Introduction

Currently, foreign language teaching in Swiss elementary (4- to 12-year-olds) and lower secondary schools (12- to 16-year-olds) is a hot topic among politicians, educators and citizens. In the early 2000s, most Swiss cantons (the 26 political/administrative entities, member states of the Swiss Confederation) included two foreign languages in elementary schooling—a national language other than the local language (French, German, Italian or Romansh) and English. Since 2007, three curricula—one for each linguistic region: French-speaking, German-speaking and Italian-speaking parts of Switzerland—have been developed to replace the 26 cantonal curricula.

This causes slight turmoil for the evaluation and assessment of learners. Although the curricula clearly state where learners should be at the end of the eighth (end of elementary school) and eleventh (end of lower secondary school) grades, there are many questions. First of all, what do the selected descriptors (based on the Council of Europe’s (2001) Common European Framework of Reference [CEFR]) actually mean and to what level of accuracy should learners perform? Second, what should report cards include and how should these cards be interpreted? Third, what sort of evidence should elementary and lower secondary teachers be collecting to show proof of students’ level of language acquisition?

The purpose of this chapter is to share the developments going on in Swiss school and teacher training and provide ideas that are also relevant to other regions of the world. First, an overview of the Swiss system and the background to foreign language teaching in and teacher training for Swiss elementary and lower secondary schools will be provided. Second, the development of the curriculum for German-speaking cantons and the issues around its implementation are described. Third, examples of changing classroom practices in the English language classroom will be described. Finally, future directions and tracks that still need to be smoothed out will be elaborated upon.

An Overview of the Swiss School System and Language Policies—Four Languages, 26 Systems

For several decades, the general trend in Europe has been towards an increase in the number of years during which the teaching of at least one foreign language is compulsory and a lowering of the age at which this begins. The Swiss situation is no different than the situation in the rest of Europe but
Grading in Swiss Language Classrooms

shows peculiarities due to its federalist system and multilingualism. Each canton has its own Ministry of Education. These Ministries are represented in the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK), the coordination body at the national level. The EDK adopted a ‘strategy for languages’ (EDK 2004) according to which all students should start learning a second national language and English by the seventh grade (10- to 11-year-olds), thus supporting the longer-term and earlier-start guidelines set by the Barcelona Council (European Council 2002). A concordat for the harmonisation of compulsory school (EDK 2007), adopted in 2017 by 15 cantons, states, among other key elements, that one language has to be taught from the fifth grade (8- to 9-year-olds) and one in the seventh (10- to 11-year-olds); the 5/7 model. Whether foreign language instruction starts with a second national language or English is left up to the ‘Educational Regions’. Thus, in the French-speaking part of Switzerland, learners start with German in the fifth grade and then continue with English in the seventh. In the French/German-speaking border cantons (such as Bern), one national foreign language (French or German) is introduced before English. In the other German-speaking cantons, English is compulsory from the fifth grade, and French, in most cases, follows in the seventh grade. Ticino (Italian-speaking canton) and Graubünden (German, Italian and Romansh as official languages) have their own particular system (EDK 2015). A second national language was already compulsory in most cantons in the 1990s and by 2015, 23 cantons had already adapted their curricula to include English at elementary level, thus implementing the 5/7 model.

Further work to harmonise the system led to the definition of basic skills to be reached by learners in several subjects, among which are the second national language and English (EDK 2011). The basic skills for foreign languages are based on the CEFR. Regardless of which language is introduced first, the levels to be achieved by the end of eighth grade (end of elementary school) and the eleventh grade (end of lower secondary school and of compulsory education) are the same for both languages and compulsory for all cantons. Educational Regions have developed curricula in accordance with the basic skills. Hence, the Piano di studio della scuola dell’obbligo ticinese (PSTI [Repubblica e Cantone Ticino 2015]) was developed for Ticino and the Plan d’études romand (PER [CIIP 2010–2016]) for the French-speaking cantons. The three regions where German is a language of instruction have cooperated to develop the Lehrplan21 (www.lehrplan.ch), a curriculum common to 21 cantons, which some cantons may partly adapt to their own specific needs.

Cantons individually decide on many other key elements of their school system, such as the hours of instruction in each subject, issues on assessment and report cards and textbooks. Educational Regions may issue recommendations or publish proposals and suggestions on an advisory basis.

Between 2014 and 2018, several popular initiatives were launched in German-speaking cantons to postpone the start of the second foreign language, to prevent the introduction of the Lehrplan21 or of skills-based teaching and learning and to replace the newly introduced textbooks. Even though none of them succeeded (EDK 2019, p. 20), the so-called ‘language debates’ make various tendencies visible. On the one hand, there is a will to harmonise the school systems at a national level and to teach a second national language in the elementary school (in accordance with the Swiss Constitution) as a means of promoting communication between the linguistic regions and strengthen Swiss identity. On the other hand, there is the idea that elementary school should concentrate on other subjects—the language of instruction or handicrafts, and decisions about when to start a subject should be left up to the cantons.

