General Competences

Development of general competences – such as e.g. self-competence and social competence – does not occur in isolation from that of other competences, and is accordingly an important concern during early foreign language learning.

In the context of any early foreign language programme, efforts should be made to foster the development of the following general competences:

- **Self-competence:** By way of achievements and insights gained during acquisition of a foreign language, the child enhances his sense of self, learns to assess and esteem himself and his personal role inside a group, and develops the courage to take action.
- **Social competence:** Sound self-assessment leads to a just perception of the other group members. The child perceives the others as individuals in their own right, learns to value each of them individually, works as part of a team, develops a we-consciousness.
- **Affective competence:** In daily contact with others, the child learns to express feelings and to recognise conflicts and problems, and also comes to know the routes that may lead to the solution of a problem.
- **Motor competence:** Physical movement during the learning process is a fundamental childhood need, enhances receptiveness, and fosters the child's motor development.
- **Cognitive competence:** The foreign language becomes a medium of communication, less of an end in itself. Foreign language content items prompt reflective thought and enhance memory performance. This competence develops at earliest when a child has reached the age of about ten.
- **Creative competence:** Unfamiliar sounds and symbols, and new and unaccustomed content, arouse pleasure, stimulate curiosity, open up new ideas, and prompt the child to test out new approaches.
- **The competence of close attention:** new influences sensitise the child to our immediate surroundings, to our environment, to the needs and necessities to which other human beings are subject. The competence of close attention leads to due recognition and respect, and also to trust.

### 3.5.2 Foreign language competences

The linguistic competences that children should possess by the age of about ten are still not covered by any empirically substantiated pronouncements from which standards could be clearly derived.

The one exception is the fact that – given the requisite input of effort – children are capable of mastering the foreign language's pronunciation.

It must be assumed that the linguistic competences of the child learner develop differently in discrete skill areas. This is probably connected with the emphasis of early foreign language teaching, which is concerned, particularly in beginner classes at primary school, with listening and speaking. At nursery and pre-schools it is the receptive skills – listening, listening comprehension, and comprehension generally – that play the central role. In the primary school, productive and interactive strategies and activities are increasingly added (speaking, writing, spoken interaction).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Irrespective of when the early start is made, every child should be allowed time during the initial stage to absorb linguistic stimuli without being pressed to speak or suffering inappropriate correction of any attempts he or she does make to speak.
- The special ability shown by children in the field of pronunciation should be fostered discriminately and intensively, particularly through the use of authentic audio materials.
- Acquisition of writing skills in the foreign language should proceed with great caution.
- The content, linguistic form and methodology of all inputs aimed at building foreign language competence should be designed for compatibility with the children's communication needs.

### 3.5.3 Intercultural Competence

The process of developing intercultural competence during early foreign language learning subsumes both the educational aspect of social interaction with the Other and the communicative aspect of mutual communication through the medium of the foreign language. Even at this early stage it is possible and sensible to use targeted learning content and activities to sensitise children to intercultural issues, e.g. through:

- ethnographic material relating to the target language culture (e.g. on festivals and customs)
- contrasted materials from the other culture and from the child's own culture, which can be used to sharpen the child's perceptions (e.g. everyday objects, artworks).

- materials suitable for raising the level of empathy with people of the other culture.
- lifelike situations (role-playing) in which acting within intercultural situations can be trained.

Children gain familiarity with the other culture through having it presented to them in the foreign language, through images, texts or virtual means. In their perception of the Other, a key role is played by the simultaneous perception of what is familiar: for it is the integration of new information and impressions into what is familiar that constitutes the desired advance in learning.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Content and methodology should be selected so as to ensure that the children retain and deepen their natural openness to what is new, and over the course of the learning process acquire sensitivity in self-perception and perception of others.

**The learning materials should be selected as to enable the child:**

- in familiar things to discover the Other, and in the Other the familiar
- to accept the Other as the Other
- to learn to cope with the insecurity and fears that arise out of encounters with the Other.



