

# A Dedicated English Portfolio for a Bilingual Primary School

A Project-in-Progress to Address the Transition Challenge  
and Augment the Agency of Learners at a Bilingual Primary School  
(and Other Primary Schools)

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**Abstract:** A bilingual primary school has initiated a project to address the “transition challenge” the children at the school, all of whom have bilingual classes from the start of Year One on, will face in the subject English when they go to secondary school. Working with researchers, a teacher from the school is developing a flexible, easily adaptable self-assessment portfolio that learners are able to present at secondary school so that their new English teachers can build on what the children have learnt and can do. This contribution relates some of the decisions and experiences this project-in-progress entailed in its first implementation with children in Years One and Two. For example, the project team observed informally that working with the portfolio and reflecting on their learning process and progress promotes the children’s agency and autonomy. While the portfolio is a practical instrument initiated at grassroots level, the data gathered are undoubtedly of interest to researchers and provide evidence of the benefits of starting English in Year One, and of an inclusive, across-the-board, immersive bilingual policy.

**Keywords:** bilingual primary school, portfolio assessment, CLIL, “creaming” effect, transition challenge



## 1 Introduction: Bilingual primary schools and the transition challenge

While more than one-and-a-half thousand secondary schools in Germany offer Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) streams or modules in which content subjects such as geography, sport, history etc. are taught in a foreign language, predominantly English, there are only a few hundred programmes offering *bilingualen Sachfachunterricht* of this kind at German primary schools (Wolff, 2017).

In one such bilingual primary school in Bielefeld, a large regional centre in the north-east of North-Rhine Westphalia, all the children at the school learn English from the start of Year One, but also have the subjects Music and Physical Education (P.E.) in bilingual format with English/German teaching teams in Years One and Two. Bilingual Science (*bilingualer Sachunterricht*) is added from the start of Year Three. The pupils have three instead of the customary two hours of English as a subject from Year Two onwards and the English teachers only speak the target language (TL) to them, both inside and outside the classroom. This immersive bilingual approach means that by the end of Year Four, the children have had considerably more immersive exposure to English at school than peers from schools with no CLIL programme and two hours of English a week.

As Kersten and Rohde (2013) point out in their discussion of the “transition problem”, learners such as these who have been in bilingual English programmes at primary school “will encounter problems in a regular English programme at secondary level, which often means a fresh start anyway as the teachers have problems assessing the children’s skills acquired at primary level”; and this, they continue, “opens another can of worms, namely the question of how to diagnose and/or assess learners’ target language skills in general” (p. 100).

How to address this “can of worms” has been a central consideration in the project-in-progress discussed in this contribution. It describes a portfolio being developed by a bilingual primary school in cooperation with researchers at Bielefeld University: its primary purpose is to address, or pre-empt, the “transition problem” when the children enter their various secondary schools in Year Five.

While the “transition problem”, or challenge, is clearly one of *standards, new horizons* open up in the enterprise of designing a dedicated, flexible portfolio which gives each child the agency to document, reflect on, present and celebrate their own language learning process. Most crucially of all, the portfolio aims to provide the new English teachers at secondary school with concrete, detailed evidence of the knowledge and competencies the individual children bring with them from primary school. The portfolio thus gives teachers a concrete basis to build on, and obviates the need to pre-emptively re-teach English from scratch.

As all the children at the school take part in bilingual instruction, addressing issues of *heterogeneity* and inclusive practices have been a core consideration in the project as well, and designing portfolio assessment for very young learners has necessitated a *multiliterate* and *multilingual* approach. Finally, the project turns customary *research culture* on its head, as the questions that gave rise to the portfolio project arose from and in the classroom practice of teachers at the school, who contacted researchers at the university to join them in developing solutions. Rather than researchers coming into school, identifying areas of concern and designing concepts for practitioners to apply, the project has developed at grassroots and is evolving via implementations in the classroom.