Which language (French or English) should be introduced only in the lower secondary grades is often not stated, but the introduction of English in elementary school is less challenged than the keeping of French.

Teacher Training

Swiss foreign language teachers are aware of many elements of classroom assessment because of the requirements they must themselves fulfil to become fully qualified foreign language teachers. As English is one of the newer subjects in the curriculum, all elementary and secondary school
teachers wanting to teach the subject over the past 15 years have undergone recent certification or re-certification—in the case of secondary teachers due to the influence of elementary school English on expected secondary outcomes. Thus, teacher qualification contributes to the general discussion because it is one level of understanding of assessment that should help to inform classroom practices. Teachers are expected to know the CEFR levels themselves, to have had a stay abroad (which feeds into techniques used in the classroom) and to understand the testing and portfolios they themselves have experienced as part of their training.

In most cantons, pre-service elementary school teacher training is a semi-specialist or generalist bachelor’s degree in elementary school education. Secondary teachers attend a four- to five-year Master’s degree program and become specialised in fewer subjects. These requirements are similar throughout Switzerland.

On the level of subject-matter knowledge, the EDK (2017, p. 3) recommends that, in order to teach the target foreign language, elementary school teachers are required to show proof of a B2 or higher level of general foreign language skills. Secondary school teachers must show proof of a C1 and higher level. Teachers’ proficiency should be demonstrated through either internal qualifying exams or standardised exams such as the Cambridge Exams. Thus, as the majority of teachers in Switzerland are non-native speakers of the foreign languages they teach (this differs in the cantons on a linguistic border, as more teachers there are bilingual); they have gone through the process and steps of learning a foreign language and are familiar with the CEFR descriptors, which should be an asset in assessing their own learners.

On the level of teaching knowledge, Swiss teachers are qualified in their initial studies in many ways, on a general teaching level through coursework and fieldwork and on the level of foreign language teaching skills, which are primarily measured through exams but also sporadically through lesson observations and feedback. After certification, a more general model of teaching-skills evaluation is in place (no longer subject specific) through feedback by various levels of school-based personnel (e.g. board members, principals, peers). In most cases, both pre-service and in-service teachers work with showcase portfolios, be it for a grade as part of their initial training or as professional development as required by many boards of education.

Finally, to become fully qualified, teachers are expected to go abroad to an area of the world where the target language is the main language of instruction and work in school or with youth. In the case of teachers of the other national languages, these exchanges mainly take place within Switzerland with familiar models of assessment, though there are differences in individual schools and local policies. For teachers getting trained to teach English, they go abroad to different countries and come back with many ‘foreign’ ideas in terms of classroom assessment practices and policies, as a large number of Bachelor and Master’s theses that include a section on grading and assessment will attest.

There has been discussion among language teaching specialists from the public school sector in Switzerland as to whether the Swiss should invest in creating a specific language teaching profile for teachers. This means: What do teachers in the public school system really need to teach in terms of foreign languages to 8- to 16-year-old learners? As an answer, in part, the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (Newby et al. 2007) is being used in some cantons. A Swiss-wide project has been launched to develop a portfolio for Swiss public school foreign language teachers—the ‘Profession-related language competence profile for foreign language teachers’ (Kuster et al. 2014), which is widely supported by the EDK and swissuniversities.ch (a joint body of higher education policy) because it may help harmonise the qualification requirements for teachers.

Hence, the Swiss place rigorous requirements on their foreign language teachers, as can be interpreted from the Key Data on Teaching Languages at School 2012 report (Eurydice 2012), which describes the situation in many different European countries. Requirements for teacher education in Switzerland are fairly competitive in a European context, and teachers should theoretically come out knowing a lot about assessment and grading policies based on their own experiences.
Yet the transfers to the classroom are at times, questionable. The use of portfolios is rather the exception than the rule, and other practices teachers similarly experience in their own professional development (peer feedback, performance assessments) are not common in classrooms. Furthermore, even though most teachers have to pass a standardised language exam which has been linked to the CEFR, often, in the classroom, teacher trainers see vocabulary lists to memorise and grammar structures to master instead of open tasks teachers have experienced with language learning and testing. Students and teachers can talk about assessment techniques they saw in their stay abroad, yet one hardly sees them in use in Swiss classrooms. What does teacher training have to do to enable teachers to use these repertoires of ideas in their own classroom practices?