### 3.5.4 Learning strategy competences

By virtue of personal preferences and aptitudes, every learner is a distinct learner type and can evolve his or her own learning techniques and learning strategies, which can be addressed in language classes, ideally in manner that is as specific to each learner as possible. Learning with all the senses means that the child becomes better at self-understanding, and observes the own learning behaviour, and this observation in turn teaches him or her how to learn a foreign language most effectively. If a child has been introduced to the widest possible range of learning strategies, he or she can identify preferences and at a later stage direct his or her learning process and pace autonomously. Learning strategies make the foreign language learning process easier and evidently engender a positive attitude to learning and using the foreign language. Benefit accrues for the learning of further languages.

### 3.5.5 Reader competence

Reader competence is not the same as reading competence. Development of reader competence should begin in the parental home, long before the conscious acquisition of reading skills. Listening to fairy-tales and other stories read aloud, and joining in the 'reading' and discussion of picture-books are activities that initiate children into the culture of reading and writing, foster their pleasure and interest in reading, and prepare them for future independent reading.

The richer a child's surroundings in written material, the easier it will be for him or her to recognise the usefulness of any such material. It is thus good practice to have written culture featuring consistently in the surroundings from an early stage, e.g. in the nursery school.

These processes can be initiated in early foreign language learning and developed over time. When shorter pieces are being read aloud, follow-up should not be concerned with content aspects alone: the children should be encouraged to develop a feel for e.g. tension-generating features or the distinctive characteristics of different text-types ('Once upon a time ...').

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teaching content and methodology in early foreign language teaching should be designed from the start to enable the individual child to learn to observe him- or herself and his or her personal learning behaviour, so coming gradually to identify the learner type to which he or she belongs, and to discover which of the senses are instrumental to his or her fastest and most successful learning.
- Training in basic communication strategies (enquiring, use of gesture and mime etc.) and memory strategies should begin early.
- Children should be given the chance to become familiar with and try out the fundamental techniques that will gradually equip them for autonomous learning.

It helps to smooth the path for children entering the early foreign language learning process if individuals in the immediate environment, e.g. parents or older siblings, are readers and in that respect role models, and also if:

- the child has easy access to a wide range of reading material
- books for reading aloud and for personal discovery are available
- the learning environment – e.g. pre-school and primary school – offers reading and writing corners
- adults are receptive to children's questions and in this way assist the learning-to-read process.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

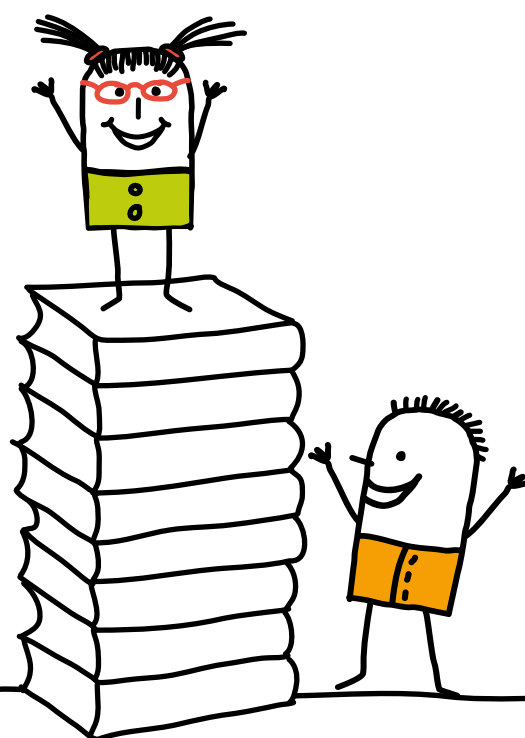
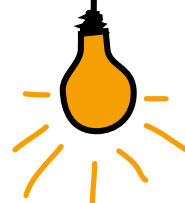
- Before children look in any detail at the written form of a foreign language, they should be familiar with the written form of their mother tongue.
- The child's everyday environment should provide as many ways of accessing written material as possible, so as to stimulate curiosity at an early age about books (etc.) and general interest in reading.

### 3.6 Appropriate content for an early foreign languages programme

Selection of thematic and linguistic learning content will be oriented towards the children's interests and current developmental stage in terms of learning psychology. The content should both appeal to and expand their interests, appeal to their emotions and their readiness for commitment, foster their imaginative and creative powers and give them fun.

