
Viljo Kohonen
University of Tampere

THE EUROPEAN LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO: FROM PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT TO PORTFOLIO-ORIENTED LANGUAGE LEARNING

Developing the ELP as part of the Common Framework

Research and development work

The *European Language Portfolio (ELP)* is part of the Council of Europe's *Common European Framework for Language Teaching* (CEF 2001), which is a recent outcome of a long-term commitment to promote the learning and teaching of modern languages in Europe. The work has laid consistent emphasis on a broad *learner-centred basic orientation* in language teaching. The process has been pursued actively in Europe since the 1971 symposium (on languages in adult education) in Rüşchlikon, Switzerland, and has involved collaboration between a large number of language teaching experts in Europe and beyond.

In the 1970s attention was directed to the basic questions of learner-centred language learning: the identification of the learner's communicative needs and learning objectives, the development of notional-functional syllabuses (Wilkins 1976), self-assessment, and the definition of the threshold level in foreign language learning (van Ek 1976; van Ek and Trim 1990). In the 1980s and 1990s the development of learner autonomy and self-directed language learning gained increased attention (Holec 1980; Holec 1988; Huttunen 1990; Little 1991).

International collaboration was intensive during the modern languages project "*Language Learning for European Citizenship*" (1989–96). The project work involved a large number of seminars and the so-called new-style workshops, which consisted of two consecutive seminars on the same topic (seminars A and B, after an interval of some 2–3 years). During the interval the participants conducted local research and development work and reported their findings at the subsequent (B) seminar. The workshops were organised in the different member states under the auspices of the Council of Europe, with participating experts from all of the member states. (See Trim 1997; Report 1997.)

In 1991, an important intergovernmental symposium was held – once again, symbolically – in Rüschnikon. The participants elaborated further the goals, objectives and functions of the proposed common framework of reference and the idea of a European language portfolio was conceived (see North 1992; Kohonen 1992; Richterich and Schneider 1992; Schärer 1992). The subsequent project, “*Language policies for a multilingual and multicultural Europe*” (1997–2000), set out to develop further the concepts of the Common European Framework and the European Language Portfolio. As part of this project, a pilot project on the ELP was conducted in fifteen member states (1998–2000; Sheils 1999; Trim 1999). The ELP project work was discussed at several piloting seminars coordinated by the Council of Europe (Ascona 1998, Tampere 1998, Soest 1998, Budapest 1999, Radovljice 2000, Sévres 2000). Rolf Schärer undertook the task of being the general rapporteur of the project, analysing the progress, drafting initiatives and compiling the annual reports on the basis of the interim reports submitted by the national coordinators and the intensive discussions at the project seminars.

The final report of the project (Schärer 2000) summarised the main findings of the piloting work and made a number of recommendations for further action. A central finding was that the ELPs were generally well received and worked satisfactorily in the different pilot settings. There was agreement that the ELP should consist of basically three parts: the language passport, the language biography and the dossier. A common core in the portfolio was seen as an important European dimension in the learners’ work. Furthermore, such a core was considered a pre-requisite for the international reporting function of the ELP to become feasible. The report noted the necessity to adapt the ELPs to the needs of the different age groups (ranging from young learners to secondary schools and higher education and adult language students). It was also clear from the findings that there was a need to link the ELPs to the national or institutional curricula and to provide information and instructions in the learner’s language.

The report further emphasised the vital importance of training both learners and teachers to ensure an effective use of the ELP and the development of self-assessment skills and learner autonomy (Schärer 2000, 10–13). On the basis of the quantitative and qualitative data gathered from the different pilot projects, the report drew the following general conclusions: (1) the ELP as a learning tool is feasible from a pedagogic point of view; (2) it addresses key educational issues in Europe, and (3) it fosters the declared aims of the Council of Europe. The report consequently suggested a wide implementation of the ELP throughout Europe to maintain and promote linguistic and cultural diversity (Schärer 2000, 14–15).

The Education Committee of the Council for Cultural Cooperation considered the findings of the pilot project (in spring 2000) and recommended that the Education Ministers create favourable conditions for a wide implementation of the ELP in the member states, starting in 2001, the European Year of Languages. In October 2000 the committee accepted an important document called *Principles and Guidelines* for the ELP. It emphasised the quality and credibility of the ELP as a pedagogic and reporting tool, as well as the quality, validity and transparency of individual ELPs in a European context. To consolidate the common European core of the ELP, the committee laid down the basic principles to be followed in the subsequent research and development work in the different national settings (see section “The European Language Portfolio; Principles 2000”).