Development of Lehrplan21 and Current Issues in Its Implementation and Reporting

History and Conceptual Framework

The current curricula (PSTI, PER and Lehrplan21) are all based on some common competence-oriented principles (what pupils can do as compared to what they know), in accordance with the CEFR and the Basic Skills. The original work from the University of Fribourg, namely by Lenz and Studer (2004), was vital to establishing the CEFR as it is being used today. This development flowed into the formulation and definition of standards being set in the various Swiss curricula already before the elaboration of the three current ones. The CEFR levels (from A1 to C2) were nevertheless too vague for the definition of teaching aims; thus, midlevels were developed in Switzerland—learners first learn to perform to level A1.1 and then A1.2 (solid CEFR A1), before moving on to level A2.1 and so on. The complexity of setting minimal or basic standards is described in depth in Lenz and Studer (2008), and more recently the work of Peyer and Studer (2014) has helped to fine-tune minimal standards for reading, writing, speaking and listening skills in any of the languages taught in Switzerland (focus on German but transferrable). Thus, the CEFR had had a large influence on the definition of teaching aims. But competence-oriented teaching is still questioned (also in other subjects), and the various political initiatives might lead to changes in the near future.

We will now concentrate on the Lehrplan21, as it is the curriculum relevant to the largest number of Swiss learners. As English is the newest subject in the curriculum (though Information Technology will be its own subject as of 2018), Lehrplan21 makes up the draft curriculum which had been in use since 2004, and these two versions do not differ in principles. Swiss teachers enjoy what is called a ‘Methodenfreiheit’ or a freedom to choose the methods by which they teach though they are limited in the textbooks they are allowed to use (these are determined by cantonal boards of education). Thus, the curriculum only suggests a ‘communicative’ approach to foreign language teaching that encourages authentic situations. The standards listed for every level of schooling, however, are slightly more precise. By the end of compulsory schooling (eleventh grade or 15- to 16-year-old children), the general expected levels most learners are to reach in foreign languages (not including bilingual programs) are B1.1 in writing and B1.2 in reading, speaking and listening. Minimal standards are also set at a lower level (level of basic skills) (Bildungsdepartement Kanton St. Gallen 2017).

In the background to these curricula is what Swiss call ‘Bildungsmonitoring’, the national educational monitoring system. Its aim is to gather and analyse information about the Swiss education system and thus lay a sound basis for policy making. The most recent report (SKBF 2014) references several studies (including Gnos 2012; von Ow et al. 2012), and some of these studies do look at performance of learners in terms of curricular standards. But because cantons were still developing or implementing their common curricula, because there are questions about how
standards are actually measured on a given test, and because there were also different starting ages for English (second grade in Zurich until summer 2017), the report could not play a major role in cantonal policies.

The overview of Swiss research provided by Wiedenkeller (2013) shows how few studies in Switzerland contributed so far to showing whether the curricular aims, in their current formulations, have been met by learners or not. In 2017, however, the attainment of the basic skills was measured in all cantons for the first time in the first foreign language. The results (EDK 2019) shed some light on the results of the cantons’ harmonisation efforts and are informing policy makers on possible improvements.

Teachers are expected to teach and thus measure learners’ language skills slightly differently than was expected years ago when mastery of structures and words was key, whereas now, mastery of a specific standard or competence leaves room for a lot of interpretation. In the following, discussions of [changes to] current changes to report cards and then descriptions of tools that have been developed over the past years will be provided.

**Report Cards**

School report card systems also vary from canton to canton. Currently, in most German-speaking cantons (some cantons do not give school report cards until the seventh grade), report cards come twice a year and start in the fifth grade. Learners receive a tick as to whether they have surpassed, met or not met the aims of speaking in and listening to the foreign language. Some cantons include reading and writing and some do not. Per upper-elementary and into lower secondary, this tick becomes a grade (‘6’ being the highest grade, ‘4’ meaning that the aims were barely met) and reading, writing, speaking and listening are reported. Figure 14.1 shows the current report card for upper elementary/lower secondary in the canton of Zurich.

Giving grades according to the four skills is difficult for teachers because it is difficult to actually separate performance in the four skills. A fill-in-the-gap question, for example, can measure both reading and writing skills, and this requires the teacher to declare the skill being measured and record it appropriately. Even official coursebooks and tests provided by the local publishers do not mention this or provide suggestions on how to do this. At the other end of the spectrum, in other cantons, such as Geneva, report cards are issued three times a year and teachers are asked to provide one grade for the entire subject based on the average of scores regardless of the four skills (République et canton de Genève 2016, p. 19). Averaging scores for a grade is discouraged in many cantons and encouraged in others.

Though cantons decide on their own assessment and reporting procedures, Educational Regions may issue suggestions to adapt and harmonise the practice. In 2015, a committee of the D-EDK (grouping of German-speaking Educational Regions) put together a report of existing conditions and suggestions for improvement (Arbeitsgruppe der Kommission Volksschule der D-EDK 2015).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Englisch</th>
<th>5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sehr gut</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gut</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>ungenügend</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<th>Hörverstehen</th>
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<tr>
<td>Leseverstehen</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sprechen</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schreiben</td>
<td>4</td>
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*Figure 14.1  Zurich report cards (Bildungsdirektion Kanton Zürich 2007)*
Out of it came the conclusion that grades are not to be average scores of tests and a suggestion for more detailed school reports where teachers hand-enter specific CEFR descriptors for each language skill and report on specific standards as compared to the skill or the subject in general. Here, teachers are asked to write the aims for each skill and to report on a learner’s performance in each skill with a grade and with the right CEFR level indicated. A reminder of evidence-gathering tools and relevant performance assessments is not provided but would be welcome in order to encourage this practice.