The content of early foreign language learning complements and nuances the image of the world that children are and have been constructing in the mother tongue. They follow a semantic and pragmatic progression and dispense almost wholly with grammatical progression. Content elements should be delivered as far as possible by way of authentic learning materials. Simple text-types such as rhymes, songs, sayings, fairy-tales and other stories are recommended. Non-authentic texts written for teaching purposes should be based on authentic language and authentic text-types and should feature dialogue forms and narrative forms.

If learners are to be able to develop linguistic competences in the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, and to acquire independent communicative competence in their childhood everyday world, they need vocabulary and linguistic structures appropriate to their life and circumstances as children. Teaching plans here should not simply provide a selection of topics, but should prescribe the structures that are to be learnt in the context of the topic in question, and these should be bound into picture books and textbooks. Pronunciation training should be an integral part of the learning programme. Here, audio and audio-visual media offering recordings of native speakers are valuable aids. Para-linguistic communication such as gesture and mime is a further very important content component in early foreign language teaching, as are other linguistic resources intimately associated with the social and cultural dimensions of language use in the target language (greeting and other polite formulae, forms of address etc.).



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **The teaching content of an early foreign language learning programme should touch on general topics such as those listed below and should be designed to introduce relevant vocabulary along with each topic. The content elements specified should be embedded in communicative contexts.**

### Topics and situations

- **Everyday life and childhood culture:**

The child in various contexts, e.g. my family/friends and I, nursery/primary school, play, hobbies, sports, animals, travel, seasons/weather, food and drink, the body and health, clothes, festivals and popular customs, environmental protection/sustainable living etc.

- **Aspects of general knowledge:**

In contexts provided by the topics enumerated above, new information and new insights relating to human beings and the world we live in are imparted.

- **Intercultural geographic aspects:**

Learning from examples about everyday life/customs and manners in the target language country and comparison/contrast with those of the own environment.

### Vocabulary

- Within the parameters of the topics and situations specified above, child-appropriate vocabulary featuring as far as possible all parts of speech should be learnt.

- **Those selecting content and linguistic structures relevant to pronunciation should bear the following considerations in mind:**

### Pronunciation

- Correct pronunciation and intonation should be treated as important from an early stage.
- The child learner should be made aware of differences between the mother tongue and the foreign language.
- The pronunciation training offered should include both exercises in listening and speaking

### Linguistic structures and language use

- Communicative aims should be embedded in syntactically simple structures (predominantly main clauses), especially when the productive work required is direct oral communication. In the case of (listening and reading) comprehension texts, structures of greater complexity may be gradually introduced with a view to extending receptive language grasp.
- A certain measure of awareness of linguistic rules and of underlying logical principles can lead to improved transparency in early foreign language teaching, and lays a foundation for future analytical thinking about language. This must not be confused with the teaching of grammar, and should only arise out of communicative or content issues. Schematically conceived exercises, deductive introduction of grammar rules, and references to metalinguistic terms are wholly inappropriate to the stage of cognitive development that has been reached by children of approximately four to ten years of age, and do not lead to the desired outcome of a communicative use of language.

- **Extra-linguistic and paralinguistic modes of utterance are an integral element of the relevant content of early foreign language teaching:**

### Non-verbal modes of communication

- Communicative situations should be accompanied both by confirmatory practical actions (pointing to something, mimicking an action etc.) and by appropriate paralinguistic body communication (gesture, mime, body posture, bodily or eye contact etc.). The marked cultural specificity of paralinguistic modes gives them a key role in the success or failure of a communication.

### 3.7 Methodology and pedagogic principles

During early foreign language learning the child should be approached holistically and with due regard for his or her fundamental needs. Phases of intensive work on the new language and culture should be interspersed with 'rest' phases giving space for reflection and for development of powers of concentration as well as for the satisfaction of the child's motoric needs.

The principles listed below involve factors that govern the course of classroom teaching, and to this extent reprise aspects of the preceding chapters. These principles – considered individually – are all of equal importance in determining the success of an early start in foreign languages.