In their meeting in Cracow (in October 2000), the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education of the Council of Europe adopted a *Resolution on the European Language Portfolio* recommending that “the Governments of the member states, in harmony with their education policies, implement or create conditions favourable for the implementation and wide use of the ELP according to the *Principle and Guidelines* laid down by the Education Committee”. The ministers also recommended that the member states wishing to introduce the ELP should set up a competent body (such as a national committee) to examine the ELP models for compulsory education, to establish whether they meet the agreed criteria, and to forward them with a recommendation to the Council of Europe. The ministers further recommended that teachers should be provided with appropriate training and support to assist them in the effective use of the ELPs. (Resolution 2000.)

Under the authority of the Education Committee, a *European Validation Committee* was set up in November 2000 to take the responsibility for the accreditation of the ELP models submitted by the national authorities, in accordance with the *Principles and Guidelines* document. To assist the national authorities in their preparations for the validation procedure, the *Rules on Accreditation of ELP Models* was also published by the Council of Europe (Accreditation 2000). Up to the end of the year 2001, a total of 23 ELP models have been validated and accredited by the Validation Committee, and further models are being prepared for validation.

As a result of these findings, recommendations and political decisions, and encouraged by the further positive experiences of the use of ELPs in the member states, a new project was launched by the Council of Europe at the conference of delegates from the member states held in Coimbra in June 2001. The project is called “*From piloting to implementation*” and will extend over the years 2001–2005. The purpose of the project is to support the efforts for a large-scale implementation of the ELPs in the different national settings, while conducting further research and development work on the ELP.

The Common European Framework (CEF 2001)

CEF 2001 provides a comprehensive theoretical approach to modern language learning and teaching to help practitioners (e.g. learners, teachers, parents, course designers, administrators, employers, etc) to orientate their options and to inform each other in a comprehensive, transparent and coherent way. The orientation outlined in the Common Framework is intended to be open and flexible so that it can be used in different situations with necessary adaptations. It is also being developed constantly within the Council of Europe in the light of experiences obtained, the latest version being CEF 2001.

The Common Framework is not tied to any single method of language teaching but rather presents a more general, action-oriented communicative approach in terms of the customary *communicative language competence*, expressed with the *linguistic*, *sociolinguistic* and *pragmatic* components, and the *strategies* in communicating and learning. The Framework gives a succinct summary of the central concepts in communication noting that language users draw on the competences at their disposal in various *contexts* and under various *conditions* and *constraints* to

engage in *language activities* involving *language processes*. They produce and/or receive *texts* in relation to *themes* in specific *domains*, activating those *strategies* which seem most appropriate for carrying out the *tasks* to be accomplished. The monitoring of these actions by the participants leads to the reinforcement or modification of their competences. *Competences* are defined as the sum of knowledge, skills and characteristics that allow a person to perform actions. (CEF 2001, 9.)

The Framework also emphasises the importance of *learner autonomy* as a goal in modern language learning and teaching. The goal entails enabling learners to develop a stance of *socially responsible language learning* in the course of their learning processes, accepting responsibility for their own learning. To proceed towards this goal, teachers must progressively delegate pedagogic responsibility to the learners in the course of their FL learning. Language teachers must also encourage their students to reflect on their learning and to share experiences with other students. In this process students develop an *awareness of language and communication*. This involves a knowledge and understanding of the principles according to which languages are organised as linguistic systems and used in communication. This knowledge helps them to assimilate new language experiences into their evolving linguistic framework for an increasingly accurate and fluent personal use of language. Students also need to develop *their study and heuristic skills* to make effective use of the learning opportunities and use available materials independently (CEF 2001; Little 1991; Kohonen 2001a,c,d).

Connected with these goals is the notion of *plurilingual and pluricultural competence* involving a complex, multiple language competence on which the user may draw in intercultural contexts. The notion refers to the ability to utilise the competence in the mother tongue and knowledge and skills learned in a foreign language for the learning and use of other languages. Plurilingual competence is thus the capacity to expand language and cultural competence in a purposeful way in intercultural interaction, producing a more skilled language learner and user. As language learning expands, the learner does not keep the different languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments. Rather, he or she builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of languages contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact. In different situations, a person can thus call flexibly upon different parts of this competence to achieve effective communication with a particular partner (e.g. by switching from one language to another, recognising and using words from a common international store, etc). (CEF 2001, 4–5.)