This contribution examines the rationale for creating a dedicated portfolio and the dilemmas, decisions and insights accrued during the first two years of the project. As the children were in Years One and Two in the phase of the portfolio’s development described here, the focus is on the children’s self-reported ability to understand and produce spoken English. While some portfolio tasks for these younger learners also provide the chance to read and write, this is optional until the second half of Year Two.

## 1.1 The school and its inclusive bilingual model

All the children attending the school where the portfolio is being developed learn English from the start of Year One, with two hours a week of English as a subject in its own right in Year One, and three<sup>1</sup> from Year Two onwards. In Years One and Two, one hour of Music and three hours of P.E. are taught in bilingual teams consisting of an English teacher who only speaks English to the children and another teacher who speaks German. In Year Three, there is one bilingual hour of Science (*Sachunterricht*) and three of P.E., and in Year Four, Science is taught exclusively in English (rather than in bilingual team-teaching), in addition to three bilingual hours of P.E. To uphold the school's commitment to L2 immersion (Cummins, 2009), the English teachers only speak English to the children, no matter what the situation, outside the classroom as well as in it.

As a centrally situated municipal primary school in a city of roughly 340,000, the school serves a broad cross-section of the population. The implementation of CLIL across the board reflects an inclusive and democratic approach to CLIL and contrasts with the practice at most German secondary schools with bilingual programmes.<sup>2</sup> The norm in secondary schools is to have CLIL streams, often with only one bilingual class per cohort, in which a specific subject or subjects are taught in a foreign language. The other classes in that cohort learn these subjects in the L1, German. As CLIL classes in this context are typically chosen by more ambitious and academically successful students, this leads to so-called “creaming” effects, which tend to skew research results on the efficacy of CLIL and lay it open to charges of exclusivity (Ohlberger & Wegner, 2019, p. 2). In a primary school where all the children have the same opportunity to participate in CLIL classes designed to afford successful learning at all ability levels, the potential for beneficial CLIL effects for learners posited by Ohlberger and Wegner (2019) in their research on secondary school CLIL modules is given.

## 1.2 The genesis of the portfolio

Independently of academic researchers working on the “transition problem” (Kersten & Rohde, 2013), English teachers at the school were starting to have the subjective sense, even in Year One, that all the children were acquiring English at a faster rate than anticipated by the education authorities. According to the guidelines for English in primary school issued by the education ministry in North Rhine-Westphalia (MSW NRW, 2008, p. 76), learners are expected to have reached the CEFR level A1 by the end of primary school, although they may have exceeded that level in the areas of listening and speaking. That most children at the school would have competences above A1 level seemed likely; even the skills of reading and writing would be beyond A1 level in some cases. In Year Five, the children would disperse to a variety of different secondary schools, and with this in mind, the following questions arose.

- How could the English teachers at these schools be efficiently and accurately informed about the content the children had learnt, and levels of competence they had attained?
- How would they know what competences they could build on?
- What could be done to ensure that the learners did not lose their momentum in their acquisition of English and become frustrated, rather than having their competences usefully harnessed in the English classroom?

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<sup>1</sup> In most German primary schools, there are only two hours of English a week from Year One to the final year, Year Four. In some federal states, English is in fact only taught in the last two years of primary school, Years Three and Four.

<sup>2</sup> Secondary schools with CLIL programmes in Germany are usually also *Gymnasien*, i.e. academically-orientated high schools, and those attending them are typically more academically inclined in the first place. At such schools, there is thus a double “creaming” effect underlying CLIL programmes.

From the end of 2017, in cooperation with researchers at Bielefeld University, the school began to explore ways of recording the young learners' progress and accurately assessing their language proficiency levels. External assessment, in the form of commercial standardised tests such as those marketed by Cambridge Assessment English, were not an option for reasons of logistics and cost. Besides, they would convey little information that would be of use to secondary school teachers, apart from indicating the children's proficiency levels. Some form of portfolio assessment, on the other hand, would document the learners' learning process and progress, provide rich and varied information about their language use and language skills, and circumvent the normative aspect that invariably accompanies formal testing, even if it is ostensibly criterion-referenced.

