



Comparative evaluation of the learning outcomes of two language strands at a Vienna Gymnasium. 2008-2010.

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A Vienna Gymnasium runs two language foreign language curricula which are mirror images of each other in terms of time-tabling. One is the standard "English as first foreign language", the other has French in that role; the other language is cast as "second foreign language"; it sets in later with a reduced timetable. The main research question was to see how the competences of final-year students compare in the two languages as parents were feeling that the results for English and French in the two strands in year 12 were not mirror images of each other as they should have been on paper.

For the purpose of the study a 4 skills test was designed at the appropriate B1/B2 CEFR levels. The tests were piloted, adapted and finally administered to the whole cohort on two consecutive days in April 2008, and to the next cohort in February 2009. One further test round is planned for spring/winter 2010. Results from the first two rounds show the expected differential in French, with "French as 1st FL" students clearly outperforming the "French as 2nd FL"-students. Matters are, however, different in the case of English where both groups perform at virtually the same level, the French group even outperforming the E 1st group ever so slightly in the writing test. The only skill where E 1st group are at a clear advantage is speaking. Apart from implications for the individual school, these findings raise interesting questions about the Austrian foreign language curriculum as a whole, where 'early English' is generally given high priority. We would like to conclude that other first



foreign languages might preferably be chosen if European multilingual policy is taken seriously.

Full yearly reports are available from the FDZE upon request. Two MA-theses have developed from the project.

The project has had considerable impact especially on its French side where one of the project members is now involved in testing and standards development on a national level, as testing expertise in the Romance languages is at a premium. A dissertation on testing French is now in the planning.