#### Principles relating to learning goals and taught content

- Learning must be centred on the child.
- Early years practitioners and school teachers must know and take account of the children's individual physical and sensory learning needs, thereby ensuring that benefit accrues from the foreign language programme to the child's emotional, social and motoric competences.
- Goals, topics, content and learning types should be defined in such a way as to have relevance to the child's life horizons and experience. They should have a straightforward meaning and application in the child's everyday world.
- As appropriate in the light of the child's developmental stage, heard and spoken language is the principal learning focus, especially in the initial phases.
- In pre-school and in the early years of primary school, reading and writing should be introduced on a phased basis and little by little. Reception takes precedence over production, understanding over speaking, speaking over writing. There should be no attempt – or as little as possible – to make children aware of structures.
- Language proficiency should be built up in a spiral progression.
- Concepts that associate language learning closely with the transmission of content will permit greater openness in the types of teaching used, e.g. cross-subject learning.

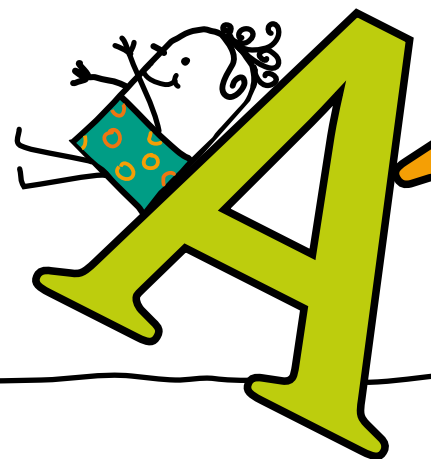
#### Principles relating to interaction in the learning group

- Children should make allowance for the levels of individual progress within a group and develop mutual respect.

- In the teaching process, children should have a voice in the setting of tasks.
- Within the group they should support each other during communication.

#### Principles relating to teaching procedures

- The learning processes of young learners of foreign languages should be play- and action-oriented.
- Rules and relationships should be recognised by the learners in examples, imitated and in some circumstances independently discovered (inductive or discovery learning).
- During all phases of teaching, the maximum possible number of different learning channels should be utilised so as to offer each learning type the optimal framework (multisensory/holistic learning by hearing, seeing, touching, smelling, reading, moving, speaking, writing, drawing).
- Learning processes should be facilitated by means of examples and illustrations; in task-setting, preferential setting of small-step and internally discriminating tasks supports the understanding-and-applying process.
- Frequent changes of social format (independent work, partner work, small-group and large-group work) and of teaching type ('workstation learning', learning scenarios, project work) ensures variety, thus keeping up interest and concentration.
- Differing methodologies (Total Physical Response, Narrative Approach method or similar) should be applied according to goals and content, and – when the learning situation permits – combined with one another.
- In the early foreign language programme, the child is not exhorted to speak, but begins by listening, then understanding and absorbing, and may often let a considerable time pass before eventually reacting by e.g. imitating individual words from the foreign language or inserting them into sentences in the mother tongue.