### 1.3 Rationale for a dedicated portfolio

Although portfolios for young learners do exist, for example *My Languages Portfolio*, the junior version of the *European Language Portfolio* (Council of Europe & National Centre for Languages, 2006), Legutke and Lortz's similar *Mein Sprachenportfolio* (2002) or indeed the portfolio specifically developed for bilingual classes by the Ministry of Education of Rhineland-Palatinate, *Mein Sprachenportfolio für den bilingualen Unterricht* (MBWWK RP, 2014), none fulfilled the purposes envisaged. These portfolios are all divided into three parts, with a language dossier or treasure-chest (texts and other products in the TL), a language passport "to show what you know and can do in languages" and a language biography, "to keep a record of your progress in learning languages" and "to record how you learn languages" (e.g. Council of Europe & National Centre for Languages, 2006, p. 2). This language biography provides opportunities for self-assessment, typically via "can-do" statements, and this was the section of most interest in the initial stages of searching for an instrument to document the learners' progress and competences.

However, these ready-made portfolios have to be extremely widely applicable. They could be used respectively in any primary school in Hessen, in any bilingual primary school in Rhineland-Palatinate, and in the case of the European portfolio, anywhere in Europe, or indeed the world. The language passport sections necessarily consist of statements (here in regard to teacher's utterances in the classroom) such as "Ich kann verstehen ... wenn er/sie mich begrüßt / wenn ich etwas aus meinem Ranzen holen soll / wenn ich etwas malen soll"<sup>3</sup> (Legutke & Lortz, 2002, p. 4) that cannot focus with any great precision on the language actually used by the teacher and children in a specific class. Children are asked to respond to these statements by filling in circles with smileys modelled before the task. *Mein Sprachenportfolio* also has more open sections where the learners can individually enter language they know (e.g. empty speech bubbles headed "Was ich alles sagen und fragen kann"<sup>4</sup>, p. 8). The self-assessment section of the 2014 Rhineland-Palatinate portfolio for bilingual primary schools is similarly broad in approach, merely adding can-do statements such as "Ich kann Fachbegriffe aus den Fächern (Ma, Su, Mu, Ku, Sp, E) verstehen" (p. 20) or „Ich kann Fachbegriffe aus den Fächern (Ma, Su, Mu, Ku, Sp, E) benutzen"<sup>5</sup> (p. 29) to other global can-do statements, such as "Ich kann in Liedern und Filmen verstehen, worum es geht. Ich kann verstehen, wenn mir jemand von sich erzählt"<sup>6</sup> (p. 20).

The revised junior version of the *European Language Portfolio* is even less suitable, most obviously because it is in English, and often complex English at that. For instance, to assess their competences, learners are invited to "[c]olour in the speech bubbles when

<sup>3</sup> I can understand when he/she greets me / when I should get something out of my schoolbag / when I should draw something.

<sup>4</sup> All the things I can say and ask.

<sup>5</sup> I can understand / use technical terms from the subjects Maths, Science, Music, Sport, English.

<sup>6</sup> I can understand what's going on in songs and films. I can understand when someone tells me about themselves.

you have done these things”, but the text in the speech bubbles, e.g. “I have compared pictures of places in different countries with pictures of home” (p. 15), suggests a level of sophistication difficult to reconcile with the notion of a learner who would choose colouring in as a way of recording their intercultural learning.

Most widely-used coursebooks for young English learners in Germany, such as *Sally* (e.g. Brune, Elsner, Gleixner-Weyrauch, Lugauer & Schwarz, 2017), include portfolio-like self-assessment sheets as well, but here the problem is that the focus is primarily on the content of the coursebook and is thus too narrow. Language acquired from the teacher’s TL input in the classroom and the children’s own classroom talk, and of course from subjects taught bilingually, is excluded.

