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**“Curriculum reform and development in Baden-Württemberg with particular reference to teaching English as a foreign language.”**

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# **Curriculum reform and development in Baden-Württemberg with particular reference to teaching English as a foreign language**

Today I am going to talk about the recent curriculum reform and development in Baden-Württemberg with particular reference to the teaching of English as a foreign language. My motives for choosing this topic are twofold: Firstly, as someone closely involved in the training of student teachers, the topic is of relevance and secondly, I hope that my presentation might contribute to the discussion about teacher education and school reform.

My presentation is divided into three main parts:

- I will begin by describing the general nature of the state school system in Germany and in Baden-Württemberg.
- Secondly, I will take a look at how the general recommendations and resolutions agreed upon at a national level are translated into policies and practices at a state level.
- In part three I will describe the curriculum reform of teaching English as the first foreign language as laid down in the 2004 curriculum in Baden-Württemberg.

## **The state school system in Germany and in Baden-Württemberg**

The Federal Republic of Germany is divided into 16 federal states (Länder). Each of these is responsible for the government of its own state. Education, science and research are structured in line with the federal nature of Germany. As a result, central government is only able to decide on and implement goals and measures in conjunction with the federal states, which are for the most part responsible for the school system and cultural matters.

Central government and the federal states work together on the “Commission of Central Government and the Federal States for Education Planning and Research Support”. The federal states agree policy among themselves as part of the *Conference of Ministers of Education (KMK)*. This is an advisory body, which attempts to ensure national comparability through joint agreements. In the absence of a centralized national ministry of education in Germany, the *KMK* performs a national coordinating function for standards in education.

Because the 16 states are self-governing in matters of education, we find regional differences in the education system in Germany and consequently different school forms in different states, depending on the current governing party. The states ruled by the Social Democrats tend to have comprehensive or mixed ability schools, the southern states like Baden-Württemberg (or Bavaria) provide different secondary school forms for students based on individual ability.

This leads me on to a more detailed description of the state school system in Baden-Württemberg. Here most children enter primary school at the age of six (6 months earlier or later is from 2004 on also possible) and pupils of all levels of ability remain together as a group through the fourth grade (sixth grade in Berlin and Brandenburg). Following primary school, when most pupils are around 10 years old, the school system in Baden-Württemberg tracks pupils of differing abilities into different school forms.

Primary school teachers recommend their pupils to a particular school based on criteria such as academic achievement, potential and personality characteristics (such as ability to work independently and self-confidence). However, parents can question the teacher's recommendation.

After completing primary school, children can enter one of three school forms at the lower secondary level (which comprises a pyramid of academic achievement).

1. The secondary general school (Hauptschule), grades 5-9/10, leads to a Hauptschule certificate and then enrolment in a part-time vocational school combined with apprenticeship training until the age of 18.
2. The secondary intermediate school (Realschule), grades 5-10, leads to a Realschule certificate and then to part-time vocational schools, higher vocational schools or the continuation of study at a grammar school.
3. The grammar school (Gymnasium), grades 5-12 leads to A-levels (Abitur) and prepares students for university study or for a dual academic and vocational credential.

On the whole, tracking at the secondary level is rooted in the following assumptions:

- people have different capabilities
- these capabilities can be assessed
- an appropriately tailored education can be provided
- teachers can instruct groups of pupils who are homogeneous in level of ability.

Although pupils are tracked at an early age, there is some flexibility in the system that allows for movement between school forms. It is possible for students to switch to a higher or lower level school form. The latter is more common.

Let me now move on to show how recommendations and resolutions approved by the *Conference of Ministers of Education (KMK)* filter down to the state level to become laws, rules, regulations and curricular guidelines.

## Policies at the state level

It was in 1997 that the conference of Ministers of Education decided to take part in international research projects such as TIMMS<sup>1</sup>, PISA<sup>2</sup> and IGLU<sup>3</sup> to compare the German state school system with other international systems. Since Germany ranked very low in PISA 2000 and the results of the comparison of the German states in PISA-E<sup>4</sup> revealed major weaknesses in the German education system, broad discussion in the media and among policy-makers followed.

As an initial response to PISA, the central government and the states agreed on an action programme for an education reform. In the course of that four billion euro were made available for promoting the introduction of all-day schools. Further core items of the programme were:

- Financial support of the state governments in expanding all-day education and the modernization of schools.
- Definition of national standards binding to an equal extent in all states.
- Development of an independent national evaluation centre to monitor compliance with these standards.
- Introduction of a national system of reporting on education by the individual states.
- Establishment of a national council of educational experts to help government leaders responsible for educational policy and the public, assess and develop the educational system in Germany.

