Assessment of Early Literacy in First- and Second-Language Learners using MABEL – A Multilanguage Literacy Assessment Tool

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With the global rise in migration and immigration, and the recognition of the benefits of bi/multilingualism, increasing numbers of children speaking diverse home languages are being schooled in a second or additional language. On average, additional language learners (ALLs) lag behind their monolingual peers in literacy skills during the primary school years. Yet, educators often lack the tools and/or the training to assess and support ALLs who may be struggling in the school language, and to differentiate between children with a temporary literacy delay due to insufficient knowledge of the school language from those who have a language-based neurocognitive disorder which places them at particular risk of poor literacy and general educational outcomes (Strand, 2021).

In this presentation, we propose a way forward based on findings from a series of direct cross-linguistic comparisons of monolingual school beginners' literacy skills (the ELDEL project), and insights from two recent studies of early literacy in second language settings. We will also showcase the arising non-commercial, free-to-use assessment tool called Multilanguage Assessment Battery of Early Literacy (MABEL) as a model for reliably assessing ALL pupils' literacy profiles in various multilingual settings. This battery provides a blueprint for further test adaptations that could easily be integrated into routine school assessments of children's home and school language proficiency and their potential literacy needs.