As it became apparent that no ready-made portfolio would fulfil the dual purposes of documenting the children’s progress in detail and aiding the transition to secondary school as envisioned, the school, in consultation with the researchers, began to develop an alternative, specifically tailored instrument with elements of existing portfolios, in particular the language biography and a dossier, the Treasure Book (for more detail, see Greenyer-Schüler, Skorge & Zehne, 2019). The ways in which this newly-conceived portfolio tries to address the needs from which it arose and the ways in which it differs from ready-made portfolios are outlined in the next section.

## 2 Considerations in developing the portfolio

The central criteria in developing the portfolio are that it should

- not be a test, but function strictly as self-assessment;
- be clearly understood by the learners, their parents and other stakeholders as a positive instrument of self-assessment, not a test;
- focus on chunks and phrases in situational/interactional settings where possible, rather than single words, even in Year One;
- be highly flexible, specific and individualised;
- accommodate learners’ emerging literacy, without excluding slower readers and writers;
- become more strongly discourse-orientated to engage the children’s reading, writing and listening skills from Year Two onwards;
- be easily adaptable by any English teacher at the school to the specific work done and language used in specific classes at all levels;
- be easily adaptable for other English teachers at primary level, also at non-bilingual schools;
- be a useful, validating and enjoyable accompaniment to the bilingual English programme over all four years of primary school;
- function as a personal record, providing each learner with positive and motivating evidence of their own learning over four years of primary school;
- provide autonomous learning opportunities for the children, in that they learn to self-assess, reflect on their learning and optimise their metacognitive strategies;
- provide rich, specific data on each child’s learning process for primary and secondary teachers;
- provide useful feedback for current teachers on efficacy of lessons and materials;
- provide useful and easily accessible data on children’s knowledge and competences that teachers at secondary school can build on;
- provide samples of the children’s competences that can be related to CEFR descriptors.

## 2.1 Specific challenges

One essential and ongoing challenge is to create a positive, motivating self-assessment experience for all the children, irrespective of ability levels, using tasks that are easy to understand and perform but, crucially, are not test-like in character. Especially in Year One, the assessment tasks have to be accessible and meaningful to children who are just starting to read and write. Although there are open tasks that invite children to write or draw, and these increase from the end of Year Two, the children are not asked primarily to *display* their knowledge and abilities; instead, they indicate whether they *judge themselves to have certain knowledge and abilities*. This is done by asking the children to assess for themselves what they are able to do, using *can-do* statements in line with the CEFR and as modelled by *My Languages Portfolio* (e.g. pp. 10ff.). A further challenge related to these kinds of tasks, especially in Year One and to some extent in Year Two, is *how* to enable children whose ability to read and write is very limited to indicate in a differentiated and meaningful way what they can do in the TL. Then there is the problem of providing tasks that are demanding enough to challenge stronger English learners and German-English bilinguals while making sure not to stigmatise or intimidate other members of the class.

The issue of what language to use in setting the tasks, the L1 or L2, also has to be addressed, with a gradual movement from German to English as the learners' language proficiency and literacy skills develop; giving portfolio sheet instructions in both languages is one way to challenge more ambitious learners whilst giving less assured learners the choice of reading (or listening to) the instructions in the L1. Finally, as the school staff have voted to implement the portfolio in all classes, and since a major factor in its design is its specificity and regular implementation, another major consideration is how to make it very easy for teachers to adapt it so that it reflects the precise topics and language used in their individual classes.

## 2.2 Meeting the desiderata: designing tasks for younger learners

Ways in which the challenges of designing tasks for young English beginners with very restricted reading and writing skills have been addressed are described below.

### 2.2.1 Using visual material

In the first two years, before the children can be expected to read or write when working on the portfolio, the self-assessment tasks rely heavily on unambiguous pictures or familiar visuals taken from material used in class. Reusing visual materials from school-book materials on portfolio sheets for the whole school has in turn necessitated that the schools buy licences to reprint the visuals, or else lengthy communications with school-book publishers to establish what conditions they apply for reusing their material (some require a detailed acknowledgement of the source on each portfolio sheet, for example).