This new suggestion approaches the concept of standards-based grading in the United States (e.g. O’Connor 2007) in that teachers are not only reporting grades on skills but on specific sub-skills or ‘standards’. This of course takes more time and Swiss teachers have never been expected to report as such; thus, this document has drawn some criticism and the ideas within have yet to be implemented.

Recently, there have been unsuccessful suggestions to have teachers individually list the graded evidence they gathered in class (a project, a test, an observation) on the report card (Fachbeurteilung mit dem Lehrplan Volksschule 2017) and to flatten the grading system to get rid of half grades. Moreover, currently in many schools and districts, there are committees and school work groups addressing the issue of points and grades with some attempts to get rid of points on tests in their schools so teachers think about the constructs being measured and also to get rid of grades at all and go to only written feedback. In some parts of Switzerland, teachers are working with the European Language Portfolio, but not for grading purposes, though this could be developed.

**Issues**

There are a few issues in the current curricular situations and report cards which make assessment and grading practices difficult for teachers and for researchers to be able to gather data for educational monitoring. First of all, there are several references in Lehrplan21 to settings that are not necessarily representative of or encouraged in the practice, for example, through the references to interactions in ‘English-speaking cultures’ and with ‘standard English’ and exemplifications of the importance of understanding native varieties of English (English in London, Scotland or Vancouver, as mentioned in the section titled ‘Sensitization to Varieties’) or ‘having conversation with English native speakers’ (in the section on ‘Authentic Encounters’).

Though there is no explicit reference in Lehrplan21 to native speakers in the specific standards for each of the language skills, the original curricular draft was more realistic in its link to real-life situations and encouraged task- and content-based learning as a methodology; this has since been removed. The draft referred simply to ‘foreign language speakers’ where children learn, for example, to give directions in English to a lost tourist from wherever. So although the original paper took the current situation of there being more contact in English among two non-native speakers of English than between one native and one non-native-speaker, the more recent curricular standards throw some shadows on more modern, tolerant assessment practices of encouraging settings of lingua franca use (see Jenkins & Leung 2016 for more examples). In teacher-training courses, the question still prevails as to which norm corrections should be based on, for example, British English or American English? Teachers mention that, because Switzerland is in Europe, they do not accept American spelling or formulations, and many textbooks are in British English. If teachers are expected to use more holistic practices (such as dynamic assessment, described by Studer 2016) based on lingua franca principles, then the curriculum should limit its references to ‘standard’ models and assumed ‘native speakers’ and explicitly promote interactions between two non-native speakers.

Furthermore, in Lehrplan21, there is often reference to learners listening and reading in English and describing what they read in the local language. Although this makes sense on some levels
to have learners show deep understanding of a text and show their ‘mediation’ ability (as defined in the CEFR and the Basic Skills), it is often over-interpreted as a call to translate, which is not the idea behind grading English in Switzerland (see Buechel 2017). Furthermore, it contradicts a statement in the introduction: ‘teach in the foreign language as much as possible and in the local language as little as possible’.

Additionally, it is stated in Wespi (2015) that not all described competencies in the curriculum have to be assessed—this is up to the teachers to decide which ones to focus on. This means that there is little value in interpreting report card grades for transitions from elementary to secondary school because what is measured varies from teacher to teacher. And although there are policies about the textbooks to be used for a certain grade level in various cantons, by now the testing materials are so widespread among parents, teachers have to write their own tests more and more often to make report card grades, and often they have not been trained to write tests. With the difficulty in the separation of reading, writing, listening and speaking skills, this makes it almost impossible to use one teacher’s measures for comparison with another’s (Oertig 2012). This could be overcome if standards or descriptors were used to assess and be reported on report cards, as teachers could use multiple different measures for a similar goal.

Lately, one German-speaking Educational Region has commissioned measures on learner performance which are meant to inform the cantons of the attainment of the curricular aims (Peyer et al. 2016). The tests used for this measure are not always representative of what teachers are teaching or how teachers are encouraged to measure what they are teaching. For example, in the evaluation criteria for full points in speaking, learners had to use ‘Vocabulary as well as structures in correct French (not necessarily correct pronouns [le or la])’. Yet teachers are encouraged to provide more differentiated, holistic feedback in speaking, including comprehensibility, intelligibility and quantity, which allows, perhaps, for a more generous ‘score’ than in this important study. Such studies put a damper on the system, as learners did not perhaps perform as poorly as reported, with the effect of such results being that teachers perhaps revert to more structural and less communicative criteria.

Moreover, the main tool used by teachers to record data on learners, Lehreroffice, is by no means as sophisticated as programs such as JumpRope or Fresh Grade. Teachers can only enter grades per skill as a whole (reading, writing, speaking or listening) and not per specific standard per skill or an overlap of standards with multiple skills involved. Some teachers find ways around this by using free tools from other countries; others are not aware of this issue or of the many different tools.