To be able to take charge of their learning and to extend their skills students need to be actively involved in the whole learning process. They need to prepare for increasingly international communicative settings and situations in the modern world. *Intercultural communicative competence* extends further the traditional notion of communicative competence, emphasising on the importance of social skills and attitudes in relating to intercultural diversity. (Kohonen 2000b; 2001a,c; Kaikkonen 2001; Byram in this volume.)

The European Language Portfolio: central goals and principles

Portfolio assessment as part of authentic assessment

In general, a language portfolio can be defined as a “systematic collection of student work that is analysed to show progress over time with regard to instructional objectives”. Examples of portfolio tasks include various written texts, drawings, learning logs, student reflections and audio or video tapes, usually with teacher and student comments on the progress made by the owner of the portfolio. In portfolio assessment students are invited to select samples of their own work to show growth and learning over time (O’Malley and Valdez Pierce 1996, 5).

Portfolio assessment is part of a more general current approach to the evaluation of language competence called *authentic assessment*. Authentic assessment offers new possibilities for supporting self-directed language learning by providing tools for evaluating the learning processes and outcomes. The concept refers to the “multiple forms of assessment that reflect student learning, achievement, motivation, and attitudes on instructionally-relevant classroom activities” (O’Malley and Valdez Pierce 1996, 4). Authentic tests evaluate student performance using activities and tasks that represent classroom goals, curricula and instruction in as realistic conditions of language use as possible. Authentic assessment emphasises the communicative meaningfulness of evaluation and the commitment to measure that which we value in education. Examples of authentic assessment include performance assessment, portfolio assessment and student self-assessment.

Authentic assessment encourages learner-centred classroom practices. Its results can be used to improve instruction on the basis of the knowledge of learner progress. Authentic assessment also emphasises the importance of the teacher’s professional judgement and commitment to foster student learning in a holistic perspective. The use of self-assessment promotes the student’s direct involvement in learning and builds the skills for continuous learning (O’Malley and Valdez Pierce 1996; Kohonen 1999; 2000a; 2001a,b,c).

Portfolio assessment supports the *twin goals of learner-centred language curricula* discussed by David Nunan (1988): (1) learning communication and (2) developing a critical awareness of language learning. To promote the two goals, teachers need to consider the ways in which they set up and monitor the learning tasks in their language classes. When designing the tasks for these twin purposes teachers pay attention both to (1) the *content*, i.e., what kinds of tasks and materials the student works with, and to (2) the learning *process*: how the student is guided to work on the tasks (Candlin 1987). Instructional decisions can be made so as to combine the language learning aims and the educational goals in the learning process.

Portfolios mean different things in different contexts (cf. artists’ and architects’ portfolios or teachers’ professional portfolios). To emphasise the above twin goals in language teaching, it is customary to distinguish between two basic types of portfolios in language learning: (1) the *process-oriented learning (“working”) portfolios* and (2) the *product-oriented reporting (“showcase”) portfolios*. The *learning portfolio* can include various kinds of process-related materials: action

plans, learning logs, drafts of work, comments by the teacher and peers, student reflections, submitted assignments, evaluation criteria and checklists to evaluate progress with regard to explicit learning objectives.

The *reporting portfolio*, on the other hand, is used to document language learning outcomes for a variety of purposes: for giving marks in schools or institutions; for applying to a higher education institution; or for the purpose of documenting language skills when applying for a job. Depending on the purpose, the student selects relevant language documents from his or her learning portfolio and submits them for review. (Gottlieb 1995; Smolen et al. 1995; O'Malley and Valdez Pierce 1996; Kohonen 1999.)

As the discussion shows, the use of the general term *language portfolio* in current evaluation literature emphasises reflective language learning, self-assessment and the reporting of the communicative skills with the support of authentic documents that are evaluated on the basis of some criterion-referenced scaling system. However, the term must be distinguished from the Council of Europe's concept of the *European Language Portfolio* which consists of the three complementary sections: the language passport, the language biography and the dossier. The language passport and biography sections clearly represent an extension of the general notion of language portfolio. The ELP emphasises a reflective, autobiographical approach in language learning aimed at fostering learner autonomy and learning to learn. The reporting function of the ELP adds an important tool for documenting communicative proficiency with regard to the criterion-referenced level descriptors.

The European Language Portfolio

The European Language Portfolio is connected with the Common European Framework (CEF 2001) as a pedagogical language learning and reporting instrument. It allows students to maintain a record of their language learning experience, both formal and informal. As part of the Framework, the general purpose of the ELP is to deepen mutual understanding among citizens in Europe, respecting the diversity of cultures and ways of life. To facilitate mobility within the European community, it provides a clear description of language competence and qualifications according to a criterion-referenced system of proficiency descriptors. Language competence is described in the model in terms of three levels of proficiency (A, B and C, with two sub-levels at each of the levels; CEF 2001; Christ et al. 1996; Schärer 1999).