In September 2003 the first German education report presented its results and recommendations<sup>5</sup>. The states had agreed to report on their steps to develop and assure the quality of their education in response to this national report. Despite many differences, all states seemed to set priorities in the following fields (amongst others):

- Language support programmes for migrant children
- A better childcare and early childhood education
- The development of school programmes
- The development of core curricula and education standards

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<sup>1</sup> TIMMS (Third International Mathematics and Science Study)

<sup>2</sup> PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) assessed reading, mathematical and scientific literacy, sponsored by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) 2001

<sup>3</sup> IGLU (Internationale Grundschul-Lese-Untersuchung), 2001

<sup>4</sup> PISA-E results show the importance of social class, migration background and command of national languages for school performance of teenagers. The influence of socio-economic background of parents differ strongly across nations, with the highest impact found for Germany. Educational policy should focus on integration of immigrant children in schools and preschools, with particular emphasis on language skills at the early stage of childhood. The general results for Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg were relatively satisfactory and correspond to the average international results.

<sup>5</sup> It was carried out by the German Institute for educational research (DIPF).

Also policy-makers saw the necessity to evaluate the German education system regularly to obtain reliable statements on its performance. Consequently an independent evaluation agency<sup>6</sup> was implemented in 2004.

To sum up, policy-makers saw as a reason for the below average German results in the international PISA benchmarking study of 2000 (and the growing gap between the different sectors of the German school system) a lack of binding national standards for education and performance.

Binding definitions of targets across the states (e.g. with regard to the skills and abilities which all pupils should have acquired at defined points of time of their schooling) were agreed on and from 2003 onwards gradually defined and set for all subjects or new subject areas. The curriculum 2004 in Baden-Württemberg is based on these national standards. They define which competences pupils must have acquired at the end of certain grades. The following chart shows for which grades the standards are set in the different school forms.

<b>Education standards ...</b>		
	<b>... in grade</b>	<b>... evaluated by</b>
Primary school (Grundschule)	2, 4	diagnostic tests
Secondary general school (Hauptschule)	6, 9, 10	comparative tests
Secondary intermediate school (Realschule)	6, 8, 10	comparative tests
Grammar school (Gymnasium)	6, 8, 10	comparative tests

So how do all these reforms and policies affect the teaching of foreign languages in Baden-Württemberg? How are standards set? What targets for skills and abilities are defined?

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<sup>6</sup> IQB (Institute for quality development and assurance in education), Humboldt-University Berlin

## Curriculum reforms in teaching foreign languages in Baden-Württemberg

Before answering these questions in detail, let me point out three major innovations in the school forms:

- Firstly, pupils now begin to learn their first foreign language English/French in primary school from grade 1 onwards. (English is also taught in special education schools).
- Secondly, there seems to be greater emphasis on the development of oral skills and the teaching of spoken English. Thus in secondary intermediate school a new compulsory form of testing pupils' oral skills has been introduced in their final year, grade 10, the so-called EUROKOM. This oral test consists of three parts, a listening comprehension test, a communicative/situational task and, most important, the presentation of a main topic.
- And finally in the last two grades of grammar school pupils have the option to do an extra new kind of oral test (GFS<sup>7</sup>) in English which can be a project presentation, a written assignment or the performance of a play etc.

To illustrate the above mentioned innovations, I would like to show three short sequences of video recordings from schools. The first one is from a primary school, the second one is a sequence of a EUROKOM presentation from a secondary intermediate school and the last one shows grammar school pupils performing Oscar Wilde's play 'The Importance of Being Earnest' which was staged in the context of an extra oral test in English.

Let us now turn to the difficult question of how the various pupils' achievements relate to standards in teaching/learning a foreign language and how these are defined in the different school forms. Which abilities, skills, competences do pupils have to acquire at primary and secondary school and what are the reference points?

The curriculum designers in Baden-Württemberg adapted its foreign language teaching to the framework and standards articulated by *the Council of Europe's language policy and activities*<sup>8</sup>. This framework is a planning instrument that provides a common basis (and terminology) for describing objectives, methods and approaches, skills, practices and assessments in teaching. It wants to provide a common basis for curriculum development, the planning of syllabuses, examinations, qualifications, teaching materials and teacher training programmes throughout Europe. It thus intends to contribute to easier international educational and vocational mobility.

