



*THE LINGUISTIC AND EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS
FROM MIGRANT BACKGROUNDS*

STUDIES AND RESOURCES

N° 1

Language diagnostics in multilingual settings with
respect to continuous procedures as accompaniment
of individualized learning and teaching

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– The role of linguistic and intercultural competences'

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LIST OF STUDIES AND RESOURCES ACCOMPANYING THE CONCEPT PAPER ON

The linguistic and educational integration of children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds

1. *Language diagnostics in multilingual settings with respect to continuous assessment procedures as accompaniment of learning and teaching* – Drorit Lengyel
2. *Languages of schooling: focusing on vulnerable learners* - Eike Thürmann, Helmut Vollmer and Irene Pieper
3. *Migrant pupils and formal mastery of the language of schooling: variations and representations* – Marie-Madeleine Bertucci
4. *Capitalising on, activating and developing plurilingual and pluricultural repertoires for better school integration* – Véronique Castellotti and Danièle Moore
5. *Professional development for staff working in multilingual schools* – Jim Anderson, Christine Hélot, Joanna McPake and Vicky Obied
6. *Co-operation, management and networking: effective ways to promote the linguistic and educational integration of children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds* - Christiane Bainski, Tanja Kaseric, Ute Michel, Joanna McPake and Amy Thompson

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Abstract

This study provides an introduction to language diagnostics in multilingual educational settings, with particular reference to the needs of children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds. It summarises the objectives and functions of language diagnostics and the principles that govern diagnostics, including formative assessment, as an integral part of continuous language education that emphasises individualised teaching and learning. From a theoretical perspective diagnostic procedures in multilingual settings treat language learning as a socio-cultural activity. They are thus based on an inclusive understanding of language and draw on evidence from (second) language acquisition research and functional pragmatics as well as (language) assessment research and practice. The study describes practical approaches, such as profile analysis and language sampling, observation and documentation, and self-assessment. These methods have in common that they focus on language development and language learning processes in home languages and/or second or third languages and/or academic language. In other words, they try to meet the needs of plurilingual children and adolescents growing up in bi- or multilingual schooling contexts. When developing policies to promote the integration of such learners, whether they are new arrivals or settled and resident, it is necessary to take account of the multiplicity of their linguistic, cultural and educational experience. Diagnostic procedures are helpful here, since they give teachers and learners themselves an opportunity to explore individual learning experiences, gain a deeper understanding of the language learning process, and consider possible ways of promoting further learning. Finally, the study describes key strategies for the implementation of diagnostics and formative assessment. Research and experience show that there are no “one size fits all” solutions. Educational institutions, local authorities or regions need to develop measures that correspond to their particular language education objectives and programmes.

1. Introduction

This study provides an introduction to diagnostic procedures in multilingual educational settings, with particular reference to the needs of children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds and an emphasis on individualised learning. It summarises the principles that govern diagnostics in language education, describes available approaches, gives examples of tools, and sketches strategies for the implementation of diagnostics and formative assessment. The study is intended for practitioners who wish to include diagnostic procedures as an integral part of language education. When developing policies to promote the linguistic and educational integration of children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds, whether they are new arrivals or settled and resident, it is necessary to take account for the multiplicity of their linguistic, cultural and educational experience. From the perspective of the Council of Europe's project Languages in Education/Languages for Education, the fact they are growing up to be plurilingual in a multilingual environment provides a resource that should be exploited to the educational advantage of themselves and their peers. Diagnostics can play a central role in plurilingual education for at least two reasons. First, its procedures can help teachers and learners themselves to find out about learners' language competences, what they have achieved so far and what needs further development. Second, it helps to establish links between educational goals and individual performance and proficiency. Fundamental to this view is the belief that all languages an individual knows, whether they are acquired outside school or as part of the schooling process, have an essential role to play in language education and the gradual mastery of academic language (Cummins, 2000; Little, 2010).

The term diagnostics¹ is used here to refer to procedures that are relevant to classroom activities and provide information useful to teachers and pupils. Diagnostics in our sense is concerned with the individual learner in mainstream and inclusive educational contexts. It is founded on a qualitative, developmental and socio-cultural view of language, language learning and academic discourse rather than on psychometric models of (language) competence and psychometric traditions of test development (see Leung/Mohan, 2004). The Greek origin of the term ("dia" = "through"; "gnosis" = "insight") implies that diagnosis and diagnostics are a matter of gaining insight beyond the obvious into a phenomenon, behaviour or performance.

The second section of the study concentrates on the objectives, functions and principles of language diagnostics and on the different approaches that can be adopted in multilingual classrooms. It concludes by sketching a broad approach to language diagnostics as an integral part of individualised teaching and learning. In the third section different kinds of diagnostic tool – profile analysis and language sampling, observation and documentation, self-assessment – are shown to play a central role in classroom practice. The fourth section introduces strategies for implementation and provides examples for successful transfer, while the final section brings together key aspects of language diagnostics in multilingual settings.

¹ In some countries, for example the UK, the terms "classroom-based assessment", "formative assessment" and "assessment for learning" are commonly used as synonyms for "diagnostics". Other countries, such as Australia, refer to diagnostics as "ongoing assessment", which emphasises its day-to-day presence in the classroom. The present study uses the terms "diagnostics" and "formative assessment". Formative assessment has been used in multilingual mainstream classroom settings since the 1990s. Teasdale/Leung (2000) discuss the potential of this kind of diagnostic procedure and the problems it poses in relation to psychometric approaches.

Most of the examples are taken from the German model programme FÖRMIG (Förderung von Kindern und Jugendlichen von Migrationshintergrund/Support for children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds),² though examples from other European countries are also drawn on to give an overall idea of different approaches.

