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Early English helps Swiss children learn French

German-speaking children who learn English first find it easier to learn French later, a study has found. Reversing the learning order would probably have the same effect, the researchers say in their report, emphasising the benefits of introducing new languages at a young age.

Critics of the introduction of two new languages in primary school argue that it overstretches the children. But the study "Early English - excessive demand or opportunity?", carried out for the Swiss National Science Foundation, indicates that pupils benefit from exposure to more than one language.

The study examined how well 30 primary school classes, who had already started English, subsequently fared with French. It also tested 20 classes where the children had not previously had English lessons.

It was shown that children benefitted from their previous language knowledge when it came to learning a second new language, in this case French. Pupils who had begun English in third class at the age of nine or ten understood French written and spoken texts better after one year of study than those who had learned only French.

The head of the study, Andrea Haenni Hoti, explained that this better performance was thanks to experience acquired in learning the first foreign language. Learners of a third language can refer back to the second language as well as to their mother tongue. They have a broader range of language comparison at their disposal. Children who grow up bilingual have an additional advantage in aural comprehension.

The early English lessons had no influence on the children's later motivation to learn French. It remained the same as for those

taking French as their first new language. The better the child perceived their knowledge of French to be, the more motivated they were to learn. Girls were overall more motivated than boys.

The study also showed that monolingual children were less motivated to learn French than those who were multilingual.

Weaker students came out worse in the language tests but this should not be an argument to limit the teaching of foreign languages.

The majority of children enjoy language classes, despite the fact that one in four of them said they were sometimes afraid of making mistakes and they felt stressed. There were about as many children who sometimes felt under-challenged.

When language learning is not encouraged at home, this has a negative impact on the acquisition of a second or third language - a problem that cannot be solved by schools.

Some German-speaking regions are applying the model of English from third class (age 9 or 10) and French from fifth class (age 11 or 12).

Other German-speaking cantons such as Bern, Solothurn and Basel introduce French first.

In French-speaking Switzerland, German is introduced in third class.

swissinfo

Corrigendum

Oops! Geography was never my strong subject, so it was a disaster waiting to happen... My apologies to our readers for labelling the Lungerersee on the title page of the November Helvetia "Sarnersee". I'd like to thank our readers who rang up and sent emails and pointed out the mistake. And I would especially like to thank them for being so nice about it.

Trudi

Around 400 children each year suffer severe burns

The Paediatric Burn Centre at Zurich University Children Hospital treats around 400 young burns victims each year. The suffering of young patients at the centre is often great as some have more than 50 per cent burns.

Almost 60 per cent of the patients are aged between zero and three years old and usually have a scald injury from hot water. Forty per cent are older children, usually boys, who have played with fire or fireworks.

Such cases need prompt medical action in the ward. The doctors and their team have to make sure that the body's shock reaction does not cause the blood circulation to collapse.

The children are given a lot of fluid at this stage; a child's body weight might rise from its usual 20 kg to 40 kg.

Once a child is stable, the burned skin, which can release toxic substances into the body, has to be removed. In high percentage burns this causes a large wound - and it is essential to stop it from becoming infected.

This is where skin grafts come in. For this the patient's own skin is used, mostly from the scalp.

It can be a long process, with an operation every second day for up to five weeks. The skin gradually becomes stable and the patient has to wear pressure garments. As the grafts do not grow with the youngster, joint areas may need to be redone.

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Santi Niggi,
Näggi,
hinder em Ofe
stegg i,
Gimer Öpfel und Bire,
so kum i wider fire.