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<sup>7</sup> GFS (Gleichwertige Feststellung von Schülerleistung)

<sup>8</sup> Council of Europe (2001). *Common Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. It gives a detailed model for describing and scaling language use and the different kinds of knowledge and skills required. It is the result of over ten years' research by a number of applied linguists and pedagogical specialists from the 41 member states of the Council of Europe.

At the heart of the *Common European Framework (CEF)* are the *Common Reference Levels*. These are a broad description of what a user of a language can do at six different levels of performance ranging from *basic* (A1, A2) through *independent* (B1, B2) to *proficient* (C1, C2). These levels function as a reference point both for descriptions of levels/achievements and for definitions of objectives. The following two charts will show how the curriculum 2004 uses the six proficiency levels of the *CEF* as a reference and how they are defined by the *CEF*.

School form	Grade	Levels in the curriculum 2004 according to the CEF
Grammar school (Gymnasium)	12 11 10 8 6	C1 partially B2 B1, B2 partially A2 A1
Secondary intermediate school (Realschule)	10 8 6	B1 A2 A1
Secondary general school (Hauptschule)	10 (optional) 9 6	B1 A2, B1 partially A1
Primary School (Grundschule)	1-4	- <sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The standards set for learning/teaching English as a foreign language in primary school at the end of grade 2 and 4 adopt the terminology and the action-oriented approach of the *CEF* but cannot refer to any of the six proficiency levels since the main focus lies on the development of a language acquisition/learning competence. The underlying teaching principles copy/imitate the way the mother tongue is acquired. Therefore the teaching is action-based, child-adequate, holistic, has elements of play and is cross-curricular.

Common Reference Levels: global scale<sup>10</sup>

<b>Proficient User</b>	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognizes implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
<b>Independent User</b>	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics [...]. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible [...]. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue [...].
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling [...]. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events [...] and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
<b>Basic User</b>	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance [...]. Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment [...].
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details [...]. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person speaks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

<sup>10</sup> Council of Europe (2001). Common Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 24

Within the standards for English as the first foreign language, the following competences, skills, strategies and knowledge areas are stated in the current curriculum.

<b>Curriculum 2004</b> <b>Competences and subject content in ...</b>	
<b>... primary school</b>	<b>... all secondary schools</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Ability to learn languages/ learning strategies</b></li> <li><b>2. Communication strategies and activities:</b> reception/production/interaction strategies; listening, speaking, interaction</li> <li><b>3. Language systems:</b> pragmatic, lexical, phonological, grammatical competences</li> <li><b>4. General competences:</b> knowledge of the world, socio-cultural knowledge, intercultural knowledge</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Communication skills:</b> listening/listening-watching, speaking, reading, writing, mediating</li> <li><b>2. Language systems:</b> phonological, lexical, grammatical competences</li> <li><b>3. Texts</b></li> <li><b>4. Cultural competence:</b> sociocultural knowledge, intercultural knowledge</li> <li><b>5. Methodical competence:</b> learning strategies/ability to learn languages, technology competence and presentation</li> </ol>

The *CEF* provides further detailed sub-scales for each individual competence, skill and strategy.

A contrasting analysis of the previous curriculum 1994 and the present 2004 one suggests no radical, complete redesign of the previous curriculum involving major changes. The overall impression is given that, apart from minor modifications, the proficiency levels of the *CEF* simply label earlier statements and that previous statements on what teachers must teach and pupils must learn in each form, have been rephrased and regrouped into what competences pupils must have acquired at the end of 2 years.

This brings me to the end of my presentation. I would like to point out that at present the issue of standards in foreign language teaching and learning is much discussed. To draw conclusions from practical experience or to speculate about long-term effects would be too early after one year of implementing the new curriculum.

The earlier mentioned innovations, involving more focus on oral skills, are certainly a step in the right direction if one believes the teachers` reactions and estimates. But

hopefully the results of the international DESI<sup>11</sup> study which will be published shortly, will reveal shortcomings of the past foreign language teaching in Germany and allow a more data-based discussion.

As far as the training of foreign language teachers is concerned, the recommendations of the *CEF* are not binding and not explicitly stated in the recent reforms of teacher training in Baden-Württemberg which has now been given a new modular structure.

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<sup>11</sup> The DESI study (German English Student Achievement International) is being conducted by a consortium of researchers from different German universities and the German Institute for International Educational Research (DIPF). It will assess ninth-graders in the different kinds of secondary schools on their communicative, linguistic and intercultural skills in both German and English.

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