2. Language diagnostics in linguistically and culturally diverse educational settings

In most European countries educational authorities find themselves faced with the challenge of ensuring that children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds enjoy the same educational opportunities as their autochthonous peers. Among other things, this entails finding ways of closing the gap between the language proficiency that migrant children and adolescents bring with them to school and the requirements of academic discourse. Research has shown that mastery of academic language can be developed only through engagement with the different curriculum subjects (see Little, 2010; Pieper/Thürmann/Vollmer, 2010a, 2010b), which means that the linguistic and educational integration of children/adolescents from migrant backgrounds depends on how effectively language is brought into focus in mainstream education. The linguistic demands of curriculum subjects change from grade to grade, and it is essential to have ways of measuring educational progress that take account of official policy and its implementation strategies, especially at points of transition from one stage of education to the next. That is why language diagnostics has an essential role to play in inclusive language education across the curriculum. It is necessary to identify the individual learner's level of language proficiency and performance not only in general but in relation to the requirements of academic language at key stages in the educational process. Research and policy generally agree on the importance of providing early language support. Diagnostics helps to ensure that intervention is responsive to the needs of individual learners; it also provides a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of intervention and planning future support activities. Although this has been widely accepted as a general educational principle for several decades, there is a growing need for empirical research that focuses specifically on the linguistic development of plurilingual learners in multilingual contexts.

2.1 Language diagnostics: some general considerations

In general, comprehensive diagnostic procedures have three functions: descriptive, explanatory and prognostic. They describe the proficiency that has been achieved, which enables it to be classified; they explain why the learner performed as he/she did, which means accounting for acquired as well as non-acquired competences; and they predict further development (see Kany/Schöler, 2007).

Diagnostics is a comparative activity based on the measurement of any feature and/or competence. For example, a diagnostic instrument may be used to measure a child's syntactic development in language X. The results are then classified, which means that they

² The FörMig programme, in which ten federal states participated between 2004 and 2009, implemented a network of "developmental partnerships" comprising a "basic unit" (for example, local schools, a municipal day care centre, a parents' initiative and the town administration) and "strategic partners" (for example, the public library, the local education authority, the educational psychology service, a centre for early child development, and a medical association). Educational systems and individual schools take specific measures to ensure that they provide an inclusive environment for all pupils. These measures are held together by an overall concept of continuous language education (see section 4.1 below). For further information see www.uni-hamburg.blk-foermig.de.

are compared with other “observations” of the same phenomenon, in this case perhaps published research on syntactic development. Alternatively the child’s performance may be compared with milestones in syntactic development in language X or with the results of other children in the same instructional group.

Comparison against a social benchmark means relating features, proficiency or achievement to a well-defined reference-group, which may be selected on the basis of age, gender or grade. Typically, standardised tests use age-based reference-groups – usually random samples of an age cohort representative of the population at large and its features, proficiency or achievement at a given point in time. This approach is likely to be problematic when applied to highly diverse populations in multilingual and multicultural settings (see section 2.3 below).

Comparison against a criterion-oriented benchmark means relating features to their developmental proficiency level. Especially when one is investigating child language acquisition it is helpful to apply developmental milestones as benchmarks that derive from language acquisition itself. Such milestones can be described in terms of phonetic-phonological, semantic, morpho-syntactic, pragmatic and discourse features (see, for example, Ehlich/Bredel/Reich, 2008a, 2008b; the authors developed a framework for the acquisition of German as a first and second language and complementary frameworks for the acquisition of Turkish and Russian as home languages in Germany (a process that differs in various ways from the monolingual acquisition of those languages in Turkey and Russia respectively). In educational contexts (developmental) criteria of academic language proficiency – oral and written – are important benchmarks that need to be included in diagnostic procedures. Criterion-oriented benchmarks are clearly linked to learning objectives that are valid in a particular society.

Individual benchmarks provide another basis for comparison. In this case an individual child’s level of proficiency or achievement at a given time is compared with his/her proficiency or achievement level at an earlier date. The focus therefore tends to be on process and change in a more or less long-term perspective. Individual benchmarks are also used to investigate the child’s level of achievement in relation to his/her potential. To find possible “answers” it is important to gather information on the individual pupil’s developmental (pre-)conditions, for example, the cultural and social capital of the family, living conditions and surroundings. Individual benchmarks have a role to play in educational settings: from a motivational perspective research shows that pupils who perform rather poorly grow in confidence if the results they achieve at a particular point compare favourably with earlier results.

Whenever diagnostic tools are used in educational contexts they should correspond to the developmental and language learning stage of the children or adolescents in question. A variety of assessment approaches are available to meet (some of) the demands that multilingual contexts impose on language diagnostics: standardised tests, observation, analytical tools and language samples, portfolios and questionnaires for groups of pupils at different levels of schooling. These diagnostic methods described in section 3.

2.2 Language diagnostics in multilingual educational contexts: an overview of different objectives and procedures

In educational settings language diagnostics can have different overall objectives. Generally speaking one can identify three: administrative, evaluative (to measure the success of

language support), and pedagogical (to plan language education and language support on an individual level). As regards plurilingual learners, the pedagogical objective of diagnostics is to track their development in the language of schooling (their second or third language) and, if possible, their home language(s).

(i) An administrative objective might be to find out how well or poorly pupils are performing in the language(s) of schooling in order to decide how to spend resources (e. g. on additional language support teachers or bilingual education schemes). Alternatively, pupils may be required to pass a standardised language test in order to transfer to secondary school or gain admission to vocational training. Assessment of this kind is linked to decisions that impact on individuals' further educational prospects, and its political and social consequences are a key concern of critical language testing theory (Shohamy, 2001).³ As research has shown, vulnerable groups are badly served by standardised language tests and by instructional changes that lead to the neglect of their individual needs and the exclusion of their home language(s) from their educational experience (see for example Menken, 2008).

(ii) Evaluative objectives are usually linked to the question whether or not learners have achieved the outcomes that pedagogical support was aiming for. Diagnostic tools serving this objective are used in a summative way: learners' language proficiency is measured at the beginning and again at the end of a period of learning. It is essential to use an instrument that focuses very precisely on the intended outcomes. For example, if pupils are taking part in a language support programme that deals with narrative text-production, their outcomes should be measured by an instrument with this specific orientation. In most cases standardised tests are used to achieve evaluative objectives (see Schwippert, 2007; Lengyel, 2008).