### 2.2.2 Bilingual portfolio instructions

As it is imperative that young learners understand the aims and functions of the portfolio and how to approach the portfolio tasks, the team decided that a "German-only" colleague would join the English-only teacher to give detailed explanations, help and encouragement when the Year One and Year Two children do portfolio-related work. Typically, the English-only teacher explains how to use the portfolio and how to do the tasks in English, and this is paraphrased by the German-only teacher, who also answers questions.

### 2.2.3 The smiley dilemma

An example of a portfolio task administered near the end of Year One introduces a further dilemma. The task is from the “advanced” portfolio sheet for classroom phrases (see section 3), and the can-do statement is: “Ich verstehe diese Aufforderungen im Englischunterricht: Sag ‘Entschuldigung’. Fass deinen Kopf an. Klatsch in die Hände.”<sup>7</sup> For the task to give a nuanced idea of the children’s developing language skills, it is preferable to have more answer options than a simple choice between yes and no. But because the children are still acquiring reading skills, the answer options have to be presented in visual form. The obvious choice, given their familiar and unambiguous meanings, are the ubiquitous happy/neutral/sad smileys. The project team nevertheless rejected the idea of using smileys initially, as a sad smiley has connotations of failure and losing that are antithetical to the portfolio’s aims.

However, after experimenting with other ways of indicating “yes”, “somewhat”, and “no”, such as three different geometric shapes, traffic-light colours or traffic signs, the team concluded that – especially in a class of six and seven-year-olds – these would pose a considerable extraneous cognitive load<sup>8</sup> that the familiar smiley would not. A further idea for alternatives to smileys comes from the workbook for the coursebook *Sally*, where instead of smileys, each of the self-assessment statements invites the children to choose one of three small symbolic images of Sally the kangaroo to indicate how they assess their own ability or performance. These images show Sally carrying a small, light, green bag in her paw; a largish yellow bag over her shoulder; and doubled over under the weight of an enormous red sack. The illustrator has found an engaging alternative to the putatively over-judgemental smileys, using imagery combined with traffic-light colours. However, the problem of extraneous cognitive load remains, and the connotation that the things the children can do well are lightweight, while the ones they do less well are burdensome, are no less problematic than happy versus sad smileys.

Thus, the portfolio team opted to use smileys after all, but to make their implications in the context of the portfolio clearly explicit. In the teacher’s guide to using the portfolio (Greenyer-Schüler, Skorge & Zehne, 2019), the German-only and English-only colleagues who administer the portfolio sheets in Year One and Two are enjoined to emphasise that choosing the sad smiley is completely acceptable; it is not an indication of a deficit or failure, but useful information for the teacher and the learner.

The teachers point out to the children that their not knowing something or not being able to do something all that well yet might mean that the teacher needs to explain better or practise some things more. In this way, the learners are encouraged to develop a sense of agency in using the portfolio, and to understand that the portfolio *gives* them agency. From observations during the portfolio presentation phases with the class that has been piloting the portfolio since Year One, it was clear that even these young children had understood very clearly that the portfolio is not a test and that the smileys are used for feedback, not to judge their performance.

As for the three other portfolios referred to in 1.3, *My Languages Portfolio* (Council of Europe and National Centre for Languages, 2006) simply invites its users to “[c]olour in the speech bubbles when you can do these things” (e.g. p. 10), which does not allow learners to indicate areas where they are starting to master competences or have not yet mastered them; Legutke and Lortz (2002) ask the users of their portfolio to draw one of three smileys or a question mark in the circles provided; and the Rhineland-Pfalz bilingual portfolio (MBWWK RP, 2014) has its users draw one of the three traditional smileys in the circles provided, or else colour them in in the appropriate traffic-light colours.

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<sup>7</sup> I understand these requests in English lessons. Say “sorry”. Touch your head. Clap your hands.

<sup>8</sup> I.e., they require careful processing that would use up cognitive resources, distracting the learner from the task at hand: see Sweller & Chandler, 1994.

