

Nuremburg Recommendations (Goethe Institut, 2010)

<http://www.goethe.de/lhr/prj/nef/enindex.htm>

Key recommendations

1 New influences on the learning environment of children

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

2.1 Language policy actors

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

- 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.

2.3 Appropriate concepts for childhood foreign language learning

- 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

- 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.

3 Basic conditions for early foreign language learning

3.1 The child-centred language programme

3.1.1 Developmental psychology and language acquisition

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 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

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

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

- 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

- 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 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

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 cooperate (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

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

- 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.
- 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.
- 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 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

3.5.2 Foreign language competences

- 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 discriminatingly 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

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

- 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.

3.5.5 Reader competence

- 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

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

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

- 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

- 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.