(iii) Pedagogical objectives are curriculum-driven and linked to individual learning processes, the goal being to promote the development of learners' proficiency in the language of schooling so that they have full and equal access to all curriculum subjects and to classroom activities that scaffold content and language learning. Cummins (2000) and Gibbons (2002) argue that assessment is integral to pedagogy. It has an "advocacy" function and is an important source of information about pupils' language-learning needs. Furthermore, it can help to make support for individual language learning more effective, facilitating bridge-building between home language(s) and academic discourse and helping to "harmonize" the competences learners bring to school with the language(s) of schooling. In this model, diagnostics impacts on the teaching process in a direct way. Teachers can use specific tools (see section 3) as well as day-to-day teaching and learning activities to diagnose pupils' comprehension and production, and the information they gather can feed into their planning. Diagnostics or formative assessment, then, is an ongoing strategy by which learning is monitored and learners themselves are involved in deciding how far their language performance matches their ability.

³ Shohamy (2001, p. 218ff.) defines high-stakes tests as "instruments of power" that are used by powerful organisations to control and define knowledge in their own terms, often without consulting pedagogical experts and/or curricula. She points out that they have far-reaching consequences and may violate fundamental values, human rights and democratic principles.

2.3 Different approaches

Broadly speaking there are two approaches to diagnostics: standardised tests and alternative, performance-based approaches. In this section I will first discuss standardised tests and then elaborate on the approach that supports individualisation in teaching and learning.

Standardised Testing

Standardised tests are based on test theory (e. g. classical test theory or item-response theory) and use psychometrics to achieve standardisation. They usually divide language proficiency into a number of components and seek to measure the extent to which test-takers have mastered some or all of those components; they are most often used to assess receptive components such as labelling or reading comprehension. Standardised tests have advantages that should not be overlooked. If they use well-defined items and tasks they can be highly reliable, objective and valid. Also, because typical response formats are true/false or multiple-choice, their administration is neither resource-intensive nor time-consuming. Usually standardised tests are used for purposes of accountability, e. g. when an educational program is being evaluated in terms of learning outcomes (the evaluative function of diagnostics) or resources need to be allocated (the administrative function of diagnostics).

When language diagnostics is concerned with multilingual educational settings, however, a number of disadvantages attach to the use of standardised tests. First, because they concentrate on components of language proficiency in a testing situation, practitioners often have problems relating test results to the teaching and learning process. Second, standardised tests generally focus on one language, which means that they model language as a monolingual construct linked to the monolingual prospects/expectations of what is considered a “normal” acquisition process. In other words, they ignore the complexities of growing up bi- or trilingual.⁴ In recent decades test developers have tried to overcome this problem by translating tests from the target to home languages in order to measure proficiency in the latter. This may seem appropriate at first sight but on closer examination complications arise. For example, morphological features vary across languages, and expressions used in one language cannot always be translated into another language. Cultural bias also needs to be considered. Most tests are developed with Western cultural and socialisation norms in mind, and this determines what kind of questions are asked and what kind of pictures are used. As a result such tests may be inaccessible to children and adolescents from other cultures and ethnicities. Research carried out in the Netherlands points out that this is a problem not only when tests are translated but also when the testing language is the test-takers’ target language (see for example Uiterwijk/Vallen, 2005; Vallen, 2007). Another response to this problem has been to use tests from learners’ countries of origin, but again there is an inbuilt bias because such tests take no account of language development in a migrant situation or of growing up plurilingual. A further problem with standardised tests is that they do not assess specific plurilingual competences such as code-switching or translating⁵. From a pedagogical point of view it is important to find out how

⁴ There are two strongly opposed views regarding the education of bi-/plurilingual children and adolescents. According to one view, it makes no difference that they are growing up bi-/plurilingually rather than monolingually, and the same social benchmark should be used to test all members of a particular age cohort in the language of instruction. According to the other view, which comes from applied linguistic and second language acquisition research, growing up bi-/plurilingually does make a difference, and we need one social benchmark for monolinguals in a particular age cohort and a different one bi-/plurilinguals.

⁵ The issue of assessment in plurilingual and intercultural education is treated by Raphael Berthele and Peter

these competences develop and how the various languages in an individual's plurilingual repertoire are linked to one another. Finally, it should be added that from the perspective of socio-cultural theory, standardised tests fail to account for knowledge-building and collaborative language learning in context. That is, they do not reflect the fact that we use language to communicate, to think and to jointly construct meaning. These problems and shortcomings mean that for pedagogical purposes diagnostics should adopt other approaches.⁶

Language diagnostics to support individualisation in teaching and learning

Because it is clearly linked to the pedagogical function of diagnostics, this approach is learner-centred. Its concern is the individual language learner and the (pre-)conditions that influence his/her language learning, language behaviour and proficiency; its aim is to support the language learning process in ways that correspond precisely to the learner's needs. Language diagnostics in the classroom is an interactive process involving teachers and pupils. It focuses on resources and strengths as well as on weaknesses and transitional linguistic elements that have not yet been fully acquired. It thus involves working with a broad and differentiated language construct that takes into account learners' languages (home and target languages, other varieties, dialects), context-embedded and context-reduced speech, oral and written language, discourse functions and genres, informal language and academic discourse, different aspects of the language system, and language learning strategies. From a pedagogical point of view this is very important: in order to plan classroom activities that promote language development it is necessary to know whether all the learner's languages are developing well or, alternatively, there are problems with one or more languages. It is important to find out whether a child can manage oral discourse and informal language well enough to build a bridge to written discourse (genres) and academic language, or whether the basic steps in language development are still in progress and need to be supported. Language diagnostics should also give insights into learners' text reception and production abilities, their command of meanings, terms and concepts, their skill in connecting phrases to form coherent sentences, and so on. It should provide data on genres and discourse functions relevant to the classroom such as explaining, instructing, narrating, reporting, and arguing. Items or descriptors for use in formative assessment evolve out of the linguistic requirements of the schooling process, which means using a criterion-based benchmark. Academic language and the (empirical) description of its linguistic features, structures and genres play a central role.

The procedures used in the individualised approach to diagnostics are influenced by a socio-cultural view of language learning that derives from the work of the Soviet psychologist L. S. Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1986; Mercer, 1995; Gibbons, 2006). They are also influenced by the findings of language acquisition research (mono-, bi- and plurilingual), and thus concentrate on developmental features and changes (such as integration and differentiation) as well as conjunctions between different linguistic dimensions (such as prosodic or semantic bootstrapping). Another theoretical link is with the sub-discipline of linguistic research known as functional linguistics or functional grammar (Halliday/Hasan, 1991), which focuses on

Lenz in a study accompanying the *Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education*

⁶ Reflecting on the social character of language from the perspective of test development and validation, McNamara (2001, p. 333) argues that learners' needs are often poorly served by language assessment theory and practice, and he calls for a re-examination of research priorities in standardized testing.

language, discourse and text in relation to context of use. This kind of diagnostics, then, belongs to the tradition of socio-cultural pedagogy rather than psychometric testing tradition.