According to the *Principles and Guidelines* accepted by the Educational Committee of the Council of Europe, the ELP has more specifically the following properties (Principles 2000, 2):

1. It is a tool to promote plurilingualism and pluriculturalism
2. It is the property of the learner
3. It values the full range of the learner's language and intercultural competence and experience regardless of whether acquired within or outside formal education
4. It is a tool to promote learner autonomy

5. It has both a *pedagogic function* to guide and support the learner in the process of language learning and a *reporting function* to record proficiency in languages
6. It is based on the Common European Framework of Reference with explicit reference to the levels of competence specified in the model
7. It encourages the learner's self-assessment (which is usually combined with teacher assessment) and assessment by educational authorities and examination bodies
8. It incorporates a minimum of common features which make it recognisable and comprehensible across Europe

The ELP consists of the following **three parts**: the Passport section, the Language Biography section, and the Dossier section.

(1) The **Language Passport** section provides an overview of the individual's proficiency in different languages at a given point of time, evaluated according to the skills and the levels of proficiency in the Common European Framework. It is also used to record formal qualifications, language competences and significant language and intercultural experiences. It includes information on partial and specific competence (e.g. only spoken language skills, or specific content areas). It allows for self-assessment, teacher assessment and assessment by educational institutions and examination boards. (Principles 2000, 3.)

(2) The **Language Biography** facilitates the student's involvement in planning, reflecting upon and assessing his or her learning process and progress. It encourages the learner to state what he or she can do in each language and to include information on linguistic and cultural experiences gained in and outside formal educational contexts. It is also organised to promote plurilingualism, i.e. the development of an underlying unified competence in a number of languages.

(3) The **Dossier** offers the student the opportunity to select materials to document and illustrate achievements or experiences recorded in the Language Passport or Biography (Principles 2000, 3).

Consistent and regular use of these three parts of the portfolio and regard for its twin functions provides a wide range of possibilities for promoting language learning with the ELP as a pedagogic and reporting instrument.

The **reporting function of the ELP** is concerned with the *product aspect* of foreign language learning: providing a record of the linguistic skills and cultural experiences that the students have acquired (including both formal and informal learning), by relating the communicative skills to the proficiency levels defined in the CEF. The students' self-assessment of their language skills constitutes an important element in the reporting. By teaching their students to use the self-assessment grids with sufficient consistency, teachers facilitate their reporting skills.

The reporting function of the ELP is necessary for a number of purposes in schooling and work life. The CEF proficiency scales have a significant role in making the grading systems in the different member states more transparent and thus comparable. The self-assessment grid makes it possible to calibrate the national grading scales on the commonly adopted system of reference (at the A, B and C levels of proficiency). The use of the common scale promotes transnational mobility (of students and work force etc) as the language learning outcomes can be recognised and acknowledged in the different member states (and elsewhere).

Preparing language students for self-assessment in their reporting means inevitably that the necessary skills need to be analysed, described and taught in language classes. This is the **pedagogic function** of the ELP, the *process aspect* of language learning: helping the students to identify their learning goals, to design and modify their action plans, monitor the processes and to assess the outcomes by themselves. Teachers facilitate this process through explicit teaching of the necessary concepts, knowledge and self-assessment skills. They encourage the students to use the available learning opportunities and provide guidance and support for doing it successfully.

Preparing for the reporting tasks helps the students to understand their own role as responsible learners and agents of their own learning: the ELP is their own learning record for which they are in charge. This will also promote their attitudes and skills for life-long learning. Students learn to recognise important sources for learning foreign languages in their local contexts (using, e.g., the Internet, mass media, entertainment industry, fiction, travelling, personal contacts etc., in addition to the textbooks and other learning materials in schools). They realise that they are (in many contexts) surrounded by rich intercultural input data for advancing their skills if they make conscious efforts to take advantage of the opportunities available around them (Kohonen 2000a,b; 2001b,c,d).

From portfolio assessment to portfolio-oriented FL pedagogy

Portfolio-oriented foreign language pedagogy thus offers a wide range of possibilities for promoting language learning in terms of both the pedagogic function and reporting function of the ELP. This dual function is essential in exploiting the potential of the ELP to enhance language education. To use the ELP with their students in pedagogically purposeful ways, language teachers need to understand the concept well in the first place. Teaching something well needs to be based on a solid understanding of what it is that one is to teach, and how one might undertake the task with the students in a given national and local context. As the cultural settings differ widely in Europe, any solutions need to be contextually based, tried out and developed further.

