Assessment of young learner literacy linked to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

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Acknowledgements

The AYLLIT project has not sought to "reinvent the wheel", but rather to tweak it a bit so that it is better suited to carry young language learners smoothly on their way to literacy, aided by good assessment and feedback practices on the part of their teachers. Without a wealth of others' research, documentation and materials to use as a spring-board, we could not have achieved what we have at the end of our three-year project life.

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This publication is the result of a project of the European Centre for Modern Languages entitled "Assessment of young learner literacy, linked to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages" (AYLLIT). Frequent reference is made in the text to the project/publication through its acronym AYLLIT.

For further information and materials relating to this publication, visit the website http://ayllit.ecml.at.

1. Introduction

In this section five questions will be addressed, to shed light on the AYLLIT project:

- What is AYLLIT?
- Who is AYLLIT for?
- What was the reason for AYLLIT?
- Why the link with the CEFR?
- Who has participated and what has been done?

1.1 What is AYLLIT?

AYLLIT – Assessment of Young Learner Literacy Linked to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) – is a project which, between 2008 and 2011, has carried out a longitudinal study to investigate the writing and story-reading of young learners (YL), roughly between 9 and 13 years old. Its aims have been to produce material and guidelines for methods which teachers can use to describe and establish the level of pupils' writing and story-reading as they progress, linked to the CEFR.

1.2 Who is AYLLIT for?

AYLLIT is for teachers who teach a foreign or second language as a subject or who are dealing with pupils whose first languages are not those used in the mainstream schooling. Indirectly, it is also for teacher educators, or others who wish to have a greater insight into assessing the literacy of young learners – who, we hope, are the main beneficiaries of the project.

1.3   What was the reason for AYLLIT?

There were numerous reasons for AYLLIT, the main ones of which can be summed up as follows:

- In order to carry out essential formative assessment in the classroom, teachers need to be equipped with criteria for judging pupils' performance and progress, which in turn should be the basis for feedback (Wiliam 2009; Clarke 2005).

- While most assessment of younger learners is formative, teachers are sometimes expected to carry out summative assessment, for example, in the case of newcomers to a class/country, or when pupils are entering a new school stage. This requires that teachers are able to estimate the "level" of a pupil's language ability (McKay 2006).

- Teachers of languages in primary schools in Europe are generally not language specialists, and require particular support in assessment (Hasselgreen 2005).

- By the time children get to upper primary school, the classroom focus typically shifts towards the written language and literary skills.

- Literacy is fundamental to lifelong learning, and the pleasure of reading storybooks, once discovered, plays a major role in literacy development. However, knowing whether a particular storybook is at a suitable level of difficulty for a learner can pose problems for teachers.

- The CEFR is a useful and increasingly known and used tool for the assessment of languages in the classroom. However, having been originally designed for adults, its suitability for use with primary school pupils cannot be taken for granted. Research is still needed to investigate how it might be adapted for this purpose (Figueras 2007).

- ECML's Bergen 'Can do' project contributed to adapting the CEFR to lower secondary school pupils, through surveys of what learners and their teachers believed they could do. A follow-up study was considered necessary to identify features of learners as they progress through upper primary school.

- While studies of learners at similar levels on the CEFR may reveal or confirm features which characterise a level (see, for example, the Cambridge English Profile Corpus), a valuable perspective may be acquired by looking at the actual progress of individual pupils as they move through levels over time.

1.4   Why the link with the CEFR?

The CEFR has set its stamp on the young learner classroom. Several school curricula have aims for language learning based on the CEFR, for example, the Finnish (explicitly) and the Norwegian (implicitly). However, the impact of the CEFR is perhaps most clearly seen in the number of validated versions of the European Language Portfolios for primary schools in Europe. A classic example is the UK's "European Language Portfolio – Junior edition", produced by CILT (the National Centre for Languages). This portfolio is a Council of Europe initiative, launched in the 2001 European Year of Languages. The CILT A1 (approximately) can-dos for writing are shown here.

Figure 1: Extract from the CILT junior European Language Portfolio (material reproduced with permission from The European Language Portfolio, Junior edition, 2006 (c) CILT, the National Centre for Languages)

This presentation of can-do statements for writing, and the fact that the CILT portfolio does not go beyond B1, illustrate the particular need felt by ELP designers to adjust CEFR statements and levels for this user group. For, despite the readiness of national authorities to accept the CEFR as a basis for defining aims for and assessing the performance of young language learners, there are three principal reasons that raise questions regarding its suitability as it stands:

1. The CEFR was originally designed for adults, and its descriptors clearly reflect the language and the world of grown-ups.

2. Studies (for example, Hasselgreen and Moe 2006) have lent support to the claim that levels beyond B1 are beyond the cognitive reach of children.

3. With a maximum of three of its six levels spanning several years of primary school learning, the movement from one level to another is a very slow process, and does not show the progress of a child, which can be demotivating.

For these three reasons, it was the aim of the AYLLIT project to produce descriptors which, as far as possible: (i) reflected the world and language use of young learners, (ii) did not define a level beyond B1 and (iii) defined "in-between" levels, so that learners could see real progress in a relatively short time. The challenges were, of course, to maintain the true "value" of the CEFR levels, while, at the same time, to actually reflect the progress, and the real world, of the learners themselves.

1.5   Who has participated and what has been done?

The participants

The main participants of the project consisted of the team (the authors of this publication), representing Lithuania, Norway, Slovenia and Spain, as well as two classes, with their English teachers, from each of these countries. The classes were all in the range 5th to 7th grades, and were active in the project for two years. English was the common foreign (taught) language for the main part of the project, although French was included in the final (workshop) stage. Most of the pupils had been learning English for at least two years at the start of the project. In each of the four countries, it was expected that children at this stage are able to write and read English. Specific curricula aims for the upper primary schools can be summed up in statements such as:

Lithuania

Writing, 5th-6th grades:

- write short texts in simple sentences about oneself and the closest surroundings/milieu using examples or supporting material (the length of texts is about 60-90 words).

Writing, 7th-8th grades:

- write longer texts on topics of personal life using simple grammatical structures (the length of texts is about 90-120 words).

Reading, 5th-6th grades:

- understand the basic information in short texts (up to 200 words) in different genres;
- find the necessary information in short informative texts with some unknown lexical material.

Reading, 7th-8th grades:

- understand longer texts (up to 300 words) which have a clear structure and which cover the topics of the curriculum (personal letters, simple instructions, advertisements, short narratives about everyday events), and which also include some unknown lexical material and more complex grammatical structures.

(Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science website)

Norway

- express oneself in writing in order to understand and be understood;
- understand different written products on chosen topics;
- give a short written presentation of a topic;
- read and understand texts of different lengths in different genres;
- write texts that tell, describe and convey meaning.

(Norwegian State Board of Education website)

Slovenia

Reading and Reading comprehension:

- make inferences about a written text and its content;

- perceive extra-textual circumstance;

- distinguish between written and spoken text;

- scan for specific information;

- read for gist;

- understand the details of a written text;

- perceive the connections between the parts of a written text.

Writing:

- make notes;

- write guided compositions;

- do creative writing.

(Grosman 1998)

Spain (Catalonia)

The written competence has to be developed in all its dimensions: receptive (reading) and productive (writing), communication and creation. The processes of reading and writing are complex and varied depending on the type of text. Reading and writing have to be present in any subject area or school activity.

They have to be perceived as a source of discovery and of personal pleasure. In this sense, each school should promote initiatives like the school library or class library, the radio or Internet platforms to make reading and writing meaningful.

Each of the four countries has its own primary school version of the ELP, and the CEFR is reflected in the curricula aims to varying degrees:

- in Norway, the CEFR levels underlie many of the individual objectives for "communication" in English, with the level of roughly A2/B1 being implied by the aims for the end of primary school;

- in Slovenia, earlier foreign language curricula did not detail the language skill descriptors that students are expected to develop at different grades (ages). In 2009, context-specific language proficiency levels for the four language skills for primary school pupils were developed and aligned to the CEFR reference levels;

- in Lithuania, the Curriculum Framework for Primary and Basic (Lower Secondary) Education specifies that the following levels of CEFR competences should be achieved (in listening, reading, speaking and writing): A2 level for 5th-6th grades and B1 level for 7th-8th grades.

- in Spain the present foreign language curricula do not give detailed descriptors of language skills that students are to expect to develop at different grades.

In addition to the participants from Lithuania, Norway, Slovenia and Spain, others were gradually brought in at the later stages of the project. A further eight teachers from "non-project" countries were involved in an online activity in April 2010, while a total of 30 participants from as many countries attended – and worked hard in – the central workshop in September the same year, which was run by the team, with the valuable advice and assistance of the project consultant, Professor Sauli Takala.