Language diagnostics in the classroom brings into focus qualitative aspects of language acquisition and learning as well as developmental processes and changes. Procedures should therefore focus not only on competences and skills that have already been mastered but also on those that learners are in the process of mastering. The notion of “transitional phenomena” comes from language acquisition research findings, especially those concerned with syntactic and morphological development. Because they are not stable they can be modelled and scaffolded via interaction in the “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1986). In order to take account of the dynamics of language learning processes, the assessment of proficiency, performance or achievement needs to be done in several “data collection rounds”: not only at the beginning of schooling but at regular stages throughout the process. In Germany the term “continuous diagnostic procedures” is used to underline this necessity. If they are concerned with language development, diagnostic practices need to be close to language use in natural surroundings and to combine several language dimensions, features and categories. Instruments such as observation and analysis tools are suitable for this purpose because they integrate qualitative aspects of language performance and give insights into how linguistic knowledge is applied in authentic communicative tasks. They focus on language learning and communication strategies as pupils progress through their education (especially in transitional phases), and thus are better described as “assessment for language learning” than as “assessment of language learning”: “Assessment for learning is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there” (ARG, 2002). Assessment for learning thus provides a broad insight into the individual learning process required by language education in multilingual contexts. It also offers the possibility of raising standards and helping learners to become more independent. Little (2009) summarises the characteristics of assessment for learning by drawing on the work of the Assessment Reform Group (ARG) in the United Kingdom as follows:

- it is embedded in a view of teaching and learning of which it is an essential part;
- it involves sharing learning goals with pupils;
- it aims to help pupils to know and to recognise the standards they are aiming for;
- it involves pupils in self-assessment;
- it provides feedback which leads to pupils recognizing their next steps and how to take them;
- it is underpinned by confidence that every student can improve;
- it involves both teacher and pupils reviewing and reflecting on assessment data. (Little, 2009, p.4f.)

In the case of children and adolescents with home languages other than the language of schooling, more is needed. To enhance their achievement in school it is necessary to consider their home language as well as the dominant language of the host region/country. Research has revealed transfer effects between languages as regards, for example, text competence. Imagine a child who is familiar with story-telling in her home language. She will

be able to transfer underlying narrative structures to other languages. If diagnostic tools take account of the individual learner's languages, teachers will be able to detect these "hidden" competences in the home languages. There is also the possibility of comparing these transferable competences on an inter-lingual level. In this case teachers can find out about the learner's dominant languages. Especially when teaching is provided in the learner's home language (Little, 2010, p. 17), diagnostic procedures are needed that account for home and dominant languages in a multilingual socialisation process.

Self-assessment, peer-assessment, diagnostic interviews and criterion-oriented feedback play a central role in developing a "reflective learning culture" (Little 2009, p.15). With particular reference to the European Language Portfolio (ELP), Little explores the relation between pedagogy and (self-)assessment and gives practical classroom examples. Self-assessment on the basis of portfolio work is an ongoing process in which the teacher and the individual pupil between them select samples of the pupil's work. Its aim is to show the pupil's progress in language learning, involve the pupil in decisions about assessment, and provide teacher and peer feedback. The greatest benefit of working with portfolios seems to be that it helps pupils and students to become independent thinkers and autonomous learners (see Hancock, 1994).

3. Examples of diagnostic tools and procedures

3.1 Integrating questionnaires and interviews on language background, development and experience in the diagnostic process

As stated in section 2.3 and in the concept paper on the linguistic and educational integration of children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds (Little, 2010, p. 13), a differentiated exploration of pupils' linguistic background and their experience of languages outside school (at home, in their peer groups), taking account of developmental features, will help teachers to understand their learners' linguistic knowledge and language performance on an individual level. Accordingly, it is necessary to ask some fundamental questions, for example: How much exposure to the language of schooling, in terms of quality as well as quantity, did learners have before starting school? And have they developed literacy skills in their home language? Pupils who attended school in their country of origin should be asked whether they attended classes in their new language of schooling or any other foreign languages. In order to individualise teaching and learning it is also important to get an idea of the linguistic environment learners live in: Who are key persons with whom they use (i) their home language and (ii) the language of schooling? When and where did they begin to acquire the language of schooling – at home, at kindergarten, at elementary school? What other languages play a central role in their life? What kind of exposure do they have to broadcast and other media? Do they have access to books, magazines, newspapers, and television in their home and/or target language? These are just some of the questions that need to be asked in order to form a rounded view of learners' linguistic background and experience of languages outside school. The European Language Portfolio (ELP) can play a useful role here, helping to make learners themselves aware of their linguistic profile.⁷

3.2 Analytical approaches

Profile analysis was first used as a diagnostic tool in first language acquisition research and language pathology (Crystal/Fletcher/Garman, 1976) and subsequently adopted by

⁷ see <http://www.coe.int/portfolio>

researchers in bilingual and second language acquisition (Clahsen, 1985). Its objective is to assess aspects of language development at greater depth and more holistically than standardised tests are able to do. If the focus is on oral proficiency, stimuli of various kinds are used to elicit authentic speech, which is recorded, transcribed and analysed. If the focus is on written discourse, learners are given genre-specific assignments, for example, to write a story. When the data have been analysed, the teacher receives a “learner profile” of competence in key dimensions of language: discourse-pragmatic, morphological-syntactic, semantic, phonological (for speaking), and orthographic (for writing). Because profile analysis is based on criteria and categories derived from the language acquisition process itself, it uses a criterion-oriented benchmark.

The analytical approach is also referred to as language sampling (for example by “The National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum – NALDIC”). In language sampling a learner’s performance of a classroom task is recorded for subsequent analysis, which reveals the learner’s actual and developing competences. This is a useful way of making teachers more aware of an individual learner’s competences and needs; it also helps us to understand the different pathways that migrant learners take in their acquisition of the language of schooling.

