

# **The early learning of English as a foreign language by hearing-impaired children, with particular reference to curriculum modification in special needs schools.**

Anne Royle (2008)

## **NOTES**

This is a summary, in English, of the final thesis in special needs education, accepted by the University of Cologne, Germany, Faculty of Human Science, Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation, Prof. Dr. Thomas Kaul. The original document, written in German, can be downloaded at: <<http://hilarymccoll.co.uk/deafness.html>>

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## **Summary**

English has gained the status of a subject within the curriculum of primary schools in Germany during the past few years. As well as the grounding they receive in the general curriculum, primary-aged children in schools for the hearing impaired are now also taught English. As English had only been made available to a limited group of hearing impaired children in the past, a different perspective needed to be developed.

In this context it is necessary to specify what the goals of foreign language learning are for children with hearing loss. The impairment might raise a barrier if only subject-specific goals are taken into account. Cross-curricular goals, on the other hand, including the development of tolerance and cross-cultural understanding, will elicit interest and promote enjoyment during exposure to the foreign language.

The present thesis aims on one hand to define the situation of hearing-impaired children and the conditions of early language acquisition and curricular specifications. On the other hand, it presents, in comparative perspective, curricular modifications undertaken in three German federal states. Qualitative interviews and questionnaires demonstrate not only how the theoretical principles developed, but also what practical outcomes were first experienced.

The results show that the curriculum modifications provide teachers with support when planning and organising English lessons that can foster interest in another culture. Nevertheless, there will be hearing-impaired children who cannot benefit from the course, depending on the extent of their hearing loss. The unique conditions are not being taken sufficiently into account. Alternative ways of learning a foreign language for children with an auditory impairment must be explored. To base a modification for hearing-impaired children on the regular primary scheme of work, which places the focus on the ability to hear and to speak, is counterproductive.

Positive experiences with alternative learning designs have been developed at secondary and university level for people with special educational needs learning a foreign language. These options should be examined and also considered when planning modifications of the primary scheme of work. An evaluation should be undertaken, similar to the one that took place in the field of English in primary schools. Such an examination must combine research in two fields: (a) the education of the hearing impaired and (b) early foreign language

learning. This is how the European Centre of Modern Languages (ECML) LangSEN Project, begun 2004, proceeded.

When it comes to the introduction of Europe-wide educational standards for English at primary school within Germany, a responsible decision needs to be taken about children with hearing loss taught in schools for the hearing-impaired. The relatively small number of hearing-impaired children in German schools cannot excuse the lack of interest in their advancement and development. As well as identifying how those aspiring to reach basic educational standards can best be supported, a discussion in this field must take public educational standards with various levels of difficulty into account. Children with hearing loss must have the opportunity to develop tolerance and self-esteem through the process of learning the English language. At the same time it should provide them with access to personalised, barrier-free learning, developing their knowledge of the elements of language and communication they will use in their future school career, employment and personal life.