The procedure

While a detailed account is given in the sections on writing and reading of the procedures used in the project, a summary of this is presented here. Prior to the start of the project, a preliminary phase (2007-08) took place in Bergen, Norway, whereby some methods and materials for assessing reading and writing were worked out, drafted and tried out with two classes. These formed the basis for the work done in the four countries from autumn 2008. The draft material and methods were trialled with the eight classes involved, and these were regularly reviewed and adapted by the team, on the basis of feedback from the "users". In the case of writing, the children in the four countries wrote to each other at regular intervals, carrying out writing tasks drawn up by the team. The written language produced by individual children, and assessed using the descriptors, was a rich source of data, and enabled us to distinguish features which seemed to mark the transition from one sub-level to the next. For reading, a number of storybook series, notably Penguin Young Readers (see Pearson Longman website) and Cambridge Storybooks (see Cambridge University Press website), across a range of levels, were selected for use with all the classes. A method adapted by the team from that developed by Clay (2000) was implemented, so that teachers could recognise which reading texts were at an acceptable level of difficulty for a child. There was close co-operation and regular contact between the team members and the teachers in their countries. The role of the teachers in the project activity varied to some extent. In most cases, the teachers were involved in the whole process – implementing the assessment themselves. In some instances, the teachers "lent" their pupils to the team member, who carried out the assessment. This balance of teacher and team member involvement was beneficial to the project, as it allowed for different perspectives on the use of the material to be fed back into its development.

"Expert meetings" of the team took place annually to discuss, plan and refine the material and methods being used. A network meeting was scheduled to be held in April 2010, with all teachers directly involved in the project, and a group of teachers from other countries. However, this had to be cancelled due to the volcanic ash cloud which disrupted European air traffic. Instead, an online survey was arranged whereby all those who should have attended the meeting were invited to take part in three phases of

rating pupils' writing using the descriptors developed at this point. Most of the participants joined in, rating project samples of writing, as well as writing they sent in from their own pupils. The rating and the comments provided by the participants were valuable to the team.

At the central workshop, held in September 2010, the material and guidelines for assessing both writing and reading were further trialled and refined. Writing in both English and French was included. The method for assessing the suitability of story texts for individual readers was presented and discussed. A serious attempt was made to validate the writing descriptors with respect to the CEFR and to draw up preliminary descriptors linking the reading of storybooks to CEFR levels.

Participants at the workshop in Graz

The remainder of this book will focus in detail on first writing, then reading in the AYLLIT project.

2. The assessment of young learners (YL) writing

This chapter will present an account of the assessment of writing in the AYLLIT project, considering what is involved in the skill itself, the assessment needs of teachers, the development of material and methods in the project, and the use of these in the classroom. It will include a short section on staging workshops in assessing writing, for example for in-service teacher training.

Before embarking on this, however, it is necessary to put the assessment of writing and reading into the context of the overall aim of the project, namely the assessment of YL literacy.

2.1   The assessment of YL literacy

In its widest sense, the term "literacy" can be applied to any area, such as "mathematical literacy". In the present context, it will be used in a narrower sense, referring to general reading and writing abilities, which, of course, lie at the heart of other "literacies". Literacy, in this sense, is taken very seriously worldwide. In the mainstream language of education, it is common for extra resources to be used in promoting reading literacy, for example as seen in the UK's National Literacy Strategy (Department for Education and Employment, UK), or national testing, for example in Norway. PISA (OECD) results in reading literacy are studied with care, and often alarm. It is widely recognised that low literacy levels in the language of schooling will affect performance in all subjects, and can ultimately lead to failure in achievement as adults. While in many cases, the language of schooling will be a child's first language, it is increasingly common in today's mobile society, that this is not the case. The USA's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 reflects the concern for those children whose first language is not English. Among other things, this act requires "all states to assess the English proficiency of English language learners each year" (Ferrara 2008: 132). And even in the case of languages which are not mainstream school languages, but taught as "subjects", low literacy levels in children, besides affecting the acquisition of and performance in the language as a subject, can also ultimately limit their access to the understanding of other cultures, and the ability to communicate with others who do not share their mother tongue, for numerous reasons, of which pleasure, study, travel and work are only a few.

For a teacher to be able to help a child develop literacy in a second or foreign language, it is essential to have ways of finding out what the child knows and can "do" when reading or writing in the language. Further, the teacher should be able to analyse and describe this ability, in order to guide the child's further development. This project has aimed to give the teacher material and guidelines for facilitating this, focusing separately on writing and reading.

2.2   Writing in the upper primary school

A glance at the curricula extracts for literacy in English in the four countries, in Chapter 1, shows that these are quite diverse. This is to be expected, since curricula aims are composed in such a variety of ways, due to differing national contexts. However, certain key ideas seem to emerge from them, which gives a broad picture of what might be expected in writing at this stage. Pupils are expected to be able to write at some length, and in a "communicative" and creative way. They should be able to write on personal topics, in a descriptive and narrative way. And in one case, writing is cited as a source of pleasure.

This concept of upper primary writing in a foreign or second language seems to concur well with what has been described in the literature. And while writing across an expanding range of genres is generally regarded as important at this stage, the place of personal narratives and the need for real communication are recurrent and central themes. Pinter (2006: 77) states that older children "may begin to see clear reason for writing such as … to write their own stories …". Cameron (2001: 156) strongly advocates writing for an audience, through letters or simple stories for others. Drew and Sørheim (2009: 88) maintain that children "usually have stories to tell about themselves and the world they live in, which they are keen to share with others". The idea that children enjoy telling others about themselves and their lives, through writing, was fundamental to the way writing was conducted in the AYLLIT project.
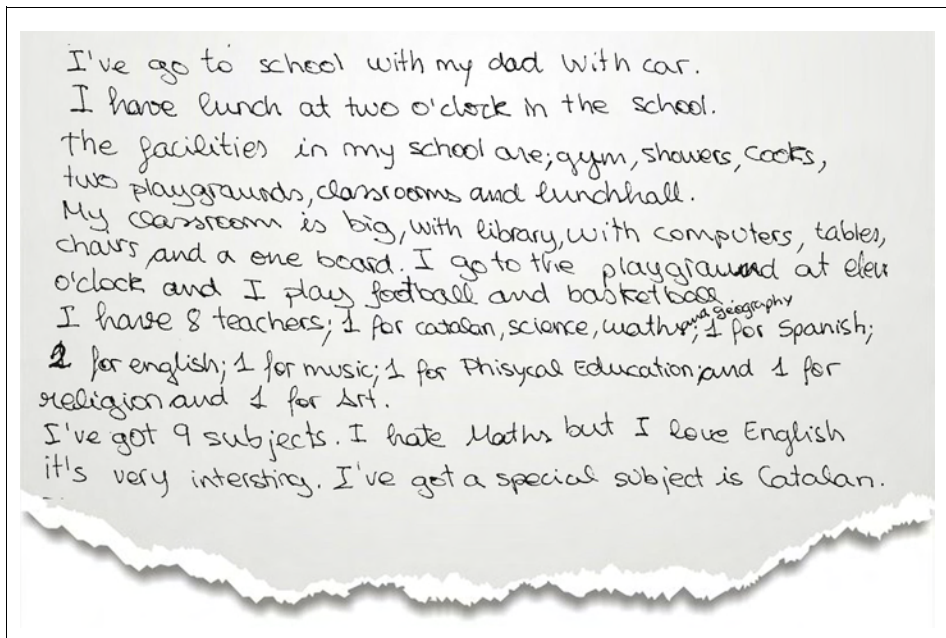

Figure 2: Extract from a pupil's text

The extract shown here illustrates the fact that children seem able and willing to share stories from their lives with others – in this case, pupils in another country. But it also demonstrates that the language ability of the pupil is a major factor in what the pupil can write, and how "well". A first draft of writing, such as that shown here, makes instantly visible the pupil's linguistic shortcomings, but also reveals something of what s/he knows and can do. The exercise of writing allows the pupil to use and reinforce what s/he has learnt, and will ideally be a learning task in itself. Pre-writing, for example in the form of class discussion or brainstorming, has great value in helping the pupil to enter the spirit and the theme of the writing, and to encounter new vocabulary relevant for the task. And with good feedback and guidance, the writing can be improved on, so that the pupil gets the satisfaction of both producing a good text, and developing his/her language. Thus, writing, as well as being a potential source of pleasure, emotional outlet or discovery, can, and should, be a major source of language development.

2.3   The assessment of writing: teachers' needs

On the surface, writing seems to be a straightforward skill to assess in many ways. It provides a teacher with documentation of what a pupil has managed at a given time, and what s/he has not mastered. Corrective feedback on errors can be given, and the writing can be shown to and discussed with the pupil and his/her parents, and kept to compare with earlier or later performances. However, without some systematic way of carrying out this assessment, it may have little formative value and can yield imprecise summative information.