Examples of tools

In Germany researchers have developed profile analysis tools that focus on bilingual children and adolescents. Other analytical tools are also available, like the “Zürcher Textanalyseraster” (Nußbaumer/Sieber, 1994) from Switzerland, which focuses on procedural aspects of text production but is not designed for use with bi-/plurilingual learners. Tools of this kind follow the principles summarised above and have been used for many years by researchers and educational practitioners to measure textual skills, so there is a wide range of experience to draw on.

The profile analysis approach applied to oral discourse – an example

HAVAS 5, an instrument of the federal state of Hamburg, is designed for use with pupils aged five to six years who are in the transitional phase between kindergarten and primary school (Reich/Roth, 2004). It focuses on oral proficiency (usually pupils of this age have not yet developed literacy skills) using a picture stimulus called “Cat and Bird”. The stimulus consists of six pictures that tell a story: a cat tries to catch a bird; the bird flies away and escapes to a tree; the cat follows and jumps on to the tree; in the end the cat sits on the tree mewing and the bird sits on a wall singing. The child’s account of what happens in these pictures is recorded and analysed using a differentiated questionnaire (“Auswertungsbogen”). In this way it is possible to assess how the child accomplishes the storytelling task and how well he/she masters the communicative situation. Lexical, morphological, syntactic and coherence features are also analysed. HAVAS 5 is a multilingual tool designed for use with languages such as German, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish.⁸ Russian, Turkish and Polish are the most widely used immigrant languages in Germany, so the instrument meets the central requirement of including at least those home languages in the diagnostic process. Quantitative results (scores) can be compiled in order to compare proficiency in two languages (for example, Turkish and German; Russian and German); at the same time, qualitative, in-depth

⁸ Greek and Bulgarian versions are under development.

observations can be noted (for example, communication strategies, code-switching, borrowing or transitional phenomena), which give an insight into the language acquisition process. Aspects of grammar cannot be compared, however, because of the structural differences between languages (for further discussion of this point, see Reich/Roth, 2007 and the literature they refer to).

Genre specific tasks using the profile analysis approach

For children aged 10-12 (grades 4 to 5/6) the authors of HAVAS 5 and other experts (Reich/Roth/Dirim/Gantefort/Pütz-Legtchilo, 2008⁹) have adapted its basic construct to a genre-specific task, the so-called “Tulpenbeet” (“Tulip Bed”), which uses a series of pictures from which one picture is missing. This tool measures basic language proficiency, but it also focuses on academic language in a specific genre, narrative, linked to curriculum objectives in language as a subject. Criteria include coherence and cohesion, reference, sentence complexity, and features of academic discourse in different languages. The tool and its analysis questionnaire (“Auswertungsbogen”) are available in German, Turkish and Russian, and like HAVAS 5 it allows users to describe, analyse and diagnose proficiency across languages. This is important for the teaching/learning process, because when learners have already acquired text competence in their home language, it can help them to master text production in different genres in their second or third language. The competences learners have developed in their in home languages can also be exploited in contrastive language work in the classroom.

Computerised analytical tools have also been developed. One example is TULPE L2, which is based on “Tulpenbeet” but has an even broader category system and can be used with different picture stimuli with pupils up to 16 years old (Schründer-Lenzen/Henn, 2009).

Another research group (Reich/Roth/Dirim/Döll/Pütz-Legtchilo/Mihaylov, 2009)¹⁰ has developed a genre-specific task for use with adolescents who are making the transition to vocational training. The task assesses the productive text competences required in a vocational context, like writing a job application or an instructional text for a magazine (“Instruktionsanleitung”). Analysis of learners’ texts reveals genre-specific competences in relation to academic and subject-specific language. As with “Tulpenbeet”, the task is available in German, Turkish and Russian, and thus meets the language needs of the two largest immigrant groups in Germany.

Summary

It is clear that analytical tools do not work in the same way as standardised tests. However, the developers of such tools make every effort to meet the same rigorous standards as psychometric tests. For example, teachers who lead their pupils through the HAVAS 5 storytelling task use clearly defined elicitation techniques. Thus although the assessment situation is close to an authentic storytelling activity, it is possible to compare one performance with another. Similarly, genre-specific tasks are introduced and managed using standard procedures and a fixed time is allowed for task completion. In addition, in their quantitative dimension analytical tools use scales that have been shown to be reliable across languages and yield satisfactory measures of inter-rater reliability.

⁹ For further details see www.blk-foermig.uni-hamburg.de

¹⁰ For further details see www.blk-foermig.uni-hamburg.de

The strength of the analytical approach is that it can provide an in-depth diagnosis on the basis of a single language sample. This makes it more likely that individual characteristics will emerge, which should have important consequences for the shape and direction of language support in the classroom. Because the approach entails working with rather than just testing language, it results in greater sensitivity to the learning of languages in multilingual educational contexts and to academic language and its complexity. If teachers are to use analytical tools effectively, they need to become familiar with them during their professional training. Results from the FörMig programme indicate that teachers who received training during the programme think of themselves as more professional in diagnosing language proficiency and are thus more confident than previously. Schools also reported that they were using the learner profiles to guide language support in the classroom by specifying individual needs and language learning goals. Some projects also used descriptors from the profile analysis tools to develop materials in home languages and the language of schooling.¹¹

3.3 Observation tools, self-assessment and documentation practices

Observation is something we all do on a daily basis; it enables us to describe, analyse, evaluate and interpret situations, behaviour and activity, and thus to get along in “the real world”. Observation in this sense is generally an unconscious process that shifts back and forth between observing and interpreting. Observation as a diagnostic process, on the other hand, maintains a clear distinction between describing what is perceived and analysing and interpreting what is described. It follows strict procedures, basing description on clearly defined criteria and categories. If observation is to yield helpful information it must be purposeful and goal-oriented, explicit and systematic. In order to be reliable and accessible to others observed data must be transparent, recognisable and comprehensible. It must be clear, for instance, what the observation is focusing on, how the behaviour or situation under observation is categorised and classified, why particular criteria or descriptors are being used, what they mean, and where they come from in terms of theoretical background and empirical research findings. Observation in an educational context is thus a demanding and highly sensitive procedure that requires appropriate training. Otherwise the observer will not be able to control some of the basic and typical sources of error such as the “self-fulfilling prophecy” (which refers to the influence of advance information on the observer) or the so-called “halo effect” (which refers to the impact of first impressions on observation) (see Kany/Schöler, 2007; Lengyel, 2009, pp. 148-158). Although observation as a diagnostic procedure is quite a challenge, it also has a great deal of potential, especially in multilingual educational settings. It can easily be integrated into classroom activities, most notably in cooperative and individual learning sessions; authentic language performance, whether oral or written, dialogic or monologic, can be observed; it can be undertaken at any point in the biographic-educational process; and from a theoretical perspective it provides a means of investigating language learning through interaction, language use in group activities, collaborative meaning making, and qualitative changes in academic discourse.