Furthermore, there are many issues in Switzerland in what concerns transitions to various educational steps (see Kolb et al. 2012). At the moment, French, not English, plays more of a role for the 20 per cent of German-speaking elementary school learners transitioning into higher-level secondary schools and from lower secondary schools moving on to these higher-level secondary schools (Gymnasium). For the other 80 per cent of learners moving on to an apprenticeship or other form of high school, there are different schools with different requirements in the different foreign languages. However, one tool commonly used (though the intention is not to use it for selection, as Stotz [2016] reports) are the Stellwerk tests in both French and English. These tests provide scores on a learner’s reading, writing, listening and speaking skills, but, unlike the Cambridge Exams, which publish information on the constructs being measured, no information is provided on the test development or statistics on results or item analyses.

There is a lot more in the various curricula that does not show up on assessments used for reporting, such as strategy use or intercultural skills. Research is on the way which may lead to appropriate tests, but assessing these competencies on a wide scale is hardly possible at present. It is thus impossible to say at the moment if Swiss learners are measuring up to curricular aims, also because of the complexity and diversity of school systems in a federalist country such as Switzerland—there are no national guidelines about how many tests or performance assessments or how much of what type of
classwork has to be used to assign a report card grade. At best, so far, Peyer et al. (2016) report on whether learners in some cantons have met the curricular aims and conclude that for French mostly not, but for English more so, and it is up to the cantons to see what they do about it.

Towards Competence-Oriented Teaching and Testing

Though there have been suggestions and tools developed over the years to encourage assessment within a certain methodology (for example, see Massler et al. 2016 for assessment ideas in a content-based foreign language teaching model), not too many have stuck around or are systematically implemented. In this section, an overview of existing general practices can be seen through a peek into research from a course with pre-service teachers, and then descriptions of tools being used in Swiss schools of German-speaking cantons will be provided.

Changing Practices: Example of Student Research

As one example of the changing landscape in assessment practices, there are more and more courses dealing with assessing learners in a standards-based way in various teacher-training programs. In one example elaborated upon here which is part of compulsory coursework at Zurich University of Teacher Education, preservice teachers delved into different aspects of standards-based grading (SBG), including how teachers gather evidence for end-of-term school report cards in the instructional language and foreign language classroom. A questionnaire was sent out to 50 practising sixth-to eighth-grade teachers in Switzerland. The return rate was poor—only 15 responses—which is why only descriptive statistics are presented, yet the results and the questions shed some light on practices.

Measuring Learner Progress

Teachers were first asked about their means of measuring learner progress in the classroom. The first author of the present chapter and her students were interested in knowing the tools they use (rubrics or portfolios, for example) and how they communicate these tools and to their learners. Table 14.1 provides the teacher responses to these questions.

These teachers do have relatively holistic ways of looking at learner progress in that they all use rubrics and the majority allow for student grade conferences and use portfolios. Learners, however, seldom create their own rubrics. That only slightly more than half count later work more than earlier work is worth further investigation in to how progress is measured—this variable is telling in terms

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Number of teachers answering “yes” (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>I compare children’s earlier work with later work on a similar task (such as a short letter in September and another one in December).</td>
<td>11 (73%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>I use rubrics for speaking and writing activities.</td>
<td>15 (100%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The learners help develop these rubrics.</td>
<td>4 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The learners receive the rubrics in advance (if used).</td>
<td>12 (80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you use a learning portfolio (collection of work to show progress) with your learners?</td>
<td>11 (73%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For report card grades for one term, is what children do at the end of the term weighed more than what they do at the beginning of the term?</td>
<td>9 (57%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you hold student conferences about report card grades with your learners?</td>
<td>9 (57%)</td>
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</table>
of learner development.

Two open questions looked to find out about progress in more detail. The first question was ‘How else do you measure your learners’ language development?’ and observations were mentioned the most frequently, as were performance assessments such as reading records, roleplays, group and pair work and presentations. Some teachers mentioned tests published by local textbook publishers, and single teachers mentioned self-assessment and reflection. One teacher stated that ‘New information replaces old information. At first, a “6” performance is not expected, so they may get a “perfect score” of a “3” in the beginning’, which supports weighing work more heavily towards the end of term and having learners develop their work.

Teachers were asked ‘How do learners know how to improve? What opportunities do they get to show they have improved?’ and they referred to regular activities such as:

- daily check ins, weekly quizzes, unit tests
- rubrics
- feedback after writings or oral tests. If a learner has a specific problem, I work with them specifically and give them additional materials
- weekly feedback for written work, weekly feedback for behaviour and performance
- roleplays, games, tests.

Though these points refer to regular activities, it is not clear how some, such as a roleplay or rubrics, are actually used for the learners’ further planning of similar activities. Do the learners get to do the roleplay again? Once they have used the rubric, are they obliged to return to the tasks with appropriate changes? Thus, these points in and of themselves do not necessarily always integrate the second part of the question about how learners get to show improvement.

