

Extracts from:

***‘Special Educational Needs in Europe’: The Teaching and Learning of Languages: Insights and Innovation’***

(European Commission, January 2005)

**Who does it talk about?**

... all young people in the European Union, whatever their disability, whether educated in mainstream or segregated schools/streams, have equal rights to foreign languages education. *(Exec. Summ)*

There is evidence of considerable success in foreign language learning across all SEN categories... with even the reportedly ‘most challenging’ of SEN categories in terms of inclusion, namely those pupils with behavioural, social and/or emotional difficulties. *(Exec. Summ.)*

**Why should they be included?**

...to encourage a pupil to bypass foreign language learning because of low foreign language communicative performance expectations is to deny him/her access to these benefits which link directly to European citizenship. *(Exec. Summ.)*

The skills required for the acquisition of language – attention, listening, responding and communicating are those that are an essential part of special needs education. Doing this in another language brings another dimension. Indeed one might argue that such learning engages another part of the brain. There have been pupils who have been able to do things such as counting more accurately and consistently in the second language than in their mother tongue. It is not dissimilar to people who stutter in speech but who can sing with no hindrance – clearly, other parts of the brain are engaged. *(p 50)*

**What sort of courses should they be offered?**

SEN pupils can and do achieve high levels of foreign language competence, but there are those who do not. However, these lower level achievers are able to achieve other benefits, relating to personal and educational development, alongside possibly modest linguistic achievements. *(Exec. Summ.)*

... success extends beyond communicative competence and includes other significant educational domains and key competence-building areas involving personal and social development... success is not a question of foreign language learning for the sake of learning a language, but foreign language learning as a platform for enhanced education and personal development. *(Exec. Summ.)*

**How can they be taught effectively?**

The foundation of good foreign language teaching practice rests on responding to the diverse language learning styles of the individual. This applies to all learners regardless of age, ability or disability... Quality foreign language teaching practice for pupils with SEN requires methodologies which are equally good for non-SEN pupils alongside specific interventions... these methods require enhanced multisensory input and adaptive support. *(Exec. Summ.)*

... most learners, if not all, can be considered 'different' in some ways, at some point in their lives. ... A good foreign language teacher will have generic skills and a diversity-oriented attitude by which to partly adapt teaching to suit the individual needs of learners. It is these generic skills which are the basis of achieving good practice in SEN and foreign language learning. These skills are then complemented by extra input according to the abilities and disabilities of the specific learner (e.g. whether hearing or visually impaired, physically handicapped, having behavioural/emotional problems, or other conditions). (*Exec. Summ.*)

Students who have more positive self-efficacy beliefs (i.e. "I can learn to speak a foreign language") are more likely to work harder, persist and eventually achieve at higher levels... Self efficacy is best facilitated by providing opportunities for the student to succeed on tasks within their range of competence.... (p57)

Student's awareness of his or her own study skills and strategies and learning difficulties is an important intermediate step for strategic learning. (p58)

Successful classrooms have the following elements in common: administrative support, appropriate curriculum, accepting environment, effective teaching, peer assistance, and disability-specific modifications. (p60)

### **CPD issues**

Across Europe, what appears to be lacking is professional integration (p4)

Provision of in-service education of foreign language teachers may not have kept pace with the processes of inclusion and increasing classroom diversity. (*Exec. Summ.*)

If we ask mainstream teachers to accommodate special needs learners into their language learning classrooms, then we need to actively consider how better to prepare them for this task. (p3)

### **Some of the recommendations**

Reiterate that language learning in basic education is fundamental in ensuring a broad and balanced education within member states, and that all learners should have the right of entitlement to opportunities for foreign language learning appropriate to their needs and abilities.

Establish a resonance group geared to production of a publication... which exemplifies good practice... in foreign language learning by special needs pupils across Europe. This would re-assert the role of foreign language learning in personal and social development as defined within human rights legislation, and exemplify its role as cornerstone of education in Europe for all citizens

Establish a specific project consortium to further develop European networking on foreign language learning for both pupils and teachers to allow for direct contact within and across SEN groups.

... outcomes should be described in relation to both linguistic and communicative competence, and enrichment in terms of European citizenship, multiculturalism, interculturalism and individual confidence-building.

Articulate the need for all language teachers, not just those employed as SEN specialists, to be sufficiently trained so as to accommodate the interests of SEN pupils learning foreign languages in mainstream schools.

Examine the extent to which understanding of individual foreign language learning strategies is incorporated into initial teacher education for SEN and non-SEN specialists.

(pages 157 – 160)

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## NOTES

Extracts selected by H McColl, March 2005

*The full 208-page report or a 6-page summary can be downloaded at:*  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lang/key/studies\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lang/key/studies_en.html)