Working with key-stage descriptors to promote second-language development in the classroom

¹¹ See for example the didactic materials developed in Hamburg on www.li-hamburg.de/bf.1120...2/index.html

During the FörMig programme the so called “Key-stage descriptors for German as a second language” (Niveaubeschreibungen für Deutsch als Zweitsprache) were developed by Hans H. Reich and Marion Döll in co-operation with the federal states of Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein. The descriptors embody an innovative approach that links standards in language as subject to the curriculum framework for German as a second language in Saxony. They focus on competence and competence progression at primary and secondary levels, the aim being to define language learning targets for all learners and the successive key stages through which they pass in achieving these targets. Because the descriptors combine general educational standards with the second language curriculum, they make second language progression visible both for language teachers and for teachers of other curriculum subjects; by supporting second language development across the curriculum, they provide a framework for discussion of language learning and possible ways of supporting it. The descriptors are divided into seven categories: discourse functions (reception and production), vocabulary, phonology, reading, writing, grammar (oral and written), and personality traits such as motivation. Key stages were defined for all categories. From Stage I to Stage III learners gradually increase their proficiency in the language of schooling, while Stage IV specifies objectives using the standards for language as subject. For further information, see Döll (2009).

This tool has been tested in the field both by language teachers and by teachers of other subjects. They found that it helped them to select pedagogical activities, observe their learners, and report on learners’ performances and progress over time in a more professional manner. Teachers also said that they had some problems understanding the linguistic terminology used, which led to the provision of a substantial glossary. Inter-rater-reliability and the validity of the instrument are being explored in a follow-up study by Marion Döll and İnci Dirim.¹²

As noted in the concept paper (Little, 2010), other Council of Europe member states have also elaborated curricula for second language acquisition, for example, the “[Framework of Reference for Early Second Language Acquisition](#)” developed by the Nederlandse Taalunie for pre-school education and Norway’s curriculum for “Basic Norwegian for language minorities”¹³. To combine these curricula with general language curricula and observation categories, e.g. descriptors that focus on the second language learning process, is challenging but seems to be a promising way of providing learners with criterion-oriented feedback, making standards explicit, and promoting second language learning in mainstream classrooms where second language learners are put together with native speakers.

In the United Kingdom NALDIC has developed a similar approach to formative assessment for learners of English as an Additional Language at Key Stage 1 (5–7 years) and Key Stage 2 (8–11 years). Seven levels are defined for each Key Stage, from Level 1 (“New to English”) to Level 7 (“Competent users of English”) via a succession of transitional stages. Descriptors for the secondary Key Stages are under development. As the NALDIC website explains, the descriptors “are especially designed to help to improve educational practice for pupils who have to learn the English language as well as the content of the curriculum. [They] take

¹² The instrument’s preliminary version, which has been implemented in all schools in Saxony, is available on <http://www.sachsen-macht-schule.de/sbi/10111.htm>

¹³ The Framework and the curriculum are available at <http://www.coe.int/lang> (PLATFORM OF RESOURCES AND REFERENCES FOR PLURILINGUAL AND INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION) under LANGUAGE(S) OF SCHOOLING, FURTHER RESOURCES.

account of the different entry points of learners, with respect to age and curriculum demands, and show progression in the context of the full curriculum.” The descriptors are meant to help teachers

- a) recognise the progress made by learners as they move through the various stages in the long process of developing the language of schooling;
- b) gain professional knowledge of the long-term developmental trajectories in a second language, which is necessary in order to support pupils’ language development through the curriculum on a day-to-day basis;
- c) develop professional expertise in noticing pupils’ accomplishments, diagnosing their language learning needs, and offering guidance to lead pupils to achieve their next level of learning (see <http://www.naldic.org.uk/docs/research/assessment.cfm>)

NALDIC’S formative assessment model is based on the theory of educational assessment in general and language assessment and testing in particular and takes account of empirical research findings. It also draws on theoretical frameworks and empirical research in pragmatics, functional linguistics and second language acquisition. Supplemented by examples drawn from classroom practice, the descriptors refer to content as well as language learning. The development of NALDIC’s assessment framework is an ongoing process of review and revision that incorporates research findings and evidence from practice.

Continuous observation of the second language writing process (in content classrooms)

Developed by a group of researchers and practitioners from various federal states in Germany during the FörMig programme (Lengyel/Reich/Roth/Heintze/Scheinhardt-Stettner, 2009), this instrument is concerned with academic language learning by secondary students from migrant backgrounds in mainstream content classrooms (e.g. mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, politics, social studies, geography, history). The instrument provides a framework for the formative assessment of learners’ progress towards mastery of written discourse functions like arguing, reporting, explaining, describing, instructing, and reasoning. To guarantee curricular validity, the curricula of content subjects were analysed and required discourse functions were identified. Since terminology varied greatly across curricula, the developers decided to adopt the functional pragmatic tradition of speech acts/discourse functions in institutional settings (Ehlich/Rehbein, 1986; Ehlich, 1991, 1994). At present the tool can be used to observe skills in reporting, describing, explaining and arguing (other functions will be added in the near future). Each function is divided into six competence levels as regards lexical appropriateness, syntactic complexity and textual coherence. Competence levels are defined with reference to empirical research on textual genre development in German (see for example Augst/Disselhoff/Henrich/Pohl/Völzing, 2007). When teachers assign their learners written tasks like explaining concepts in mathematics, describing pictures in art, and reporting research findings from a science project, the framework can be used to assess learners’ writing in terms of content objectives as well as language learning. It can also be used in the planning of classroom activities that focus on content and academic language: Which discourse functions does the task require? Why are they required? Which language abilities do pupils need if they are to meet expectations? What kind of language routines and exercises do they need? Besides providing learners with individualised criterion-oriented feedback, the framework can be used to support teacher-pupil dialogues/diagnostic interviews.¹⁴ The instrument was field-tested by teachers during

the FörMig programme. They used it to observe pupils' second language development in reporting and explaining as they performed curriculum-based tasks at three points in the course of a school year. As a result of using the instrument, content teachers became more aware of the linguistic demands of classroom activities and the importance of their own modelling role in continuous language education. The instrument also enhanced co-operation between language and content teachers.