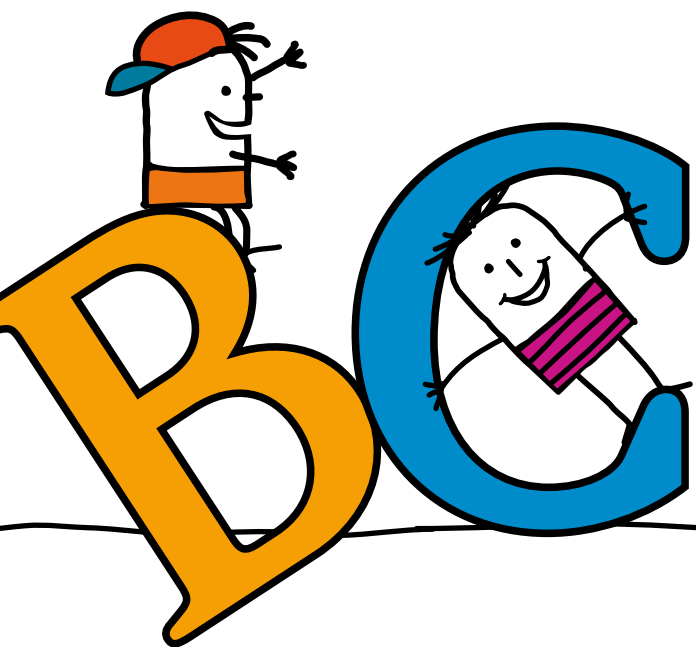
- The practitioner or teacher as far as possible uses the foreign language exclusively; however, when addressed by the children in the mother tongue the teacher indicates that he or she has understood. The overriding principle of early foreign language teaching may be taken to be ‘as much foreign language as possible, and as little mother tongue as is needed’.
- The teacher should possess an exact knowledge of the previous language-learning experience of the learners, should take account of the individual multilingual ability – or total language resources, as applicable – of individual learners, and should make use of these circumstances in the teaching, where possible. In favourable situations, occasional child-appropriate indication of analogies to or differences from the mother tongue – or even perhaps to other languages in the child’s environment – may foster the child learner’s linguistic awareness.
- The teacher should give immediate feedback on the success or otherwise of a learner’s contribution in class; positive reinforcement has a particularly strong motivating effect.
- Errors are a normal element in the process of developing language proficiency, and can be picked up by way of feedback strategies. Oral language production in progress must not be interrupted by corrections.

#### **Principles relating to the learning atmosphere and physical environment**

- The teacher ensures a child-friendly, relaxed, unafraid atmosphere that at the same time offers stimulus and a challenge, and increases willingness to join in.
- Wherever possible, the foreign languages programme should take place in a long-term unchanged learning environment, e.g. always in the same room or the same learning corner, so as to ensure favourable physical circumstances for encouraging the children’s attentiveness and concentration.
- The physical environment for learning should be laid out in such a way that materials and equipment required are readily accessible and usable, so that the even tenor of learning is not disturbed and neither children nor professionals cause needless fuss or disruption during normal everyday work.
- Clear structures in e.g. time-planning, in particular rituals or classroom seating order – things which can easily be made mere routine, e.g. by means of labels and verbal agreements – have the function of automating learning processes, and meet the child’s need for an element of routine.

#### **Principles relating to learning materials and the use of media in learning**

- Media (particularly ‘new media’) should be deployed in a targeted and considered way, and for limited periods of time.
- The use of authentic media and materials (rhymes, songs, stories, children’s books, posters and comparable visual material, television programmes, films) imparts linguistic and cultural content simultaneously.
- In addition to imparting linguistic and cultural content, learning materials should also allow the experience of a sustainable contact with the environment.



## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- So that the holistic development of the child is kept constantly in view during language learning, the methodology and pedagogic principles outlined above should be applied, with discretion according to the current learning situation.

### 3.8 Media

Today, media also permeate the world of children. Among children living in Germany, according to a recent study, television is the most popular and most heavily used of the media, well ahead of audio-cassettes and picture-books<sup>21</sup>. The media are an integral component of the world that children live in, and processing of media impressions is an important part of early childhood accumulation of experience. Accordingly, quite aside from issues raised in current media criticism, the media should perform an important function in early childhood upbringing and education.

The usefulness or otherwise of media depends on the quality of the material, on its meaningful pedagogical integration, and on individual support from parents, early years practitioners and teachers. Media deployed in a way appropriate for the child can bring positive benefit to the development of the learning processes. They contribute to variety in the teaching activities, allow for multisensory learning as well as an individual approach to the learner. They can also be useful in aiding development of the powers of concentration and memory.

In early foreign language programmes, media (understood as the entire range of play and learning materials plus the electronic media) transmit learning content in differing ways. The media can initiate, accompany and support learning processes, and can deepen them by way of the replay facility, and they can also record and document results. By contrast, uncontrolled use of media may significantly impede learning.

For the child's learning process real objects from the immediate surroundings and the natural world, toys, glove puppets, and games including board and dice games are preferred. The most widely used print media include picture cards, text cards, picture books, magazines and textbooks, along with transparencies, posters and placards. Media

requiring technical support include sound recordings, photographs and films, CD-ROMs, online content and e-mail. Digital photo processing, electronic communications and aids such as the interactive board fascinate children and can play a useful role even in early foreign language programmes by imparting information and considerably enhancing learning motivation.