Other comments were more punctual, such as ‘at the end of the year each learner writes down two things they think they did well this year and one thing they want to improve in next year’, as well as mention of student-teacher conferences and having a look at work from previous years. One teacher admitted to not having any clear means of letting learners know how to improve.

Recording Data

The second part of the questionnaire was aimed at finding out how teachers record data on learner performance for report card grades. The teachers in this study primarily use Lehreroffice and not an SBG program. Closed questions were posed to find out how data is recorded. Are grades arbitrary or do teachers record in a way that truly reflects what a learner has learned? Are teachers even

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<th>Question</th>
<th>Number of teachers answering “yes” (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>When you enter data, do you separate reading, writing, listening and speaking skills?</td>
<td>14 (93%)</td>
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<td>When you enter data, do you sometimes report one activity in two different categories (such as a gap fill grade for writing AND reading skills)?</td>
<td>10 (67%)</td>
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<td>When you record information on children, do you connect their performance (grade or comment) on each question or task to a specific curricular standard?</td>
<td>7 (47%)</td>
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<td>Do you use the CEFR descriptors (in the curriculum) to record information?</td>
<td>8 (53%)</td>
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separating skills, which could be one step in the direction of SBG? Are teachers recording data about curricular aims? Table 14.2 provides an overview of the general questions asked.

These teachers understand that the four skills go into the report cards, but perhaps less so that certain item types (such as a listening test with multiple-choice questions to read) can measure different skills (here listening and reading). Teachers do not directly link their tests to the specific CEFR descriptors, most likely because it is not yet required.

Teachers were then asked about how they record information on their learners’ productive skills with the following questions:

1. When you observe or test your learners’ SPEAKING/WRITING skills, which of the following constructs do you specifically record information on?
2. When you give feedback to your learners on their SPEAKING/WRITING skills, which of the following constructs do you specifically give feedback on?

The aim of these questions was to see to what degree information on subskills is being noted and at the same time to see if learners are given direct feedback on how to improve. Table 14.3 shows teacher responses on four common subskills of speaking and Table 14.4 on writing subskills.

The majority of teachers record information on fluency, range and pronunciation. In light of research on English as a lingua franca, it would be interesting to know what is meant by pronunciation (a general comprehensibility or a specific norm). Teachers record information but mostly do not give as much feedback on range and pronunciation. However, for accuracy, teachers do not record information as often as they give feedback on it.

For writing, teachers focused on accuracy and range and spelling and not as much on general mechanics or the structure, most likely because learners at this age are not writing complex things. Teachers tend to give feedback about mechanics and spelling but do not record the information, which conforms with the curricular suggestions.

| Table 14.3 Teachers who say they record information and give feedback on aspects of speaking |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Information recorded | Feedback given |
| Number of teachers (%) | Number of teachers answering “yes” (%) |
| Accuracy of tenses/word order | 10 (67%) | 12 (80%) |
| Fluency | 13 (87%) | 13 (87%) |
| Range of words or structures | 14 (93%) | 12 (80%) |
| Pronunciation | 13 (87%) | 11 (73%) |

| Table 14.4 Teachers who say they record information and give feedback on aspects of writing |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Information recorded | Feedback given |
| Number of teachers (%) | Number of teachers answering “yes” (%) |
| Accuracy of tenses/word order | 12 (80%) | 12 (80%) |
| Range of words or structures | 13 (87%) | 13 (87%) |
| Spelling | 11 (73%) | 12 (80%) |
| Mechanics (capital letters, punctuation) | 8 (53%) | 12 (80%) |
| Structure | 7 (47%) | 8 (53%) |
We can thus interpret that these teachers do use quite differentiated criteria when analysing learner performance and giving feedback. They also give more feedback than they record (such as on spelling), which can be reassuring to their learners.

**Content of Report Cards**

This section referred to what goes into school report cards and what else is recorded about the learners. Teachers were first asked to choose from seven items that they include in determining report card grades.

All participating teachers include observations, and there seem to be opportunities for creative work, posters and presentations. In looking at the individual results, four teachers who use translation tests do this in both directions (from and to the local language), while ten others don’t use them at all.

The teachers were then asked to list what else they note on a regular basis about individual learners for their report cards. Comments came on general behaviours such as motivation, initiative, interest, participation and trying to use the target language. There were also comments related to specific language (read-out-loud time, greeting responses, regular tasks such as picture descriptions, tests and self-evaluations). None of the teachers mentioned using note-taking about specific learning aims. Teachers were also provided with an open field into which they could write anything they felt. They could use this space to provide tips to pre-service teachers. A selection of responses are copied here.

- The keeping of a portfolio is hindered, as I need to have every test signed by the parents and file it in order to prove my grade if necessary.
- For many of these brilliant grading ideas mentioned above I don’t have the time—we are not given much planning time per lesson.
- Not every task has to be graded and recorded—no penalty for practice!
- Introducing standards, especially with younger students, is slow, gradual work which happens for a while in parallel to using them for assessment.
- Plan tests for every skill (speaking, writing, . . .).