A broad approach to observation, self-assessment and documentation

To give an example of broad diagnostic approaches that use observation, documentation and learner self-assessment, I will briefly describe procedures from Sweden and Germany. The Swedish example is part of a holistic approach which combines curriculum, diagnostic materials and tests in Swedish and Swedish as a second language. Whereas curriculum content tests are designed for grade 5, grade 9 and upper secondary education, diagnostic materials are used from pre-school to 5th grade and from 6th to 9th grade. They should not be seen independently of their educational setting and grades but they can nevertheless be used to observe pupils' development over several school years (Garme, 2005, p. 242ff; see also www.nordiska.uu.se/hatprov). The diagnostic materials are designed to allow not only the teacher but learners themselves to monitor their language development.¹⁵ In the case of children and adolescents who are growing up plurilingually, home languages are included in the process alongside Swedish as a second language. Since home languages are school subjects with their own curricula and evaluation standards, teachers can bring in their observations from both subjects. A holistic approach of this kind takes account of child language acquisition, children's communicative competence in their various languages, the language incentives provided by the environment, and typological and structural differences and similarities across languages (see section 2.3 above).

The Swedish materials are designed to illuminate pupils' strong and weak points, with a focus on the language learning progress. Observations are documented and can help the teacher in planning the continuation of the course as well as in so called "personal development dialogues". A general framework ensures that the teacher's observations and insights are systematic. The materials also include an observation table for each child, teachers' instructions and a poster to display on the classroom wall (the poster is supposed to stimulate learners to reflect on their language proficiency and development). The observation scheme consists of two sections: communicative language proficiency and reading/writing skills, focusing on key dimensions of these competences. Each section contains assessment descriptors logically linked to one another and based on the chronology of language acquisition.¹⁶ In recording their observations teachers are expected to consider whether the tasks they give their learners correspond to their interests and abilities. Accordingly, aspects of the individual learner's behaviour and of language learning processes are included in the tool. Observation can take place either spontaneously or in relation to predetermined tasks and pupil-centred activities. Either way, findings need to be documented using the observation scheme. It should go without saying that schemes of this kind are not intended to be used to compare learners with one another but to gain insight into the individual learner's progress and achievement (individual benchmark).

¹⁴ For further details and ordering options see www.blk-foermig.uni-hamburg.de

¹⁵ For further discussion of self-assessment in language educational contexts, see Little (2009).

¹⁶ An overview of the various components of the diagnostic materials (and tests) from pre-school to 12th grade is available at www.nordiska.uu.se/hatprov

Another example of a broad approach is the documentation tool developed in Berlin to support the language development of migrant children in the transition from kindergarten to primary school (Lerndokumentation Sprache – Documentation of Language Development; Senatsverwaltung Berlin, 2005;¹⁷ Carls, 2009). This scheme comprises three parts: a documentation sheet (or report form) for the individual child, a comprehensive guide for teachers, and a portfolio for the child. The portfolio is designed to be used in first and second grades and offers the possibility of incorporating a so-called “language learning diary” that children and their teachers use in kindergarten. The scheme is an instrument for performance-based observation and documentation of individual language acquisition with particular reference to phonological awareness, auditory perception, oral discourse, grammar, text reception and production, and orthography. The teacher gathers evidence of pupils’ performances in order to examine their language development in depth and to individualise her teaching. Home languages are addressed by using a questionnaire at teacher-parent meetings. Parents are asked to provide information on their child’s acquisition of the home language, language use outside school, literacy activities in the home, and so on. Evaluation of the scheme showed that teachers tended to use the documentation instrument in conversations with parents to show them how their child’s language development was progressing and what aspects needed to be improved. Teachers also reported that the documentation form was a suitable way of finding out about children’s resources, strengths and interests – information that could be used to engage the individual child in his/her own language learning process.

Broad approaches to diagnostics, including documentation and self-assessment procedures, can play a significant role in making implicit language standards and expectations explicit. The use of implicit language standards was common practice in “homogeneous” classrooms attended only by native speaker pupils, but it has been rendered obsolete by pupils’ heterogeneous language socialisation experiences. Tools of the kind we have been discussing in this section have an impact on individual learning, monitoring on the micro-level, future planning, and learning-centred dialogues with pupils and/or parents. They take as their starting point what pupils know and can do, which allows for the fact that pupils may have a rich variety of linguistic experiences. It is important when working with children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds to find out about the (linguistic) resources they can bring to bear on their language and academic learning.

4. Implementation strategies – some examples

As section 3 has shown, there are a number of ways to gather evidence of migrant learners’ language development and learning potential. But whichever approach to diagnostics is chosen, it is still necessary to find ways of embedding diagnostic procedures into the administrative and classroom practice of the school. If formative assessment and language diagnostics have not been part of teachers’ pre-service training, their use may easily be treated as an optional extra unless effective strategies are put in place. This section provides an overview of the implementation strategies devised by the model programme Förmig.

4.1 *Establishing a language concept and integrating diagnostics as a standard*

The first step towards successful implementation is to work on a concept of language learning that will provide the basis for diagnostics in one or more institutions. This requires a

¹⁷ Available at www.foermig-berlin.de

process of negotiation that should involve all members of staff in order to ensure their commitment to the concept and to language learning across the curriculum. In FörMig a primary school undertook this task in collaboration with six kindergartens, developing a concept of language learning in which formative assessment played an obligatory role. In this way the institutions involved developed a common understanding of diagnostics and also of the areas in which compromises would be inevitable.