Children involve themselves very actively with media: they enjoy operating the equipment for themselves, and independently. For genuine competence in the media field, nothing can replace hands-on experience. Materials and media used by linguistically qualified pre-primary staff and teachers of foreign languages may be authentic or may have been specially developed for educational use. Materials that have been adapted or edited for educational use should differ as little as possible in content and form from the authentic original material even if they have had to be simplified for classroom use.

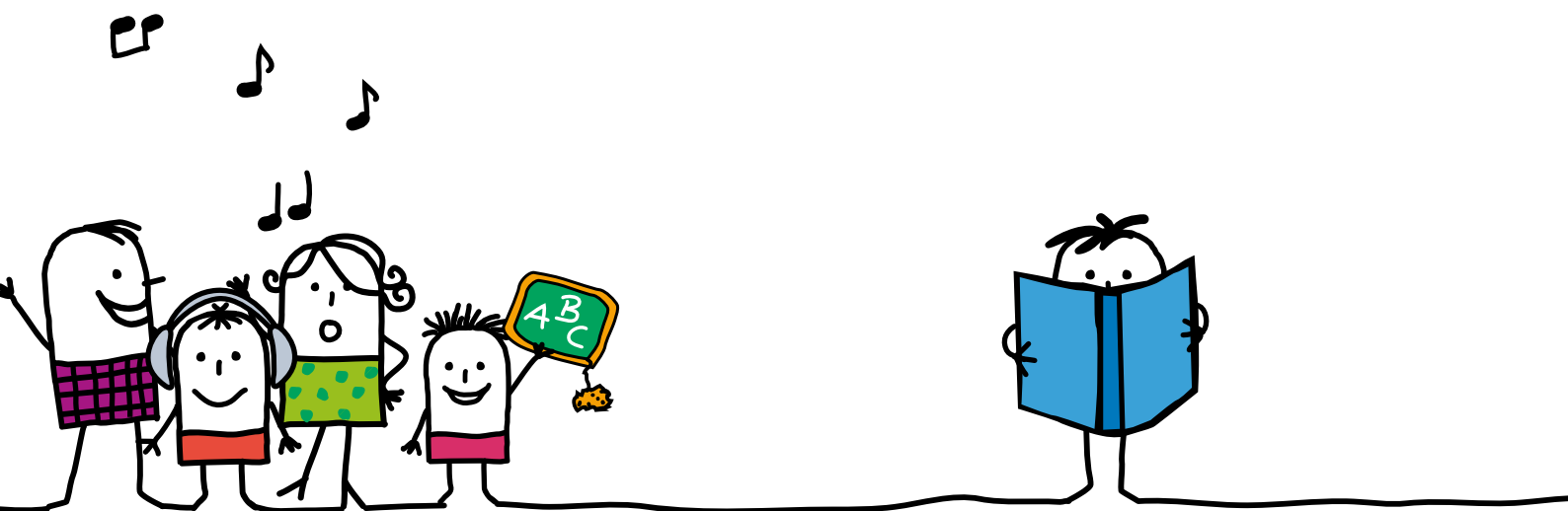
<sup>21</sup> Feierabend/Mohr (2004)





## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Selection and deployment both of traditional and of 'new' media should derive their rationale from the goals, content, methodology and pedagogic principles of early foreign language learning.
- Irrespective of their form, media should be deployed sparingly and on the basis of careful consideration. They should support and enrich the learning process and never become an end in themselves.
- Media use contributes positively to the language learning process, to media education and to gaining media competence. Media experience should be accompanied by the practitioner or teacher, partly so that the children clearly understand its use, partly also to help them judge what value different media have for them personally.
- Practitioners and teachers should be able to recognise the legacy that children have brought with them from their media experiences into the learning programme, (e.g. in re-enacting roles, processing what they have experienced, exchanging views on television programmes with other children, etc.), tap into it at appropriate points, and use these points of reference to aid their understanding of the childhood learning process.
- Children love to be active, and in media sessions should be supported in their wish to play an active role.