There were too few participants in this study to make the results transferrable to the general teaching public, and it could be that we were preaching to the converted—teachers who participated were interested and know about the topic anyway. These results should only then be used as an impulse to think about assessment practices or as a model for further studies. Yet this research does provide some insight into teacher habits, and by developing this questionnaire themselves, student teachers were forced to think about their own assessment literacy knowledge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance type</th>
<th>Number of teachers answering “yes” (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign language to local language translations tests</td>
<td>4 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local language to foreign language translation tests</td>
<td>5 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larger unit tests</td>
<td>12 (80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posters</td>
<td>12 (80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other creative work (poems, plays, etc.)</td>
<td>12 (80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentations</td>
<td>14 (93%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>15 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It would be interesting for future studies to find out what teachers exactly observe, if they note down their observations in a systematic way and at what time point (soon after the observation or much later?). It would also be interesting to know how many instances of each measure are used for report card grades.

**Changing Practices: Tools**

The years between 2000 and 2013 brought a lot of development in setting standards, norming CEFR descriptors and developing materials. There are some tools such as the European Language Portfolio that were adapted for elementary and secondary learners but are not as frequently used by teachers as desired. Yet there are many pieces that are standing the test of time, and the following are some tools currently used in Switzerland which are continually being developed.

**Lingualevel**

Perhaps the most developed tool for French and English language tests in Switzerland is the Lingualevel tool (www.lingualevel.ch). Designed by Lenz and Studer (2009) at the University of Fribourg, it provides teachers with French and English language tests and tools for self and peer assessment that correspond to specific descriptors of the CEFR. It has gone through elaborate development throughout the years. Though it is not meant for learners in the first years of French and English instruction (suggested age is 11 due to the contexts), much of the functionality can be used for any age group. Within the system, users can pull up lists of CEFR descriptors, for example, by searching for ‘English’ A1.1–B1 in reading, listening, monologues and dialogues. Teachers can, using the tabs, then select tests for each of these and print out a list of the descriptors in a table, which is useful for taking notes on learner performances—not just on the tests but on performance assessments or observations. Lingualevel is regularly updated with new test formats and corrections. The interface is in German, French, English and Italian and CEFR descriptors are provided. The tool is of great use to teachers; however, the question is how the CEFR descriptors as they have been worded and used in this tool correspond to the curricular aims, which are a reformulation—thus different—of many of the same descriptors.

**Swiss Learner Corpus SWIKO**

Under the direction of Thomas Studer, a corpus of learner language is being established at the University of Fribourg which aims to describe the actual processes of language acquisition in selected areas of linguistic competence. Using concepts and methods from corpus linguistics, the students’ actual developmental stages will be elicited, processed and exemplarily analysed. This will result in an empirical contribution towards a better understanding of the acquisition of linguistic structures in the context of ‘new’ approaches to foreign language teaching and learning (research relevance). It should also answer, on the basis of initial interpretations of the targeted corpus, the practical question as to how realistic curricular goals for linguistic competences are: does learner performance in oral and written productions actually correspond to what the curriculum prescribes?

*(Studer et al. 2016)*

This corpus will make a valuable contribution to assessment practices and policies, as it will provide concrete examples of learner performance that can be used for benchmarking.
Passepartout and Other Cantonal Tools

In the German-speaking border cantons of Switzerland, the Passepartout region, English starts in the seventh grade after French. These cantons have worked together and have been progressive in providing guidelines and suggestions for teachers to assign grades. Teachers are also provided with rubrics, checklists and ideas for formative assessments. This information is freely available online (www.passepartout-sprachen.ch/services/dossiers/beurteilung), and each canton in Switzerland also offers similar tools for teachers.

Yet unlike in the United States and some other countries where grades and what is contained in a grade are prescribed by a regional board of education, in Switzerland, schools and teachers are mostly autonomous to decide what and how this will be done. Thus, one finds many Swiss materials for assessing learners in general and to help teachers give feedback on various aspects of language, but concrete guidelines about what goes into a report card grade are scarce and often very vague. There are also some perhaps misleading tools available such as rubrics for reading out loud when it is not clear whether this task should be interpreted for speaking or reading comprehension. Also, word lists with translations, by mere existence, encourage the use of vocabulary-translation tests.