#### 2.2.4 Differentiated tasks on unit work, classroom phrases and bilingual classes

So as to assess what language is acquired from classroom interactions in the school's immersive setting, as well as from bilingual classes, in addition to portfolio sheets on "Unit Work", which are based on the language and topics covered in the subject English itself, the portfolio team has been developing sheets for two more categories. These are "Classroom Phrases", reflecting language used by the teacher and learners in classroom talk in English lessons (classroom management, non-topic-specific interactions), and "Bilingual Classes", which focus on language acquired in the CLIL subjects.

In Year One and Two, there is typically one sheet presenting material all the children should be familiar with, and a sheet with more advanced material to challenge them more. Some material however automatically offers each child the chance to indicate how much they know, and no differentiated sheets are required. For instance, some tasks are based on complex pictures<sup>9</sup> showing scenes with multiple interactions in a supermarket or at the doctor's. The children are asked to look at these illustrations and circle parts of the picture if they know what the people depicted could be saying in English. In more open tasks such as these, which become more frequent as their language and literacy skills develop, the children are able to demonstrate individually what they can do or what they understand. In other tasks, children can choose whether to draw only, or draw and write, and they are encouraged to add further words or phrases they know.

#### 2.2.5 Examples

To illustrate the portfolio tasks, here are examples from the portfolio for the *second half of Year One*:

- A simple drawing of a face, familiar to the children from classwork, with the instruction "Kreise ein, was du auf Englisch sagen kannst!"<sup>10</sup> (Unit Work, basic tasks)
- "I can also say these numbers in English. / Ich kann diese Zahlen auch auf Englisch sagen. Circle them! / Kreise sie ein! 14 16 11 17 20 12" (Unit Work, advanced tasks; note that the children have a chance here to try to read the instructions in English as well)
- "Ich verstehe diese Fragen:<sup>11</sup> What can you see in the picture? How many dogs are there? Have you got a pet?" For each question, the smiley options ☺ ☹ ☹ are given. (Classroom Phrases, basic tasks)
- "Ich verstehe auch noch diese Fragen:<sup>12</sup> Can you open the window, please? Can you close your schoolbag, please? Can you come to the front, please?" The smiley options are ☺ ☹ ☹. (Classroom Phrases, advanced tasks)
- "Ich verstehe diese Aufforderungen im Sportunterricht":<sup>13</sup> Run quick. Get into a circle. Change, quick! Let's play a warming-up game. Roll the ball." The smiley options are ☺ ☹ ☹. (Bilingual Classes, basic tasks)
- "Ich verstehe auch noch diese Aufforderungen im Sportunterricht"<sup>14</sup>: Carry the bench. We need eight children. Line up on the yellow line. Balance on the bench. Throw and catch the ball." The smiley options are ☺ ☹ ☹. (Bilingual Classes, advanced tasks)

The examples also show that, wherever possible, the portfolio tasks focus on meaningful TL phrases and sentences rather than single words in isolation.

<sup>9</sup> Taken from the coursebook materials.

<sup>10</sup> Circle what you can say in English.

<sup>11</sup> I understand these questions.

<sup>12</sup> I also understand these questions.

<sup>13</sup> I understand these requests in P.E. lessons.

<sup>14</sup> I also understand these requests in P.E. lessons.



### 2.2.6 Access and adaptability

To ensure that other members of staff can easily access and adapt the portfolio sheets for their own classes, inserting contents they have covered and the classroom language they habitually use, portfolio pages that have already been developed are stored as Word documents available to everyone on the staff. In time, the “Unit Work” and “Classroom Phrases” sheets could also be made available and utilised by teachers at non-bilingual schools as well.

## 3 Implementing the portfolio

The project has been in operation since early 2018, when the first portfolio activities were carried out with a Year One class. Each half year, new portfolio sheets are developed, reflecting the work of the past half year and giving children the chance to assess and critically reflect on what they have learnt. The sheets are filed in each child’s own portfolio folder, which is kept by their English teacher.