### 3.9 Diagnosis, progress recording and evaluation<sup>22</sup>

For practitioners and teachers concerned to keep a responsible eye on childhood learning as it proceeds, it is important to observe and document the learning processes of early foreign language learning and to reflect continuously on all findings. This enables them to identify every child's individual preferences and interests, and to contribute targeted support. But parents must share this approach; above all, the children themselves must engage with the foreign language as consciously as possible, thus equipping themselves to gradually take on responsibility for directing their own learning and making it serve their individual needs.

Essentially, one of two routes may be followed: childhood learning processes may be continuously followed and documented by the practitioner or teacher; or, alternatively, the child learns to evaluate his or her performance by self-observation, on an increasingly autonomous basis.

Children following the first of these routes receive feedback on their language attainment and advice on how best to progress further. The motivation for continued learning can be derived from talking to the teacher and from the awareness that even small successes are observed, and – more importantly – rated as achievements. The documentation generated can be used to trace which learning strategies most benefit the language learning process.

On the other hand, self-observation is the first step towards introspective reflection, and offers a gradual approach to self-directed learning. Progress recording understood in these terms reinforces the sense of self and promotes personality development.

Evaluation results provide teachers with feedback on the success, or of course failure, of their own methodology and pedagogic approach. Individual records kept by the child and completed assignments give some insight into his or her linguistic and social development. The planning, implementation and critical review phases of teaching can be substantially guided by evaluation results.

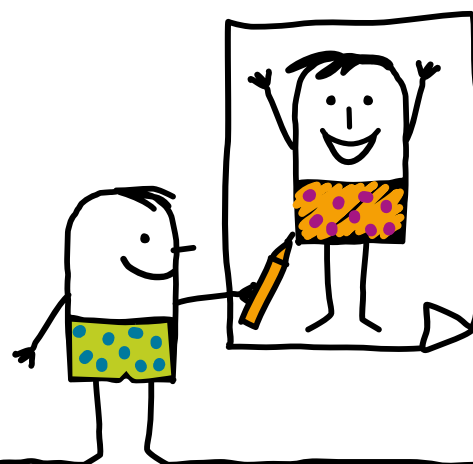
Progress recording by way of self-evaluation supplies parents too with reports on their child's learning progress, as seen from the perspective of the child in question. This makes it easier for them to appreciate and support the separate perspective of the teacher. Learning diaries that the children fill in at

home, and may illustrate e.g. with photographs or drawings of their family and their home, are a way of enabling children and parents to communicate their personal interests discreetly. At the same time they give the teacher access to background knowledge that facilitates a relatively open, partner-like relationship.

If the learning process has been documented from the start in regard to as many of its facets as possible, there will be a much better prospect of avoiding both over- and understretching of the child at the time of moving on to the next type of school. The teaching planning could for instance avoid divergent individual learner development by selective make-up of learning groups.

Evaluation thus serves the purpose of making it possible to trace the learning history through the whole sequence of its individual stages. However, it is not only the results recorded at the end of completed stages that count, as it is above all the individual circumstances and efforts that spur the learner on to more advanced levels.

Procedures for recording learning progress should not differ from the usual activities and learning assignments familiar to the children from their everyday learning environment. Progress records kept by teachers, and self-observation and self-review by children, are not for purposes of assessment and must not be allowed to generate anxieties or undue pressure. For children in pre-school and the early years of primary school it is sensible to dispense entirely with marks and confine oneself to verbal comment and description of the learning



behaviour; this then serves to record the development of competence. Even a tactfully restrained performance measure, let alone performance evaluation, can easily damage the childhood joy of learning, and along with it the motivation to continue.

At nursery school and pre-school, and to begin with at primary school, for example, the child's level of comprehension can be assessed by inviting reactions (mime, gesture, movements, drawing and the like) to material that has been narrated or read aloud. Other skills can be added at a later stage to help in ascertaining the learning progress made; however, care should always be taken to avoid direct questioning and ensure that the modalities devised for recording progress – and, if necessary, judging attainment – are as creative as possible, so that the learning process is not in the end reduced to mere auditing.