EALTA's "European Survey of Language Testing and Assessment Needs" (2004), conducted among language teachers and other professionals (Hasselgreen et al.), revealed that teachers had an overwhelming need for training in virtually all aspects of language assessment. Given that primary schoolteachers often lack training as language specialists (Drew, Oostdam and van Toorenburg 2007), it is reasonable to suppose that the need is greatest in this sector. Among the specific areas of assessment investigated, "giving feedback" and "defining assessment criteria" were cited as being urgently in need of training. And these issues lie at the heart of formative assessment (Wiliam 2009).

In order to help pupils develop, teachers need to know what to give feedback on – corrective or otherwise – and how to give this. And for feedback to be constructive and understandable, it has to be based on criteria shared between teacher, pupil and parents (Torrance and Prior 1998). Moreover, the pupil should be able to assess his/her own performance, using these criteria. And in order to be able to place a piece of writing at a "level", whether to show ongoing progress and set targets, or to give a summative

report, these levels need to be described in terms of the same criteria, and illustrated with benchmarks to assist the teacher in interpreting them. Importantly, the teacher needs to know that the tasks they give pupils will allow them to demonstrate their ability in terms of these criteria. These needs combined to underlie the aims of the AYLLIT project and, thus, the development of criteria and guidance on feedback, as well as on giving writing tasks, were defined as central objectives for the AYLLIT assessment of writing.

Assessment criteria for writing must reflect the consensus of what good writing is. And descriptors based on these criteria must reflect the age and ability of the writers for whom they are being developed. While a wide variety of criteria exist in the literature on assessing writing, for example in Weigle (2002), certain common categories emerge. These reflect both the content of what is written, and how it is written – its overall structure and cohesion, grammatical structures, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation.

These categories are all catered for in the detailed CEFR descriptors of writing; moreover, descriptors based on these categories are presented across a range of levels, thus providing a well-tried starting point for those hoping to develop descriptors for a particular group. When the AYLLIT project began, it took its roots in a small preliminary project in Bergen, Norway. This pre-project was in turn linked to the work of the group at Bergen University who were responsible for producing the Norwegian national tests for English. As part of this work, a grid of CEFR-based descriptors was developed for assessing linguistic aspects of the writing of pupils at the end of primary school (7th grade), and it was this set of descriptors which formed the starting point for the work on developing AYLLIT writing descriptors for the primary school.

The Norwegian grid used four aspects of writing – textual structure, grammar, words and phrases, and spelling and punctuation – and each of these aspects was described at levels A1, A2, B1 and B2. Shaded areas denoting in-between levels were built into the grid, but no descriptors were provided for these sub-levels. Teachers placed the writing on all four aspects, putting crosses in the boxes on the grid to show the (sub)level of each aspect. The overall (sub)level was decided on the basis of the profile that emerged, which was also useful as a basis for feedback.

These descriptors were valuable to the AYLLIT project in several respects. Developed by language testing specialists, hand in hand with teachers, they represented a picture of writing ability which reflected what is commonly agreed in the literature, and acceptable to teachers in Norway. Furthermore, they were designed closely in line with the descriptors in the CEFR for a wide range of sub-skills of writing, yet worded in and exemplified in a way that teachers of pupils aged between 12 and 16 could relate to. (The descriptors referred to here were virtually identical to those used in the 10th grade, which additionally included descriptors for C1.). And, importantly, they had been shown to work. Teachers themselves, after training, rated their own pupils' writing in the national test, using these descriptors to place pupils at levels and in-

between levels. The degree of reliability achieved between teachers and external raters (around 0.7) (Lie et al. 2005) was relatively high for this type of assessment.

However, as descriptors for younger pupils, to be used primarily in formative assessment, the Norwegian national test descriptors have a number of shortcomings:

- the levels they represent go beyond what is cited in Chapter 1 as the upper limit (B1) for young learners;

- only three relevant levels (A1, A2 and B1) are described, limiting their usefulness in tracking pupils' development.

- the language used to formulate the descriptors is not suitable for use with younger pupils, as a basis for feedback and self-assessment;

- they have not been trialled with the writing of pupils below the end of upper primary school (Norwegian 7th graders are 12-13 years old);

- they have not been trialled with the writing of pupils outside Norway, or with languages other than English.

A major concern of the project was therefore to work with pupils and teachers in order to "convert" this grid of descriptors into one which, while adhering to the basic CEFR levels, could be widely used as a tool in the formative assessment of YL writing. The account of how this was done is described in the next section.

2.4 The development of material and methods in the project

At the start of the AYLLIT project, a number of writing tasks had been done by Norwegian pupils in two classes, as part of the preliminary project, and assessed with a grid of descriptors which was in continual development. The grid described above was gradually worked on by the researcher in co-operation with the two teachers, rewording it, drafting in-between levels, and replacing the B2 level with a level defined as "above B1". This draft grid, and the tasks used with the pupils, were the foundation of the work carried out in the project proper.

The actual project started in the autumn of 2008, with two classes and their teachers in each of the four countries of the team: Lithuania, Norway, Slovenia and Spain. These classes remained in the project for two years, starting at 5th or 6th grade.

At the beginning of each school year during the project period, the team met to draft out the writing tasks to be used in the coming year, as well as the assessment descriptors to be used, and the procedure to be followed. A major feature of the project was that pupils were to write to pupils in the other countries. This was found to be very motivating, giving a real purpose to the writing. A system was worked out, defining the tasks to be done, the dates for the writing to be sent out, and where each school should

send these to. The tasks in the first year were descriptive in nature, beginning with personal introductions, then an account of how Christmas is spent in their country, followed by a postcard from their town, with a description of what the town has to offer. In the second year, the tasks became more narrative in nature, for example recounting summer holidays. The teachers and/or team members were mainly responsible for the assessment, using the descriptors, and feedback based on these. They were encouraged to use the whole grid in the assessment, creating profiles, based on the four categories in the grid, which would be the basis for feedback. The overall "level" of the pupil would emerge from the profile itself. The assessment was carried out on the first writing draft, while the material sent out to other pupils was normally revised by the pupils on the basis of teacher feedback. In the course of the year, teachers and team members gave comments on how the descriptors were working, and samples of writing, rated by teachers on the "levels" (including in-between levels), were sent round to be rated by team members, in order to see how well they functioned in relation to level setting.

At the start of the second year, these experiences were drawn on to adjust the material and methods. Moreover, at this point the team were able to review the descriptors in the light of what pupils' texts showed about their development. Material was collected from a number of pupils in each country, showing their writing at three stages across a period of one or two (in the case of Norway) years. In each case, the team agreed on the level of each text, then considered the question of what a pupil appeared to be able to do at any stage, which s/he had not appeared to do at the previous stage. The descriptors were then adjusted to incorporate these valuable insights on what "happened" as a pupil progressed through the levels. A significant adjustment was the introduction of an "approaching A1" descriptor, as it was found that the earliest efforts of some pupils actually seemed to be below A1. Note also that the descriptors at the lower end of the scale are not divided into four categories. This is because of the nature of the writing at these levels, which is largely based on reproducing learnt chunks of language at a pre-grammatical stage. The newly revised descriptors were then used in the second year, with minor adjustments being made, largely as a result of the central workshop in September 2010, when they were also trialled with French texts. The final AYLLIT descriptor grid is shown below.
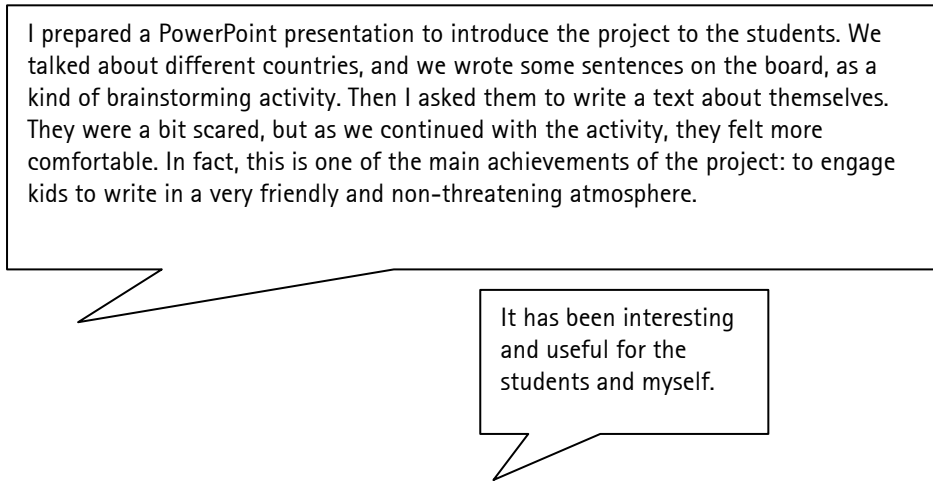
Levels	Overall structure and range of information	Sentence structure and grammatical accuracy	Vocabulary and choice of phrase	Misformed words and punctuation
Above B1	Is able to create quite compli-cated texts, using effects such as switching tense and interspersing dialogue with ease. The more common linking words are used quite skilfully.	Sentences can contain a wide variety of clause types, with frequent complex clauses. Errors in basic grammar only occur from time to time.	Vocabulary may be very wide, although the range is not generally sufficient to allow stylistic choices to be made.	Misformed words only occur from time to time.
B1	Is able to write texts on themes which do not necessarily draw only on personal experience and where the message has some compli-cation. Common linking words are used.	Is able to create quite long and varied sentences with complex phrases, e.g. adverbials. Basic grammar is more often correct than not.	Vocabulary is generally made up of frequent words and phrases, but this does not seem to restrict the message. Some idiomatic phrases used appropriately.	Most sentences do not contain misformed words, even when the text contains a wide variety and quantity of words.
A2/B1	Is able to make reasonable attempts at texts on familiar themes that are not completely straightforward, including very simple narratives. Clauses are normally linked using connectors, such as "and", "then", "because", "but".	Sentences contain some longer clauses, and signs are shown of awareness of basic grammar, including a range of tenses.	Vocabulary is made up of very common words, but is able to combine words and phrases to add colour and interest to the message (e.g. using adjectives).	Clear evidence of awareness of some spelling and punctuation rules, but misformed words may occur in most sentences in more independent texts.