The children are given the chance to show their portfolio sheets and reflect on their progress each half year in carefully scaffolded presentation sessions, facilitated in Year One by both the English-only teacher and a German-only colleague, who sums up in the L1 and moderates the feedback and reflection phases. From Year Two, the English teacher can hold the presentation session without a German-speaking colleague. Although the children present their work and make comments in German, they are encouraged to give examples of some of the English words and phrases they have been asked about when filling out the portfolio sheets. Thus, although what they “can do” in terms of oral production cannot be assessed directly via the sheets, they get the opportunity to demonstrate their speaking skills in the presentation sessions, and are eager to do so. In these sessions, the learners’ positive achievements are constantly foregrounded, celebrated and praised. At all times, the children are encouraged to be proud of how much they have learnt and what they can do, as reflected in their portfolios, and they are invited to give feedback to the teachers, and, if they like, tell them what they could change or do better in their teaching. In this way, too, the portfolio is conceived to give the children agency and make them equal partners in the enterprise of learning and teaching English.

The portfolio sheets roughly correspond to some of the “biography” elements of existing portfolios. Like other portfolios, it also has a dossier, the “Treasure Book”. Each half year, the learners are invited to choose work from their classroom folders to put into their Treasure Book folders. As for the self-portrait elements of the language biographies, the project team decided that it would make more sense if the learners added these in Year Four, when their biographies are longer and their ability to reflect and formulate texts are better developed.

## 4 Taking stock: the project so far

In mid-2021, the first cohort of children who have worked with the portfolio since Year One will leave primary school. The proof of the pudding will thus be in their first years of secondary school, from September 2021 onwards. Although the team members have been working on the project in their free time and without funding, it would be too good an opportunity to waste if their progress were not tracked by a systematic study. In particular, it would be vital to learn whether and how they and their new teachers utilise the portfolios to address the “transition problem”. Ways of doing this are currently being explored.

As work on the portfolio has progressed, it has become clear that it has other benefits besides being a means of providing future teachers with evidence of the learners’ progress and competences. It can also function as a valuable documentation for the children,

their families, their current teachers, the school and other stakeholders. Equally significantly, it can provide evidence for school boards, teacher trainers, researchers and, crucially, policy makers, that a successful TEFL programme starting in Year One is of demonstrable benefit, and that a well-implemented bilingual model can result in competence levels considerably higher than that envisaged by the education authorities in North Rhine-Westphalia by the end of Year Four.

While the project generates a great deal of data, which could certainly be a rich seam to mine in future research, it should not be forgotten that it is *not a research project but a practical initiative, originating in the school itself*, and it is intended primarily to benefit the learners themselves. To this extent, the project's philosophy shares a great deal with that of Action Research (Burns, 2010). The team makes no claim to the validity of the data, as there is no guarantee that all the learners are able to assess themselves accurately or that their assessments are always truthful. Observation notes, casual checks during the reflection phases (for example backup questions from the teacher), the teacher's knowledge of the learners' usual performance and the responses on the portfolio sheets themselves suggest, though, that the learners in the classes piloting the portfolio are capable of very accurate self-assessments and are not inclined to cheat.

## 5 Final remarks: CLIL research on a grassroots project?

As noted earlier, the project is firmly rooted in the practice of teaching professionals, who approached researchers for support in developing a response to a practical need. The initiative has been generated primarily by the school with the explicit support of the head teacher and approbation of the English teachers, and examples of portfolio sheets and guidelines have been made available to all interested teachers at the school, who are encouraged to use them. To this extent, the project differs significantly from those whose roots lie in academic studies of school practice, with researchers developing and handing down solutions to teaching practitioners.