The languages portfolio is a progress evaluation tool, documenting both the language learning process and the children's level of experience. Introducing it for a given child indicates that the teacher has previously initiated a gradual empowerment of the child to practise self-observation and self-assessment.

The Council of Europe has initiated the development of official 'European Languages Portfolios' specific to member states. A Portfolio consists of three parts: the language biography, the dossier, and the language passport. They can be produced in a version suitable for early childhood learners.

- The 'language biography' contains personal information about the holder's history of learning foreign languages, about experiences during learning and intercultural encounters, blank grids for registering self-assessments as an aid to evaluating progress, suggested learning goals to help the user compile a learning plan and develop an understanding of the learning paths most suitable for him or her individually, etc.
- The 'dossier' is the user's own compilation of work results produced during the learning process (pictures, essays, poems, CDs, posters etc.)<sup>23</sup>.
- The 'language passport' gives an overview of the portfolio holder's linguistic proficiency in relation to competence levels, and is filled in by the teacher.
- The three elements of the portfolio are used at varying intensity relative to one another depending on age-group. At nursery schools it is the dossier that is used most: it

functions as the basis for reports on learning progress. At primary school the children can be gradually familiarised with work on their language biography<sup>24</sup>.

In addition to self-assessment, the portfolio provides a convenient way of informing others (parents, and teaching staff at entry to a new school or a new level) about the learning attainment of the holder. The portfolio is a particularly useful resource at the time of transition from one level of learning to the next and higher level of school. It is nevertheless not a testimonial, nor a certificate of achievement, but a kind of diary or log, laid out by the child user for whose personal benefit the portfolio is essentially intended.

It is recommended that there should be no institutional pressure to make the portfolio obligatory either for teachers or for learners<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. also BIG (2008)

<sup>23</sup> Rau/Legutke (2008)

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Kolb (2008)

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Burwitz-Melzer (2008) for a model of a language portfolio covering more than one school type

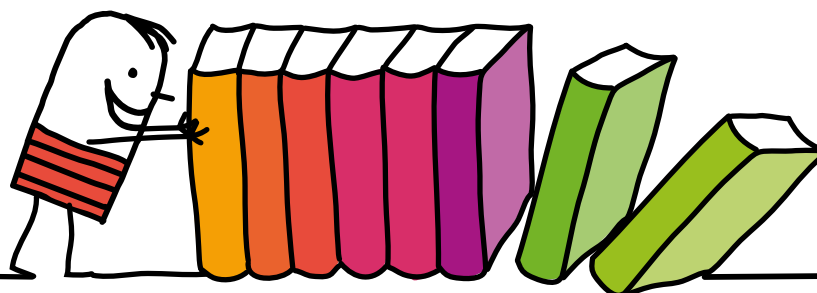
## RECOMMENDATIONS

- In early foreign language learning, learners' progress should be considered primarily in relation to the processes of learning. Excessive focus on learning outcomes should be avoided.
- Every evaluation process should be carefully planned over the long term and followed throughout.
- The portfolio represents a possible tool for progress recording. First introduction at nursery school level and continuation throughout primary and into secondary education are recommended, as this will ensure visible continuity in the learner biography.

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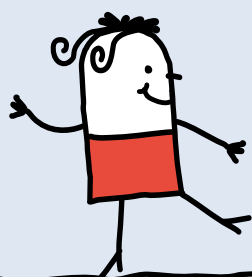
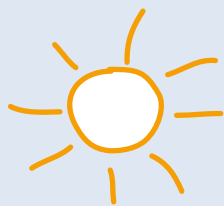
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### Publisher:

Goethe-Institut e.V.  
Dachauer Str. 122  
D-80637 Munich  
[www.goethe.de](http://www.goethe.de)

Graphic Design: ImageDesign Astrid Sitz, Köln  
Printed by: Schöff-Druck + Verlag GmbH, Augsburg  
Illustrations: Cover (globe): ag visuell, fotolia.com, pp. 6/7, 8/9, 16/17, 34/35 NL shop, fotolia.com

ISBN: 978-3-939670-38-4  
Orders: [gimat@goethe.de](mailto:gimat@goethe.de)  
Price: 5 € (plus p & p)



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