A2	Can write short straightforward coherent texts on very familiar themes. A variety of ideas are presented with some logical linking.	Is able to make simple independent sentences with a limited number of underlying structures.	Vocabulary is made up of very frequent words but has sufficient words and phrases to get across the essentials of the message aspired to.	Some evidence of knowledge of simple punctuation rules, and the independent spelling of very common words.
A1/A2	Can adapt and build on a few learnt patterns to make a series of short and simple sentences. This may be a short description or set of related facts on a very familiar personal theme.		Can use some words which may resemble L1, but on the whole the message is recognisable to a reader who does not know the L1. Spelling may be influenced by the sound of the word and mother tongue spelling conventions.	
A1	Can write a small number of very familiar or copied words and phrases and very simple (pre-learnt) sentence patterns, usually in an easily recognisable way. The spelling often reflects the sound of the word and mother tongue spelling conventions.			
Approa-ching A1	Makes an attempt to write some words and phrases, but needs support or a model to do this correctly.			

Table 1: AYLLIT writing descriptor grid

Guidelines were also drafted on the basis of comments and feedback on the use of the material, and these will be the subject of section 2.5. Some of the teachers' comments are shown below, and indicate the degree of satisfaction generally felt regarding the writing itself and the assessment.

I prepared a PowerPoint presentation to introduce the project to the students. We talked about different countries, and we wrote some sentences on the board, as a kind of brainstorming activity. Then I asked them to write a text about themselves. They were a bit scared, but as we continued with the activity, they felt more comfortable. In fact, this is one of the main achievements of the project: to engage kids to write in a very friendly and non-threatening atmosphere.

It has been interesting and useful for the students and myself.

Figure 3: Comments from teachers on the writing project

As the end of the two-year writing period approached, in the spring of 2010, we trialled our material with new teachers, from a range of countries, who had no experience with the project work. This was first done using an online survey (to replace the planned network meeting, which was cancelled because of the ash cloud), whereby teachers assessed texts in three phases, using the AYLLIT descriptors to assign levels to texts and give comments on the rating. The first two phases involved AYLLIT texts, while in the final phase, the teachers were able to submit their own pupils' texts for rating. The results of this survey and the comments were valuable to us in planning the central workshop in September.

The central workshop was attended by 30 participants, of whom only one had prior involvement as a teacher in the project. The writing part of the workshop focused on the assessment grid, its relationship with the CEFR, its use in assessing texts, and its potential as a basis for feedback. The participants brought with them texts produced by their pupils, in English or French. The workshop began with familiarisation of the CEFR levels, followed by a group task of placing isolated AYLLIT descriptors at levels/in-between levels of the CEFR. This was a way of validating the descriptors, which all proved to be recognisable as "belonging to" the intended CEFR levels. The group work then moved to assigning texts to levels on the AYLLIT descriptor grid, starting with the benchmark texts, and moving to other sets of texts; firstly, those collected in the AYLLIT project, then using the texts of the participants' own pupils.

This group work went well, and corroborated the fact that the descriptors were able to be used with texts at a broad range of levels, and two languages, with strong consensus among raters, both for overall level and the profiles that emerged for individual texts, using all four categories in the assessment grid. The focus then turned to using the grid as a basis for feedback to pupils, first presenting examples of AYLLIT feedback, then working in groups to decide on appropriate feedback on individual texts. The work on writing assessment concluded with a follow-up plan for an online assessment of texts provided by the participants. The descriptor grid was adjusted very slightly, for a final time, as a result of the feedback from the workshop participants. The discussion in the workshop was noted, and proved to be very valuable in compiling the guidelines for using the material.

2.5   Using the material and methods in the classroom

This section will offer some guidance to teachers, first by way of considering the topics pupils may write about, and then by focusing on assessment and feedback, with the help of the AYLLIT descriptor grid.

Getting children to write

As was discussed in section 2.2, writing can be a source of personal satisfaction and discovery, as well as being a means of developing language and writing skills. As a general rule, children in the early stages of writing are most comfortable when writing about themselves, their pets, their friends, etc. They are most able to write descriptive and simple factual texts, which can gradually be extended to include, for instance, familiar things they see in pictures or have encountered in stories they have heard, watched or read. As their language develops and they begin to experiment with the past tense, they can write simple narratives, again, starting with personal experiences, and progressing to basing stories on whatever they are familiar with. As they are introduced to a range of genres through their reading, these should be reflected in their writing, so that they produce captions, poems, letters, e-mails, diary entries, stories, dramas, news items, etc. Poetry can be a very liberating genre, as it need not make demands on sentence grammar, and a child can use whatever language s/he has to produce a poem that, by definition, has no "right or wrong". At this stage, of course, a teacher will encourage the child to use all the language at his/her disposal whatever the task; a first draft can always be worked on later, and new language arises from the need to use it. Group writing, whereby a number of children produce a text together, can be a good way of allowing each child to contribute what they are able. Depending on the task and situation, first drafts can be revised, on the basis of teacher feedback, so that the child has the pleasure of seeing a well-written (though not necessarily perfect) piece of work, which can be presented to a reader, for example by being sent, displayed, acted or kept in a portfolio.

The pleasure of writing should be preserved, so the teacher needs to find a way of maintaining motivation, while at the same time getting the children to do a lot of varied writing. A perceived purpose for the writing is important in motivation. A letter or e-mail, or a personal description or experience, is ideally done with a "real person" to write to, who does not already know what is being written. However, the context of the classroom can be exploited to give a purpose so that the children see a point to the writing; a teacher may want the children to practise a particular form of language, but, in free writing, this should not be the main reason from the child's perspective. A letter can be written to or from a character they "know" in fact or fiction. A narrative can be in the form of a news item, based on a factual or fictional event. Personal experiences can appear in a class newsletter. And stories they have met can be dramatised and acted out; drama tends to be a success with primary school pupils. Whatever the task, the child will benefit from talking about the theme in advance, collecting any necessary vocabulary, and activating the "schema" – a mental representation we have of particular situations or topics – so that previously learnt vocabulary will be more easily accessed. (Cook 2008: 121). This can be done through brainstorming and mind-mapping in advance of the actual writing. From time to time, and particularly if the genre is one which is new to the pupils as writers, children should be shown models of writing, and can benefit from the teacher acting as a model, for example on the whiteboard, with pupils giving suggestions.

Assessment and feedback, using the AYLLIT material

In order that the assessment of a pupil's writing should most accurately represent what s/he knows or can do at a given time, the assessment using the AYLLIT descriptor grid should be carried out on a first draft. This draft should, as far as possible, be done without help. In the trialling, it was common to have a brainstorming session on a topic with the whole class, before embarking on the writing. Vocabulary – words and phrases – which emerged from the brainstorming session was often written on the whiteboard, but erased before the writing started. The children were encouraged to write without using any assistance, including dictionaries, and "you try" was the normal advice. However, it happened of course that a child was stuck and very much wanted a word from the teacher. In these cases, the teacher wrote the word at the bottom of the pupil's sheet, so that, in assessment, it was easy to identify which words were not entirely known to the pupil. A similar system could be used for words which had been looked up, and a coding could be used to denote spelling help. In this way, the children are given the chance to learn as they write, while the assessment is restricted to what the pupil actually managed unaided.

Before embarking on the assessment for the first time, a teacher should familiarise him/herself with the grid, and read the sample texts for the different levels, as well as the profiles and comments on each text. These can be found on the AYLLIT website (http://ayllit.ecml.at). The overall level for the text is assigned on the basis of the profile, combined with a holistic view of which sub-level the text seems to represent.

