

## Bilingual Education with Signed and Spoken Languages in Schools! Call to Action

Key Findings of the *De-Sign Bilingual* / ERASMUS+, 2014 – 2016.

### Calls to Action on Policy Makers

Policy makers must be an active and supportive force in establishing sustainable bimodal bilingual education<sup>1</sup> in schools. This is an essential condition to inclusion of people with hearing impairments. We call upon politicians to provide the prerequisites and create the framework that will enable:

- 1** Legal basis that supports the **sustainable establishment of bimodal bilingual schooling** in special and mainstream schools. These legal foundations entail the recognition of the national sign language(s), the right to bilingual education, bilingual curricula and sign language as a subject in schools.
- 2** Implementation of **bimodal bilingual education in inclusive settings** where hearing and deaf pupils study together. Inclusive bilingual education is feasible with sufficient qualified personnel.
- 3** Establishing bimodal bilingual schooling in **all grade levels** starting with bilingual **early childhood education at pre-school level**.
- 4** **Potent educational centres** that join together comprehensive competences for educating children with hearing impairments, including bilingual education. Such centres consolidate early education, schooling and counselling under one roof and they maintain close cooperation with other schools and centres in which deaf and hearing pupils study together.
- 5** **Teacher training** that prepares educators for inclusive, individualized and multilingual teaching in a team. Teachers have to acquire sign language competences already during their initial training, not in extra-occupational training at a much later date.
- 6** Development of **open, bimodal bilingual educational programs** that take into account the linguistically diverse needs of all pupils. In order to accomplish this, schools need adequate resources (time, finances and personnel).
- 7** Creation of **teaching material and diagnostic tools** for bimodal bilingual child development.
- 8** Balanced **parent counselling** that outlines a multilingual life with the national spoken, written and signed languages.
- 9** A **multilingual life with spoken and signed languages**. This entails balanced parent counselling, sign language classes for parents, sufficient budget for interpreters and bilingual learning material. These provisions should be equally promoted and financed as the supply with assistive listening devices.

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<sup>1</sup> Bimodal bilingual education = education with a spoken/written language and a sign language.



## Current Status of Bimodal Bilingual Education in Schools in Europe

- **Establishing Bimodal Bilingual Education in Europe.** In all 39 European countries examined the national sign language plays a role in schools, but in none of them bi-bi education is firmly established in a way that guarantees its full access to every child in any region.
- **Sign Language in linguistic education.** In more than 70% of the nations sign language constitutes an educational goal. And in 60% of the countries the national sign language is taught as a school subject. However, this option is often limited to individual schools, and special schools in particular.
- **Inclusion.** In Europe, over 50% of pupils with a hearing impairment visit a mainstream school. In these schools bimodal bilingual schooling is an absolute exception.
- **Legal Foundations.** Even though the UN-Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities firmly secures bimodal bilingual education only 50% of the countries we surveyed have created a legal basis for bimodal bilingual education (laws and/or curricula and syllabi). However, these laws often are only in force regionally. Experts and headmasters have named the backing from both politics and school administration as the decisive factor for promoting bimodal bilingual education. Yet they perceive politics and administration as rather unsupportive.
- **Teaching Material.** 60% of the countries already have developed teaching material for bimodal bilingual education, though there is ample demand for further development and progress, especially with regards to diagnostic tools.
- **Teacher Training.** In only 20% of the 39 countries comprehensive (initial and continuing) teacher training programs for bimodal bilingual education have been established.

### **Background**

The strategic partnership Austria – Switzerland – Germany – Slovakia aims at raising the scope and quality of bimodal bilingual school education of deaf/hard of hearing pupils. The project *De-Sign Bilingual* brings together five specialized schools and four universities. Between 2014 and 2016 we compiled a comprehensive overview on bimodal bilingual school education in Europe, please view our free-access interactive map: [www.univie.ac.at/map-designbilingual](http://www.univie.ac.at/map-designbilingual). Additionally, we developed bimodal bilingual teaching concepts and materials (mostly in German) that are also available free of charge: [www.univie.ac.at/teach-designbilingual](http://www.univie.ac.at/teach-designbilingual).

### **Project partners**

Dr. Mireille Audeoud, University of Applied Sciences of Special Needs Education Zürich, Switzerland.  
Prof. Dr. Claudia Becker, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany.  
Dr. Verena Krausneker, University of Vienna, Austria.  
Prof. Dr. Darina Tarcsiová, Comenius University Bratislava, Slovakia.

### **Please address questions to**

Verena Krausneker  
University of Vienna  
Austria  
[verena.krausneker@univie.ac.at](mailto:verena.krausneker@univie.ac.at)