



## Successful Completion of the ELIAS-Project

### Researchers draw positive conclusions from the EU-research project on bilingual preschools

The project name ELIAS stands for *Early Language and Intercultural Acquisition Studies* which captures the focus of this EU research project: It is aimed to prepare young people for a Europe that is in the process of growing together as well as an increasingly globalised world. The project combines two goals: attaining thorough knowledge of foreign languages as well as gaining awareness of intercultural competence and the environment from an early age.

Project partners include ten bilingual preschools in Germany, Belgium, England and Sweden, a monolingual English preschool in the UK, as well as eight Universities and the Zoological Garden in Magdeburg, Germany, which carried out the scientific research. The leadership of the project was shared between Prof. Dr. Holger Kersten and Dr. Kristin Kersten at the University of Magdeburg. Bilingual preschools are the most successful method of introducing young children to these concepts: the preschools follow the principle of immersion, whereby children learn the language through a high degree of natural language input from native speakers. A particular feature of the project is found in the bilingual zoo-preschool in Magdeburg, where bilingual learning is combined with environmental learning. This is a new focus which the researchers in the project have called 'Green Immersion'.

The methods used within the ELIAS project include observational records but also a number of standardised and non-standardised language tests which are appropriate for the age groups tested.

The results of the project include the following insights into language learning and intercultural competence:

1. At preschool level, children already learn and successfully apply different strategies of intercultural competence.
2. The children attain a high level of competence in the foreign language (English), whereby language comprehension is in advance of language production. The level of language competence depends on the amount of contact with the language, as well as the language specific teaching methodological principles of the preschool teachers, that is, the way language is used when interacting with the children. Children with migration backgrounds learn the language faster than children with a monolingual German background.
3. The native language is not affected by the intense input in the foreign language, on the contrary: The children's level of German increases developmentally according to their age. Children with migration backgrounds are not as disadvantaged as was initially feared: in line with other studies, it was shown that both languages of the children benefit from an increased language awareness.
4. The children in the zoo preschool show significant progress in terms of bilingual environmental competence ('Green Immersion'). This development was found to depend a lot on the age of the child as well as other individual factors.

Materials like for example modules for teacher training as well as learning materials for bilingual environmental learning, a brochure with information, a guide for setting up bilingual primary schools, as well as various presentations can be downloaded from the website [www.elias.bilikita.org](http://www.elias.bilikita.org). There are made available for use in other preschools and for researchers in this area. A two-volume book publication outlining the scientific and practical results will be published in October 2010.

### Further information:

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