While the CEFR-related sub-levels assigned to sample texts are those agreed by the team, there is no absolute right answer – it is common for a text to be borderline between two sub-levels, so a stricter judge may assign texts to consistently slightly lower levels than a lenient judge. However, teachers are advised to try to align themselves with the sub-levels indicated, as far as possible.

The assessment grid can be used on computer, after the teacher reads through the pupil's text. When reading through the text, a pencil is useful to mark anything – good or bad – that the teacher may want to refer to in assessing or giving feedback (these can be erased as appropriate). The rough level of the pupil will be apparent to a teacher who has used the grid for a while. When opening the grid in the computer, it is recommended to use only the section (level-wise) which is near the pupil's own level. This means that for a pupil around A1-A2, the levels from about B1 are erased, while a pupil at the higher end of the scale does not need to see the lowest level descriptors. This has the practical function of liberating more space for comments (which can be written under the grid) but also serves in focusing the pupil on his/her own achievement and targets. It is important that pupils can see the descriptors immediately above and below their own, so that they see how they have progressed and what they are aiming towards. It allows them to consider their progress with respect to themselves, rather than seeing themselves at the top or bottom of the range for their whole class. A simple way of recording the profile is to colour shade the most relevant "boxes". Occasionally, when it is difficult to decide between two levels in a category, both boxes may be shaded. This shading will normally allow the teacher to find the most suitable overall level for the text, which can be gradated, for example by using plus or minus signs. This can be useful when keeping a record over time – a pupil who has been assessed at A2- and is later assessed at A2 will see that progress has been made.

The comments written below the grid give a more detailed description of the text, and should show, by examples, why the profile is as it is. It should reflect the categories in the grid, and point out what is good and what is less good. It can include very specific examples, for example of grammar or spelling, which the teacher feels the pupil should work on more. It can also give an overall comment, for example praise when the teacher feels the pupil has really made an effort, and may refer to previous assessments, drawing attention to areas where the pupil has made progress. These comments, as well as the profile, should be accessible to the pupil/parents but may have to be given as an oral interpretation of what is written. If the pupil is keeping a portfolio (for example, using the ELP), the texts (in draft and revised forms) can be kept together with the assessments.

While the assessment described above will give a good indication of a pupil's level and progress, with pointers as to how to improve, a teacher will normally want to give some more detailed corrective feedback, particularly if the pupil is going to revise the text. The area of corrective feedback is not unproblematic. The temptation is for a teacher to highlight, or even correct, everything that is wrong. This can be caused by a feeling of pressure from parents or other teachers; a teacher will not want to give the impression

that s/he does not recognise an error. However, the corrective feedback should be limited only to what the pupil can benefit from. It is better to concentrate on a limited number of errors, and stick to what is within reach of the pupil at the stage s/he is at. The text below illustrates this:

Summy!
My summar holiday.
Aim hvas in Mallorca and am sunbrathling, that was very fun! That was a experienle of the live, and am stay as a camping place, wit my Grandmum and my Grandad, and we fising and have fun that summer. We also play Gitar and Singing and 1 day we go to shopping I don't bay so much.

Figure 4: Sample of a pupil's writing

This text has been assessed as at level A2. In order to progress to level A2/B1, the pupil would need to show awareness of a range of tenses, s/he would also be expected to be able to spell most common words, and be aware of some spelling rules. The text suggests that the pupil is unable to form the relevant verbs in the past tense, apart from "was", but clearly needs to master these in order to write this simple narrative, which the pupil seems otherwise to be able to manage. There are also some very frequent words which are (sometimes) misspelt; both "summer" and "was" are at times spelt correctly, so are clearly within the pupil's reach. Thus, it is helpful to this pupil to focus on simple spellings and past tenses. How then should the corrective feedback be given? To correct them, is to do all the work, and will not result in the pupil learning. A suggestion which is more formative is given below. The teacher uses a highlighting pen to mark in yellow (here shown by shading) the misspellings of simple words, and green (here shown by underlining) to mark verbs which should be in the simple past tense. The teacher then gives a simple brief explanation of the two types of error, with an exercise for the pupil to do to correct these.

```
Summmy!
My summar holiday.
Aim hvas in Mallorca and am sunbrathling, that was very fun! That was a
experienle of the live, and am stay as a camping place, wit my Grandmum
and my Grandad, and we fising and have fun that summer. We also play
Gitar and Singing and 1 day we go to shopping I don't bay so much.
```

1. Spelling: copy these words carefully	2. Grammar:
Summer	When we tell about things that happened at a time in the past, we use the past tense of verbs. The underlined verbs in the text should be in the past tense. Find the past tense of these verbs and write them in the phrases below. The first one is done for you.
Was	
Fishing	
Guitar	
Buy	
With	
Now correct the spelling of the words shaded in your text.	We have "We had"
	I am
	We stay
	I play
	We go
	I don't
	Now correct all the verbs underlined in your text.

Figure 5: Example of corrective feedback

Once this has been done, the pupil is in a better position to revise the text. The few
remaining errors can stay uncorrected, unless it is vital that the text is perfect for some
reason, in which case the teacher can write the correct version of these above the error.
It is very important for teachers to explain in advance, to parents and children, why
they are using this type of feedback. Once it is understood, it will be beneficial in both
a formative way and a psychological one – there is nothing more demotivating than a
text covered with red ink.

Finally, a word about sharing the criteria with the children. It is important that they,
and their parents, are aware of how they are being assessed, in order to help them to
understand the assessment, and to develop as writers. This can be done by drawing
attention to the four main categories used in the descriptor grid, for example by
displaying these in simple language on a poster in the classroom, or by using them as
the basis for a simple self-assessment form. Figure 6 below shows an extract from a

self-assessment form developed in the ECML 'Can do' project (http://www.ecml.at/cando/files/start.htm). This was developed for pupils around the transition upper primary/lower secondary school, and was given to pupils to fill in and hand in with a piece of writing. This had the effect of encouraging children to check and work on their own writing before the teacher saw it.

How true are these? Ring the most appropriate number (4= true, 3 = more or less true, 2 = partly true, 1 = not true)				
I managed to write what I wanted	4	3	2	1
I made a text that suited the task	4	3	2	1
I made a text with a "thread" running through	4	3	2	1
My paragraphs each covered a main point	4	3	2	1
I used words and phrases typical of texts like this	4	3	2	1
I knew enough grammar	4	3	2	1
I checked for spelling, punctuation, "endings", etc.	4	3	2	1
I liked doing this	4	3	2	1
I got help from: (dictionary, Internet, etc.)	4	3	2	1

Figure 6: An extract from self-assessment form for writing, ECML 'Can do' project

2.6   Giving workshops in assessing writing

As was explained in section 2.4, training was given to potential users of the AYLLIT material and methods at the project's central workshop in Graz. This proved to be a successful way of initiating teachers in using the descriptor grid in assessment and feedback, and the following steps are recommended for those wishing to stage such a workshop, as part of in-service or initial teacher training. This format is designed for a two-day workshop.

1.   In advance of the workshop, allow the participants to try out the assessment grid with their own pupils' work. Ask them to bring two or three samples of their pupils' writing with them to the workshop.

2.   If the participants are not all familiar with the basic CEFR levels, spend a short time at the start of the workshop allowing them to place themselves on the levels of the CEFR self-assessment grid (Council of Europe 2001: 26-27), preferably in more than one language.

3.   (Group work) Give each group a paper with a number (for example, 10) of descriptors from the AYLLIT grid, randomly representing all categories and levels. Each group should have a different set, but of course there will be a lot of overlap in the descriptors. Make sure the group also has a copy of the CEFR grid, and that they do not have a set of AYLLIT descriptors to consult. Ask the group to estimate which level, including in-between levels, from approaching A1 to over B1, they feel each descriptor represents.

4.   (Plenum) Compare the results of the group work with the actual grid – shown as an overhead – and discuss any areas where there was a discrepancy.

5.   (Group work) Give each group an identical set of three AYLLIT sample texts (with a spread of levels) with accompanying profiles and comments (see AYLLIT website (http://ayllit.ecml.at/resources). Give the groups some time to study these and discuss the extent to which they agree with the profiles and comments, and overall levels.

6.   (Plenum) Feedback and comments on the group work.

7.   (Group work) Give each group an identical set of three new sample texts and assessment grids, and ask them to make profiles for these – give out copies of the unfilled grid, so that the group must make a profile for each of the texts, and assign it to a level. These can be displayed on the wall, with one display zone for each group. They then go round and compare the profiles and levels, and discuss any differences.

8.   (Individual work) Each participant is given an identical set of two new sample texts (with grids) to assess alone.

9. (Group work) Within each group, participants compare the profiles and levels of the two texts they assessed individually.

10. (In pairs/threes) The participants write comments which will be the basis of feedback to pupils on the two texts. These may also be displayed and discussed.