Although the portfolios are not intended primarily for research, the responses of the children in the first cohort to use the portfolio certainly reinforce the impression that they are progressing quickly in their acquisition of English, and that they will indeed be beyond A1 level in the skills *Speaking* and *Listening* by Year Five. This impression holds for almost all the children, and not just those who are academically strong in general. The portfolio tasks are constantly evolving in step with the children's developing literacy and cognitive development. At the time of writing, the children are in Year Three and have recently produced written texts on the development of the potato and echolocation in bats in their portfolio work on CLIL Science. The project and the data it is generating are interesting in the CLIL research landscape, in view of the recent critiques of data collected in the context of pre-selected CLIL streams and the move towards researching CLIL effects in contexts where there is no "creaming" effect (Ohlberger, 2019). In this respect, the project could feed into research that is changing the face of CLIL.

By way of illustration, three portfolio sheets have been included on the following three pages: one from the second half of Year One and two from the first and second halves of Year Two respectively. There is one example each of Bilingual Classes, Unit Work and Classroom Phrases. These are of course taken out of context from a wider range of tasks, in each case. There is a detailed, multi-page lesson plan explaining how to administer the sessions where the children fill in the sheets, based on experience accrued during the pilot project.

## Bilingual Classes II – Year One 1.2



Name \_\_\_\_\_

Datum \_\_\_\_\_

**Music**

1. Ich verstehe auch noch diese Aufforderungen im Musikunterricht:

Sing and do the movements.	😊 😐 😞
Sing a bit louder.	😊 😐 😞

2. Ich kenne auch noch dieses englische Lied:

<b>Little Peter Rabbit</b>	😊 😐 😞
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**Physical Education (PE)**

1. Ich verstehe auch noch diese Aufforderungen im Sportunterricht:

Carry the bench.	😊 😐 😞
We need eight children.	😊 😐 😞
Line up on the yellow line.	😊 😐 😞
Balance on the bench.	😊 😐 😞
Throw and catch the ball.	😊 😐 😞

2. Ich kenne auch noch diese Sportgeräte:

soft floor mat	😊 😐 😞
small box	😊 😐 😞
large box	😊 😐 😞

Das GSZ Bilingual Portfolio – M. Greenyer-Schüler, P. Skorge, C. Zehne – 06/2018

*Figure 1:* Example of a page from the portfolio, Bilingual Classes, second half of Year One

## Classroom Phrases I – Year Two 2.1



Name \_\_\_\_\_

Datum \_\_\_\_\_

## 1. Ich verstehe diese Aussagen:

Don't touch anything!	
Say it in a whole sentence, please.	
Open your books at page 15.	

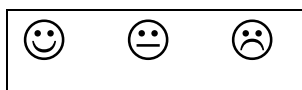
## 2. Ich verstehe, was wir in dieser Stunde machen werden:

We're going to sing our good morning song.	
We're going to have our chat time.	
We're going to work in our pupil's book.	

## 3. Ich verstehe den Unterschied zwischen diesen Sätzen:

Give me ..., please. ↔ Get me ..., please.	
What is it? ↔ Where is it?	
Here you are. ↔ How are you?	

## 4. Ich verstehe den vorgelesenen Text.



**Look! I've got a wobbly tooth! It hurts! The tooth fairy will come tonight and bring me a present.**

Das GSZ Bilingual Portfolio – M. Greenyer-Schüler, P. Skorge, C. Zehne – 01/2019

Figure 2: Example of a page from the portfolio, Classroom Phrases, first half of Year Two

Unit Work - Year Two 2.2

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Datum \_\_\_\_\_



**Family**

1. Ich weiß, was diese Namen von Familienmitgliedern bedeuten.

sister  
☺ ☹

grandpa  
☺ ☹

brother  
☺ ☹

uncle  
☺ ☹

aunt  
☺ ☹

2. Ich kann in einem ganzen Satz (höchstens 6) Familienmitglieder aus meiner Familie auf Englisch aufschreiben.

**Who is in your family?**

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Das GSZ Bilingual Portfolio – M. Greenyer-Schüler, P. Skorge, C. Zehne – 06/2019

Figure 3: Example of a page from the portfolio, Unit Work, second half of Year Two

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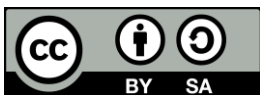
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