Best Practice Examples

A compilation of best practice examples (EDK 2017) adaptable to any language level and for any language is available online. Though many of the examples are not new, they are not often used in practice; thus, these materials offer a reminder and some impulses for teachers in many aspects of language teaching, including assessment. Examples of rubrics and checklists are provided, as they are important for transparency of aims and the earlier learners are familiar with such tools, the better they are able to self and peer assess and also to set guidelines for their work. Examples from the English-speaking world of classroom assessment techniques that have been tried out in Swiss foreign language classrooms (such as one-minute papers) provide teachers with assessment rituals and routines that can be used in any subject and belong to a repertoire of assessment practices that do not need a lot of preparation. Ideas for more formal assessments using graded readers in class with concrete examples that can be applied to any book or unit of study are also exemplified. Though many teachers in the rest of the world are using interactive whiteboards and clickers, Swiss elementary schools are not familiar with these tools, but examples about the use of mini whiteboards for both formal and informal assessment practices are provided as an alternative medium to pen and paper. The selected practical examples in this chapter show the complexity as well as the seamless lines between assessment and teaching.

The best practice examples on assessment attempt to get teachers to think about the following:

• Testing is only a small part of a report card grade. How can teacher-made tests be either eliminated, made less important and/or be done in a more informed manner? Furthermore, many teachers use points on tests, which may take away from a focus on learning and improving. So, how can teachers use tests for learning and getting learners to talk about what they learned (or didn’t) and not just how many points they earned?

• Assessment can be a positive motivation to learn if learners are allowed to repeat and show that they have met standards, if the assessment technique is creative and if there is some room for individualisation. There are so many languages in Swiss schools, and there should be more overlap in assessment practices. For example, learners who know what success criteria are for a presentation in English can be guided to use this knowledge for the same activity in the local language with some adaptations for complexity. Furthermore, teachers who allow learners to re-do work and show improvement can help learners see what it is like to make progress and see it.
• It is difficult to separate assessment in the four skills; thus, teachers have to think about what is exactly being measured on what is designated as an assessment.
• Much of what we assess/teach we do not use for report card grades, such as general strategy use. For example, getting one’s point across with a large dependence on body language is an important skill, yet not really attributable to a specific language or language skill. Furthermore, if a learner acts defiant or does not do what a teacher says, this can be an indication of not understanding or simply being defiant! There is so much about teaching a foreign language that is relevant for general teaching and thus it is difficult to separate out subject-specific skills and behaviours, and teachers need to know what goes on report cards and separate other behaviours out of this grade.

Conclusion and Ideas for Future Research
Currently, thousands of school principals and teachers are being trained in Lehrplan21 and, through this, they are acquiring new ideas on how to assess and grade learners. How long these current curricula will last before they are adapted is unknown, as there are plenty of issues with the interpretation of the curricula into the practice. The ideas found in Graves (2016) as reasons for misalignment between curricula and their implementation hold true in the Swiss situation as well: learner needs are constantly changing, and learners today have much more exposure to English than their teachers; thus, teachers do not always connect to their learners’ worlds and instructional goals of the curricula are not realistically measured.

Yet Switzerland is a multilingual country where bilingualism is the norm, not the exception, and any 11-year-old child will be more than happy to try to speak to visitors in English, so there are many successes despite the many complexities of assessment. Teachers’ own training, new courses taking place at universities of teacher education, in-school work groups, tools such as Lingualevel and support from local boards all enable teachers in their role as assessors. Perhaps simply the freedom of Swiss teachers to teach as they feel fit, though problematic for interpreting learner grades, is part of the reason learners are learning.

There are still many open questions in Switzerland, such as whether teachers are using their own experiences as learners in grading for their own grading. Swiss teachers are trained in ways that match the concepts of SBG, yet do their practices show this? How long will it take to redefine the curricular aims based on ever-changing formulations to what it means to perform a certain task in a language? Which tools allow teachers to most efficiently record evidence of learner performance in a way that makes sense for learner language development and grading? Grading each of the four skills in isolation is problematic—how can they be separated, or should the aims be changed?

Future directions in Switzerland might include implementing the newly suggested report cards to get away from the four skills in isolation to more outcome-oriented definitions of language knowledge. This may, however, require some reformulation of the curricular standards or the development of a repertoire of tools to better measure these standards. Although teachers need the liberty of making individual decisions for their classes, they might also appreciate clearer definitions of what goes into a report card—some grading policies that are loose enough but provide more guidelines than ‘not the average of scores’ might be appreciated by teachers and worth developing for and with them. And in this regard, how many different performances for a specific standard should go into each report card grade? Can certain combinations of teacher assessment practices be linked to learner success—for example, do learners with a teacher who actually records data on subskills perform better than learners with a teacher who does not? What other assessment practices link more clearly to learner performance? The world has a lot to learn from the example of Swiss functional multilingualism and, at the same time, schools have the responsibility of constantly improving the quality of their practices, and looking at models from the rest of the world makes this possible!
Notes

1. There are four ‘Educational Regions’ in Switzerland, one for the French- and Italian-speaking cantons and three for the German-speaking cantons (see www.edk.ch/dyn/16400.php for more details).

2. Art. 70 states that the Confederation and cantons have to foster understanding and exchanges between linguistic communities; following a national vote in 2006, Art. 62 states that the Confederation can make laws to harmonise some elements of school systems if the efforts of cantons don’t succeed (see www.admin.ch/opic/en/classified-compilation/19995395/201702120000/101.pdf).

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