11. (Plenum) Present guidance on corrective feedback (see section 2.5), and initiate a discussion on what may be suitable corrective feedback for one of the texts just studied.

12. (In pairs/threes) The participants decide what corrective feedback they may give on one or two of the other texts recently assessed. These may also be displayed and discussed.

13. (In pairs/threes) Participants share texts from their own pupils, going through the stages of agreeing on profiles, levels, comments and corrective feedback on a number of these.

14. (Plenum) Final rounding up of experiences at the workshop. Evaluation. Plans for possible co-operation (be aware that the skills acquired need practising).

Think about this

- Do you have clear criteria for how to assess your pupils' writing?

- Do you share these with your pupils and their parents?

- Do you give writing tasks that let your pupils demonstrate that they have the abilities you are assessing them on?

- Does your feedback reflect these criteria?

- Do you give corrective feedback that pupils can really benefit from?

3. Assessment of YL reading

This chapter will present an account of the process of reading in the primary school, considering what is involved in the skill itself, the assessment needs of teachers, the development of materials and methods in the project, and the use of these in the classroom.

3.1 Reading in the upper primary school

Most teachers and parents would agree that one of the most important skills any child can leave primary school with is the ability to read independently and effectively for meaning. However, to achieve this goal children need a lot of support in both their L1 and L2. Children whose parents immerse them in books and visits to the library in the pre-school years and who read with them every day at home during their first years have a better chance of being strong readers in their L1. The children who are not so lucky will need a lot of support from teachers, and, in the case of the foreign language classroom, it is the teacher who has the dominant role in fostering reading in their pupils.

Reading in a foreign language classroom in primary school can be introduced relatively early, despite the fact that the main emphasis is still on the oral skills of speaking and listening. Children show both interest and enthusiasm when they start to learn the new language, and this is enhanced if reading materials are available in the child's immediate environment, either at home or at school.

Reading can help to reinforce what children are learning orally (Pinter 2006). In contrast with native speaker children, who possess a great resource of oral language to build on, children's L2 oral proficiency is typically low. At the same time, they are able to draw on their experience with reading in their first language. Pinter (2006: 69) recommends that children should start L2 reading with decoding familiar written language, matching spoken and written forms, or completing short texts with personally relevant information. Introducing reading beyond word level should happen gradually, from word to sentence level, and further to paragraph and short-text level. In the case of younger children, it is important to progress slowly as reading is a holistic process which involves many sub-skills. Storybooks can offer a good opportunity to expand children's reading abilities beyond the sentence level and beyond textbook texts, which may not offer much opportunity to develop extensive reading skills.

Two basic approaches to reading can be identified: intensive and extensive reading. Intensive reading involves learners reading in detail, with specific learning aims and tasks. Aims may include skimming a text for specific information, and tasks may include gap-filling, matching headings to paragraphs, or putting jumbled paragraphs into the correct order. However, task-based focuses on reading do not encourage

children to approach reading as creative individuals (Vale and Feunteun 1995). Moreover, the learning power of intensive reading is limited. Even after a child has acquired a word, it is beneficial to keep encountering it (and stories provide great opportunities for this).

The second approach to reading, extensive reading, involves learners reading texts for enjoyment and to develop general reading skills. It also involves choosing books themselves (Susser and Robb 1990; Day and Bamford 1998). As teachers know, the more pupils read, the better readers they become.

Storybook reading

Children enjoy listening to stories in their mother tongue and normally come to the foreign language classroom familiar with the conventions of narrative. As Ellis, Brewster and Girard (2002) suggest, stories provide an ideal introduction to the foreign language, as they are presented in a context that is familiar to the child.

Children's picture books, either in L1 or L2, are defined by their illustrations. A story may be read aloud using text alone, but without the accompanying illustrations, the meaning is different. Illustrations in a children's book are integral to the story and support the content of story. This is especially important for foreign language learners who may not know all the expressions when these are read or heard but they may guess the meaning when observing the pictures. Pictures support comprehension. To quote Galda (1993: 510):

> Picture books offer a unique opportunity for children to develop visual literacy because they are able to return to the visual images in books to explore, reflect, and critique those images. As children explore illustrations and develop the ability to read images, they will attain deeper meanings from literature and an awareness of how visual images are used in their own meaning making.

The use of picture books is advocated by Schoch (2011), who gives 13 reasons for teachers to use these almost daily, even beyond primary school age: they are non-threatening and focused, set a purpose for learning, provide a common knowledge background, are great teaching lenses, activate visual thinking, build reading comprehension, provide exemplars of figurative language, serve as writing models, can breathe life into dry facts and figures, can teach to literary targets, make abstract concepts concrete, and develop themes for learning. And they are fun.

When children read or listen to a story, there are four main mental processes involved (Vale and Feunteun 1995: 83):

1. Picturing and imaging. Children create a mental picture of what they are reading.

2. Predicting and recalling. Children predict what is going to happen and/or relate what has happened before to what is happening now.

3. Identification and personalising. Children identify with the characters and situations in the story according to their experiences.

4. Making value judgments. Children can relate their own values to those mentioned in the story.

Teachers may start reading books together with children, but they should increasingly leave the reading to the children themselves. A book corner set up, where pupils may look through books of their own choice and at their own pace, is empowering to the children. Setting up a class library is a good way to provide materials for pupils, and because the books are kept in the actual classroom, there is a greater chance that they will be borrowed, and teachers have more opportunities to refer to them during class. And a short period of silent reading in class can help to develop structural awareness, build vocabulary, and promote confidence in the language. Reading is much more than discovering what happens next in the story or answering comprehension questions related to a piece of text.

Graded readers

In a foreign language classroom, teachers may use graded readers in order to promote extensive reading. Graded readers are series of books ranked by age, reader level, or

another level of advancement. They are books specially written for second or foreign language learners. They are graded in the sense that they are informed by grammar and vocabulary guidelines for specific levels of difficulty. Beginning learners read books written in basic, familiar grammar and vocabulary. Once readers feel comfortable reading at this level, they move up through the series by reading books with more challenging vocabulary, grammar and plot. The vocabulary at each level is normally established by referring to corpus-based lexical research, and an analysis of commonly occurring words in course materials, readers and narrative text. The grammatical properties may reflect the level of most commonly used structures at a specific level within mainstream foreign language teaching.

3.2 The assessment of reading: teachers' needs

> It is very important that children regularly read aloud individually to their teacher, since it is only by listening carefully to how children are making sense of written words that we can understand their progress in learning (Cameron 2001: 142).

In this section we will consider the assessment of reading with respect to storybooks. Assessment here does not involve "testing", but rather knowing what books – or levels of books in a graded series – a child is capable of reading. It also involves knowing what kind of guidance to give children in choosing storybooks, so that they may develop independence in selecting stories, while at the same time not being defeated by an unrealistic choice they may make. The discussion here begins with general guidance issues, and leads into the tricky question of deciding which "language level" is the right one for a child to read at.

Helping children choose books

Children who choose the books they read usually read more books and spend more time reading, both at school and at home (Lance 2011). And independent reading increases both vocabulary and reading fluency. Lance adds that learning is enhanced when the right match is made between the ability level of the reader and the difficulty level of the book. Children themselves, particularly in the case of L2 reading, are not always able to find this match. They may gravitate to familiar books, or be drawn to an appealing cover illustration, while others may select a book they know an older brother or sister has read, but which may be beyond their ability. Ohlhausen and Jepsen (1992) advocate a strategy called "Goldilocks", citing the fairy-tale where Goldilocks was on the quest for what was "just right". The following questions may help children when deciding which book is just right for them:

- Is this book new to you?
- Do you understand some of the book?

- Are there just a few words on each page you do not know?

- When you read, are some places smooth and some choppy?

- Is there someone who can help you with this book?

By engaging in this decision-making activity – comparing and contrasting difficulty levels – children may learn to make choices. There will be times when a child really wants to read a book, despite its being too difficult, and it may be best to just allow him/her to carry on and get what s/he can from the book. However, on the whole, the teacher needs a more systematic approach to determining whether the language in a book is "just right" for a child, and this is where the method known as "running records" (Clay 2000) comes in.

Running records

A running record is a method, originally developed for assessing reading in pupils' mother tongue (or language of instruction), which can be done quickly and frequently. It is an individually conducted ongoing formative assessment, which provides a graphic representation of a pupil's oral reading, identifying patterns of effective and ineffective strategy use. This method is similar to miscue analysis, developed by Kenneth Goodman (Brown, Goodman and Marek 1996).

