

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE EARLY TEACHING OF MODERN LANGUAGES*

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La question reprise ici est celle de savoir si un début de l'enseignement de langues étrangères avant l'âge de dix ans mène à une plus grande compétence dans la langue apprise qu'un début postérieur.

L'auteur de cet article arrive à la conclusion qu'un début précoce de l'enseignement des langues est à déconseiller à base de considérations empiriques aussi bien que théoriques.

Es wird die Frage aufgeworfen, ob der Frühbeginn des Fremdsprachenunterrichts bei Kindern vor dem 10. Lebensjahr zu einer größeren Kompetenz in der Fremdsprache führt als ein späterer Unterrichtsbeginn.

Der Autor dieses Artikels kommt zu dem Schluß, daß von einem Frühbeginn des Fremdsprachenunterrichts sowohl aus empirischen als auch aus theoretischen Erwägungen abzuraten ist.

If we accept the arguments for introducing at least one foreign language into our educational systems, so that every member of our national communities will be proficient in one language besides his mother tongue, it does not follow that we have to choose an early start for foreign language teaching. Such a decision would only be sensible, if it could be shown that by starting teaching early, better learning results in adolescence or adulthood could be gained. If we exclude bilingual areas or bilingual family situations, it does not seem very important for children of age 7 or 9 to be able to converse in a foreign language to a similar degree as it would be for, say, sixteen-year-olds or adults.

So we get to the root of the matter if we treat it as a purely educational problem: *does an early start lead to a higher level of foreign language competence in the adolescent or the adult years?* The solution to this problem is more than a matter of simple arithmetic. The fact that we have more years for teaching at our disposal if we start with young children is not necessarily an advantage.

First, it may be that older children learn the same thing faster than younger children do. Developmental psychologists have shown in careful experimenta-

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