The model programme FörMig has developed an institutional framework for continuous language education and language diagnostics. Academic language is the overarching objective in this concept of language education. The goal is to give all pupils access to academic language, whether they are bi-/plurilingual or not, which means that standards of academic language must be made explicit in terms of linguistic features, structures, discourse functions, and so on. Because academic language is seen as the indispensable tool for effective content learning, language(s) across the curriculum and scaffolding language in content classes are two fundamental principles linked to this idea of language education (see Cummins 2000, Bourne 2003). The framework assumes that language proficiency will develop best when there is balanced and coordinated provision of multiple, rich, and varied stimuli for language learning in content as well as language classrooms. It also assumes that the various languages in individual learners' repertoires can be developed at school in a variety of ways, which reinforces learners' sense of identity and helps to give them equal educational opportunities (the concept paper (Little, 2010) briefly describes some possible approaches). Discovering that a child already has some experience of literacy in his or her home language can help the teacher when it comes to developing literacy skills in the language of schooling because it enables her to focus on the underlying concept of literacy, which can be transferred to the new language. The coordination of development in home language(s) and language(s) of schooling can help to make language learning more effective in other ways. Besides facilitating the explicit use of transfer processes and procedures, it supports the early development of language awareness and fosters the growth of analytical skills and the capacity for self-monitoring. What is more, linking the home languages of migrant learners to the overall goals of language education benefits monolingual as well as plurilingual learners, bearing in mind that linguistic and cultural diversity is a central aspect of daily life for a wide range of children and adolescents, especially in urban areas. Home languages can be used from time to time to make sure that academic content has been understood, but also to illustrate linguistic similarities and contrasts and to give a multilingual dimension to projects in content subjects like geography, literature, and history. Diagnostics, especially procedural techniques that focus on individualised and cooperative learning and teaching, plays a central role in continuous language education, making it possible to match pedagogical activities with individual learner needs.

4.2 Co-operation

Co-operation plays an essential role in the successful implementation of diagnostic procedures. In the model programme FörMig schools that succeeded in introducing diagnostics established teams to promote and manage the process. This meant that responsibility was shared among the team members and procedures, findings and results were constantly discussed and reflected on. In a few cases teachers of heritage languages and teachers of German as subject worked together. They were able to arrive at a holistic view of learners' competences in both languages, which meant that support for children growing up bilingually could take account of home languages as well as German. The

procedure can be illustrated by a practical example. In one primary school a language promotion team was established. The team members discussed different diagnostic approaches and decided to use the profile analysis tool HAVAS 5 (they had already been trained in its use), applying it to home languages and German as language of schooling. They introduced the tool to their colleagues at meetings of the whole staff, showed how working with it revealed progression in learning, and integrated HAVAS 5 in the school's language promotion policy. The staff appreciated this way of proceeding, which also ensured transparency for parents and pupils.

Co-operation between language and content teachers is also important. Language teachers can help content teachers to apply diagnostic tools, understand the findings and develop strategies for future action. At the same time content teachers have their own contribution to make to the development of learners' proficiency in the language of schooling. Success is likely to depend on negotiation and co-operation, which are often seen as time consuming. However, teachers who have engaged in these processes report that it is time well spent because it benefits both teaching and learning (for more examples see also Bainski/Kaseric/Michel/MacPake/Thompson 2010).

4.3 Training the staff

Another key to successful implementation is training, which should include learning about language acquisition in plurilingual settings, multilingualism in educational contexts, and how to use diagnostic procedures to support language learning in the mainstream classroom. Training is most likely to be effective when it is carried out over an extended period. In a long-term perspective language diagnostics in multilingual settings should become an obligatory part of pre-service teacher education.¹⁸

4.4 Combining tools

Especially in the early stages of implementation it is possible to save time and resources by combining tools. Spolsky (1992, p.37) argues for a multilevel system that combines testing and formative assessment, and an example from FörMig shows how such a combination can work. Some of the primary schools involved in the model programme began by using a computerised assessment task in German and Turkish to screen the general language proficiency of all pupils starting school for the first time (in those schools Turkish was the dominant immigrant language and the first/home language of most pupils). The task in question was an adapted version of *Toets Tweetaligheid*, an easily administered standardised test developed by the Cito Groep in the Netherlands (see www.cito.com); a number of children can be assessed simultaneously, and the computer delivers results quickly. After this the teachers used HAVAS 5 to look more closely at those children whose test results gave cause for concern. By using a standardised test to gain an overall view, the schools were able to concentrate their profile analysis, which is time-consuming and resource-intensive, on those learners most likely to benefit from it.

4.5 Application of tools linked to academic objectives

Some of the tools discussed above apply a criterion-oriented benchmark, using descriptors to link curriculum, academic objectives and classroom activities. Teachers and schools find

¹⁸ The NALDIC website offers a useful overview in this field and practical information. See also some helpful web-resources in Anderson/Obied/McPake (2010).

this approach very attractive, which perhaps explains why it seems easier to implement than other tools. By making standards, criteria and expectations explicit to teachers and learners, we provide them with a set of guidelines they can rely on. We also enhance learners' ability to monitor and self-assess their language learning and help them to build identities as successful learners. In this connection it is important to recall that teachers often have low expectations of learners from migrant backgrounds, whereas research carried out in the United Kingdom has shown that high expectations are as important for them as for autochthonous learners. Assessment for language learning connected to academic language objectives and overall learning goals can help to maintain high expectations because it makes explicit the path to be followed.

Conclusion

This study has explored the principles that underlie language diagnostics designed to support continuous language education in multilingual settings. Diagnostic procedures that focus on individualised learning and teaching are located within a theoretical framework that views language learning as a socio-cultural activity. This implies an inclusive view of language, which is especially appropriate when dealing with learners who are growing up bi- or plurilingually. The design of diagnostic procedures takes account of (second) language acquisition research and functional pragmatics as well as (language) assessment research and practice. The study has also provided an overview of the aims and functions of language diagnostics and summarised different approaches, describing a number of available tools. Different methods and tools were seen to share the same objective: to assess individual development in home languages and the language of schooling, especially academic language, in order to respond more precisely to individual needs. By applying diagnostic tools and reflecting on their findings, teachers can understand the “bigger picture” of language development and learning over time. Some tools can also help learners to develop self-assessment skills, making them more autonomous and independent in their learning.

In linguistically and culturally diverse classroom settings there can be no “one size fits all” approach to language diagnostics and language support. Rather, it is necessary to devise solutions that match the objectives, curricula and programmes of regions, municipalities and even individual schools. Some of the key strategies and examples of successful implementation described here may help to identify appropriate first measures.

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