Running records are designed to be taken as a child reads orally from any text. They capture what the reader said and did while reading the text. Clay (2000) says that by using this tool teachers can review what the reader already knows, what the reader attended to, and what the reader overlooked. As the pupil reads, the teacher records miscues. After reading the teacher asks the pupil to retell the passage to check for comprehension. Then s/he analyses the responses, and uses the information to decide on future instruction. A significant feature of the running record method is that a teacher is able to judge, on the basis of a short sample of reading, whether a text is too difficult, very easy, or "just right" in terms of language challenge for a pupil. This is done by calculating the percentage of words in the text sample which are problematic in some way (made simple if the sample contains 100 words). Where over 15% of words are problematic, the text is too difficult. Between 5% and 10% will make a text challenging but readable, while fewer than 5% of problem words will render a text very easy. This is in line with much that has been written about readability, and the vital role of vocabulary in deciding text difficulty (for example, Alderson 2000)

Using running records can thus provide a way to assess an individual pupil's reading, determine appropriate levels of text for reading, and to inform teaching. Taken at intervals, these records can show growth over time in reading skills. Moreover, each running record can provide evidence of how well children are learning to direct their knowledge of letters, sounds or words. This puts the teacher in a position to decide what pupils need to learn and to match pupils to appropriate books or levels in a series.

However, the question still remains as to how the running records, designed for mother tongue reading, can be adapted for use with primary school L2 readers.

3.3   Development of material and methods in the project

One of the main aims of the project was to develop a tool for teachers to use to judge whether a reader is able to read a given text in English as a foreign language. The teachers need to know if the children are able to make the link between the spoken words they already know and the written ones in a story. The teachers also have to be able to select the appropriate books for each child, especially in terms of the difficulty level.

We decided to focus on the use of graded readers, as most children in the primary schools represented in the project were at levels commonly catered for in graded readers series, and were not felt to be quite ready to independently read most stories intended for native speakers of their age, although many did progress to this level in the latter stages of the project. We also decided to work on the adaptation of the running record as described by Clay (2000) so that it better suited our own pupils' needs as L2 readers.

We followed the reading of pupils in the four countries at half-year intervals, over two years. Our first task was to identify a series of texts that we felt suitable for reading in all four countries. These were taken from two series: Penguin Young Readers (Pearson Longman) and Cambridge Storybooks (Cambridge University Press).

For the purpose of the project we selected a number of books from each series, representing a wide range of levels and topics. The same selection of readers was sent to all the schools involved in the project. The teachers in the schools had the readers available for the children to read. A timetable for the reading activity was scheduled in each country in order to establish one reading round per term.

The teachers (or researchers) were given the following guidelines to follow. First, the teacher talked briefly about the book title, the pictures, any particular names or concepts that were strange to the children and may hinder their understanding. Then the teacher let the children get into the story before starting with the assessment. The first few sentences should not be assessed, and might be read aloud by the teacher. For the assessment, the team had a 100-word sample of the text ready and used this while the child was reading aloud. The teacher coded any problem by using the suggested coding scheme (see below). As a rule of thumb, the child should have no more than roughly 10 problem words for the text to be suitable for him/her. Fewer than five problem words may suggest that the child should try a higher level. The coding results should also help the teacher to identify particular weaknesses which can be worked on with the child, to help him/her to develop his/her reading ability further. The teachers were also reminded that familiarity with the topic would make the reading easier and therefore

may not reflect the general level of the pupil´s reading ability. The coding system, which was adjusted during the project, was defined as shown below, and illustrated by the text shown, where "problem" words are highlighted by shading.

Coding:

- A problem word: a straight line above the word, e.g. $\overline{entertainment}$

- A word that is read correctly but misunderstood: a line underneath the word, e.g. entertainment

- Self-correction: write SC above the word, e.g. beautiful (SC)

- If a student substitutes the word, write that word above the replaced word, e.g.

  goat

  coat

- If a student leaves out a word, write this line: **/**

- Intonation problems: ……..? (should have a question intonation)

  ……….! (other types of wrong intonation)

- Added words: **+** (the added word), e.g. music (+ the)

Figure 7: Codes used in reading project

Extract of reading record. From Penguin Young Readers, level 3: *The School Bus*

My name is Penny, and every morning I get the⟨to⟩ bus to school. My mother waves

goodbye from the garden gate. My journey to school is always the same. The bus

goes through the green wood. Then it⟨is⟩ goes down the⟨to⟩ big hill and along the High

Street. The same⟨Self-correction⟩ children are on the bus every day. **Simon** always reads his comic.

Joseph listens to his Walkman⟨welcome⟩. **Colette** talks on her phone.

Figure 8: Example of a reading record

Below are some teachers' comments from the first round of the reading assessment:

> The majority of the kids want to keep on reading even if they do not understand the story. The reasons: not to disappoint the teacher?

> Children with greater reading difficulties tend to follow the Catalan pattern (syllable by syllable).

Figure 9: Teachers comments on the reading project.

Family names and surnames may increase the difficulty of a text. This was observed in the case of *The Jungle Book*, where many children could not pronounce the names, and therefore made slight pauses which interrupted the flow of the reading process.

When the children read a story with a familiar context their reading seemed to be more fluent and smoother.

After the first reading round in all of the participating countries the team identified some recommendations to be followed in the next reading round. First, where the selected sample proved too difficult, the child should be given a lower level book to try. The children who have read the sample without significant difficulty should either

be assessed as being at that particular level or be given a book at a higher level to try, as appropriate. Although the assessment is done on a 100-word sample, the children should be given the option of reading the whole book.

The team identified a number of factors that make children's reading difficult:

Vocabulary

- unfamiliar surnames and names;
- unfamiliar words: "elves", "shoemaker", "sorcerer", "apprentice".

Structure of the text and layout

- if the book consists of dialogue only, this can cause problems in understanding the book;
- some pictures are not helpful, especially those which are not consistent with the plot of the story;
- if the size of the book is too small, this may be a constraint for some children.

The reading assessment method and our findings were presented to the participants at the central workshop. Initially, many of the participants were sceptical about the procedure and the outcomes, and a lively discussion ensued. Reading aloud is rather stigmatised, and often regarded as outdated in the foreign language classroom, and incompatible with communicative foreign language teaching principles. It is commonly associated with painful memories of "reading round the class". However, it was pointed out, by a number of participants, that reading aloud is an authentic activity, for example in news bulletins and passing on written information orally, and has a distinct place in many modern teaching practices, such as role play and readers' theatre (Drew and Pedersen forthcoming). By playing recordings of pupils reading aloud, and allowing participants to listen to these, first with their eyes closed, and then with the text in front of them, we were able to persuade most participants that much can be discovered about the individual child's foreign language proficiency and his/her reading skills, as well as the readability of a text for a particular child. A number of texts were presented, hearing pupils reading and seeing records. The participants were able to see and hear that a pupil may not actually be making a connection between a word on the page – which may be very common, such as "who" – and the word they are familiar with orally. These problems can go unnoticed if the teacher does not listen to pupil reading.

One of the aims of the project, to draft CEFR-linked descriptors for story reading, had proved difficult for the team throughout the project. A last attempt was made at the central workshop, and the participants valiantly rose to the occasion (as evidenced by the photo below), but, in fact, little was achieved in a meaningful way, and this aim has been recognised as being beyond the scope of the project.

Discussing reading levels at the workshop

3.4 Using the material and methods in the classroom

The reading aloud method with unseen texts may be used for the purpose of classroom formative assessment, to help the teacher decide which books are suitable for a child, and to inform him/her of particular reading problems the child may need help with. The findings acquired may also be used in summative assessment, where the level of reading reached can be compared with that reached earlier. Whatever the aim, teachers should follow the standard procedure if using the AYLLIT reading aloud method. This may be adapted for their own purposes but should not be changed too often as this will make the comparison of the results impossible. Before teachers start the assessment they should be familiar with the storybooks (plots, vocabulary, difficult names, etc.) and the whole assessment procedure in advance. They should have a 100-word sample of the text ready and use it while the child is reading aloud to make the record with. Teachers should practise until they feel confident with the method. Being able to use it with any text, at any time, as and when appropriate, should be the aim (Clay 2000). At first, only easily noticed things may be recorded, but with practice more and more things will be noticed and recorded.

As Clay (2000) points out when teachers have recorded the essentials, they may note also what the child said about the task, how s/he moved across the text or how s/he turned back or forward several pages and corrected his/her error, whether he/she was surprised by the error, etc. Without a doubt with practice teachers get more and more information from their observations and records, which may be a vital and varied resource of areas for improvement. Teachers may discover that things taken for granted have not been learnt at all or that vocabulary that a teacher believes to be above the level of the child (children) has long been acquired. The results from recording children's reading may influence important educational decisions like moving children to different groups, identifying children with particular difficulties (for example, dyslexia), timely selection of children for special supplementary assistance, etc., (adapted from Clay 2000: 6-7).

While the method used here will hopefully be helpful to teachers in assessing their pupils' story-reading ability, it will only be as good as the material the children read. Without inspiring texts which children have access to, and can take pleasure in reading, we will achieve little on the road to turning them into keen and able readers. Therefore, some advice is included here on the selection of materials, the setting up of a class library and some methods for using stories and reading aloud in an enlightened classroom.

In the selection of materials for reading, it should be emphasised that graded readers are only a small part of what should be offered. There is a distinct place for using native-speaker children's books, which vary in difficulty, and which may be appealing to children for many reasons, for example, through illustrations, or through familiarity from L1 reading. And it should also be stressed that many children love factual books (which are also offered in some graded reading schemes). However, it is maintained here that, as children in upper primary school progress towards being autonomous readers, there is a clear place for books published for foreign language readers.

The class library has become a normal part of many classrooms. This is a place where pupils are expected to browse books, and read (or pretend to read). Teachers must provide quality time and opportunity for children to read during the day.

When setting up a classroom library with foreign language books, teachers should make it a good learning environment as well as a stimulating leisure area. When selecting books, it is better to choose quality over quantity. Books should be chosen for relevancy, difficulty level and attractiveness. Books with an accompanying CD can also be a valuable supplement, so that children can read and listen at the same time. The material should appeal to both boys and girls, and should include fiction and non-fiction. Comic strips can have a place here, and can be particularly helpful for pupils with low reading ability.

Example of a class library

If storing books on bookshelves, teachers should make sure that their pupils can reach them. If books are in baskets on the floor, then children can easily rummage through them. It is also a good thing to label books according to subject matter (stories, fairy tales, animals, etc.), series or difficulty levels. Younger children often choose a book by its cover. Therefore, try displaying picture books with the cover out rather than the spine.

It is not always comfortable to read while sitting on hard desk chairs. Children will want to stay in the reading corner longer if there is a nice rug, floor cushions or something else soft that children can sit on. It is important to encourage children to sit in the corner for some time, and read quietly from time to time. There could also be a teacher's chair or stool and the teacher may use it to read aloud to the children. With children at the starting stage of reading, it is important that the classroom offers a lot of environmental reading which can be achieved by labelling classroom items with words or phrases or any written material. While children are reading, the teacher may play quiet, ambient music. This could be a classical music CD, modern electronic piece or any soothing music without words. Music will help pupils focus and feel at ease. And we must not forget the value of online reading and having an online library in a computer.

Another way of working with storybooks with primary school pupils is setting up literacy workstations. These are work zones within the classroom where pupils work either alone or with a partner, using instructional materials to explore and expand their literacy and learning (Diller 2003). During this time children are actively engaged in practising reading, writing, and working with words in a meaningful and relevant context. Workstations are an integral part of classroom instruction. By consulting the Workstations video link (see references section) you can see a video made in one of the project schools in Spain on how to set up a workstation in an English class. The video has English subtitles.

In the case of extensive reading with foreign language storybooks, literacy workstations can also have a role in giving children the chance to select books that they find interesting and right for their level. Workstations, therefore, may be organised according to the difficulty level of the storybooks. The pupils are then free to choose how they might use the books to practise reading skills. They read the book and, if they wish, they may talk about it with the teacher or with their classmates, do some extra activities, or just move to another book. Teachers may set up a "word workstation" where children can choose to do writing tasks related to what they have been reading about. There may also be game/play stations where children play with words. The aim of literacy workstations is to provide meaningful, independent practice of literacy (reading) skills. Another way of working with foreign language storybooks is to set up a readers' theatre. This is a dramatic presentation of a written work in script form. Readers read from a script and reading parts are divided among the readers. There is no memorisation, costumes or special lighting needed. The focus is on reading the text with expressive voices and gestures. The main aim is to make the text meaningful and fun (see Drew and Pedersen, forthcoming, and the Reader's Theater website (see references section)).

Hopefully, this section will have given the reader both help in assessing young learners' reading, and in promoting it. To quote Vale and Feunteun (1995: 82):

- Reading is a quest for meaning which requires children to be active participants in the construction of meaning.
- Readers learn about reading by reading. Children become readers by being fully involved in books, …, texts of all kinds – and by getting joy and satisfaction from reading.

Think about this

- Do your pupils have the opportunity to read texts other than those included in the textbook?

- Have you set up a foreign language classroom library? If yes, does it perform the main aims? If not, what needs to be done to get one? Whom should you turn to first? Where and from whom should you get support?

- Which storybooks does your classroom library hold? Are they appropriate? Do you need to update the library?

- Have you tried assessing the reading of your children? If so, what methods have you used?

- Could the methods suggested here enhance your assessment?

4. Conclusion

In this book we have attempted to make clear what the AYLLIT project has meant, what it has done, and how it might make a difference to the literacy of young learners. In the first chapter we took a look at the whats, whys, whos and hows of the project. In the two main chapters – covering writing and reading respectively – we allowed ourselves to go into more detail. As the project has been dealing with a special group of pupils – in upper primary school – and their teachers, we began by considering the importance given, rightly, to young learner literacy. In each of Chapters 2 and 3, we presented issues particularly relevant to the writing/reading of young learners, and gave an account of what seemed to be the main needs of their teachers, in order to carry out assessment in a way that would contribute to their literacy development. We then went on to describe the procedures followed in the project, in order to develop materials and methods to use in the classroom. We concluded both chapters with an important section on how to use these materials and methods, alongside a range of other valuable activities for promoting the development of children's literacy.

But the work of AYLLIT began long before the project started, and even before the team conceived of its idea. A cornerstone of our work was, of course, the CEFR, the roots of which can be traced back to the 1970s. And the work of many people, inside and outside our own countries, gave us junior ELPs to refer to and draw inspiration from. The ECML's Bergen 'Can do' project had played a part in this, and provided us with research-based material to build on. The Norwegian national testing group at the University of Bergen had laid down years of work and experience in producing descriptors of lower secondary school writing, linked to the CEFR, which gave us the early prototype for our own descriptors. In the field of assessing reading, the running record method, developed by Marie Clay (2000), was already being used worldwide, and we were able to observe it in use with L1 readers before trying it out with our own pupils.

Yet the account given here, although we have done our best to include glimpses from events in the "real life" of the project, does not capture the full, and very human, story we have brought from it. For that we would need another book. We remember Lina, the 6th grader, who had never been asked to write a story in English, and whose talent as a narrator showed us all just what an 11 year old could rise to. Then there was Petter, small and scowling, a "non-performer", who would, at first, only translate (impressively) the graded reader he was asked to read aloud, before finally being persuaded to do it in English. He reached level four within weeks, and turned out to be one of the best readers in his class, perhaps tasting acknowledged success for the first time in his life. On the other hand, we were able to discover that Anja was confusing pairs of words, such as "the" and "there", and were in a position to help her move forward, which she did, slowly but surely. And we cannot forget the pride of all those who, for the first time ever, had read a "whole book". "Write it down," said one teacher, "I'll show it to his mother; she'll hardly believe it!"

And we remember the thrill caused by announcing that the pupils' writing was to be sent to exotic places, and read by children who spoke different languages. And the package of "Christmassy" things arriving from a school in Spain. The teachers too gave us moments that buoyed us up when the workload threatened to drag us down. Like Helge's appreciative e-mail, the morning after a session of parents' meetings, where he had been able to show them the latest profile of their child's writing, comparing it with that made earlier, showing where improvements had been made.

What these and many more stories add up to is that we feel we have been on the right track. The writing tasks we have given, and the way we organised them, sending them across countries, struck a chord with the children and enabled them to produce their best, giving us and their teachers real evidence of what they could do. The assessment descriptors allowed us to make meaningful profiles, which in turn provide a basis for feedback and for seeing visible progress, ultimately with movement through CEFR sub-levels. The use of running records – with teachers hearing children reading aloud, using graded readers – had undoubted value. While the coding can take time to master, the fact that teachers are able to identify the level a child is at, and the particular problems that s/he may be struggling with, is key to setting the child on the way to independent reading and a feeling of true achievement. True, we have yet to find a satisfactory way of making CEFR-linked descriptors for story-reading, but this only serves to highlight the fact that our work is never done, and that there are always areas beckoning for new research in this important field.

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Assessment of young learner literacy linked to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

Angela Hasselgreen, Violeta Kalėdaitė, Natàlia Maldonado Martín and Karmen Pižorn

This publication is targeted at:

- Primary school teachers
- Teacher educators
- People involved in language assessment

Primary school teachers are increasingly faced with the task of assessing the literacy of pupils in a language other than a pupil`s mother tongue. The handbook presents practical issues and principles associated with this assessment. The section on writing also contains a step-by-step guide for training teachers in the use of the material.

Teachers will find tips for how to get pupils to write, how to assess their writing and how to give feedback. This is illustrated by pupils' texts and teachers' comments. In addition, the project website contains downloadable material for assessing writing. Samples of pupils' writing across a range of levels are provided exemplifying how to use the proposed material, with comments demonstrating how the assessment can be used as a basis for feedback to the pupils.

For further information and materials relating to this publication, visit the website: http://ayllit.ecml.at