How to teach the ELP?

If portfolio work is largely limited just to the reporting function of the ELP there is the possibility that the ELP will not find a meaningful place in regular classroom practices. Once the information for the language passport and the language biography is filled in properly and the supporting documents are placed in the dossier, there will probably not be much to update for some considerable time. This is because language skills develop slowly in school contexts with just a few weekly lessons. It is not motivating to use the self-assessment grids very often in the same group of students as the work is quite laborious and takes up a great deal of curriculum time. Using the

ELP only for the self-assessment of language skills and cultural experiences gives it a fairly marginal role in language curricula.

It is therefore important to explore the pedagogic function of the ELP in order to integrate it as a regular learning instrument in classroom work and private study. This is where the ELP has a significant potential for promoting the language learning processes in the direction of autonomous and socially responsible language learning, as proposed in the Common European Framework (CEF 2001). Teachers need to teach their students the central concepts of the CEF, appropriately tuned to the given context, and enable them to become increasingly aware of their language learning aims, contents, processes and outcomes. This is what the pedagogic function of the ELP is about.

To promote the pedagogic function of the ELP, language teachers need to consider the following kinds of questions in their national and local settings:

- How can students be helped to develop a more differentiated awareness and understanding of the phenomena of language, communication, learning and learning processes?
- How can they be guided to direct their learning efforts and monitor and assess their language skills?
- How should they be taught to establish and maintain mutually beneficial and responsible social relationships in their learning groups and communities?
- How can students be guided to acquire new knowledge, understanding and skills increasingly on their own?
- How can they be provided with sufficient support, tutoring and encouragement?
- How can they be helped to build up and modify their physical and social learning environments?

There are further questions to consider: how to legitimise the goals of student autonomy as something attainable to them, at least to some extent, if they make a serious effort; how to help them to explore their learning, both alone and together; how to help them to discover more ways of proceeding in their learning; how to increase their awareness of their role as responsible learners. Teachers need to plan how they will help their students track and document the development of new knowledge, skills and attitudes. They need to develop conscious pedagogical ways and means of making the learning aims and outcomes more concrete to the participants (Kohonen 2000b; 2001b,c,d; Huttunen in this volume).

In piloting the European Language Portfolio in Finland, we have made a useful distinction between the pedagogic and reporting functions of the Dossier as well, in accordance with the dual function of the ELP. We have used the *reporting function* of the Dossier to collect authentic documents of the language learning outcomes, whether written or spoken records, as required in the Principles and Guidelines document (2000).

However, we have also used the Dossier as a regular *pedagogical tool* in classroom work and in homework. We have encouraged the students to increase their awareness of themselves as language learners, of the learning tasks, and of the individual and social learning processes. We have added guided reflective work to the actual, ongoing language learning tasks being carried out during the lessons and as homework assignments. The dossier thus functions as a pedagogic

device for the teachers to guide learning and provide on-line feedback about it, and as a practical tool for the students to take increasing charge of their learning under the teacher's guidance and tutoring. For us, then, the dual function of the dossier provides an *interface between language learning, teaching and assessment*.

We have discovered repeatedly that the pedagogic function of the Dossier is crucial for developing portfolio-oriented foreign language learning. Students need to be taught, in a language that they can understand, what communicative and intercultural competence mean for them as goals for foreign language learning and how they understand student autonomy – and how these concepts evolve in the course of their language study. They need to reflect on their own role as socially responsible learners, and how they can become more skilled language learners and language users. This means increasing their understanding and awareness of language learning as part of a wide learner-centred goal orientation. The task is pedagogically quite challenging for the teacher as there are so many things and options to be considered. One of the first questions is how to get started with a given group of students, and how to proceed (Kohonen 2000a,b; 2001b,c,d; Kolu 1999; Kujansivu and Pajukanta 2000; Pajukanta 1998; 1999).

Getting started in the class – where to begin?

Learning to be reflective about one's language learning is a complex task for anyone who has little experience about learning and little knowledge about language as a linguistic phenomenon. Students face even greater difficulties in assessing their communicative skills by means of the criterion-referenced level descriptors.

As teachers we need to understand the paradoxical nature of the task that we ask our students to undertake. They need a great deal of specific help, guidance and support to cope with it gradually. At early stages of their language learning students have very understandable difficulties in assessing the extent to which they can control the accuracy dimensions (phonology, morphology, syntax) of the target language. To be more sympathetic to the student's dilemma it is actually helpful for the teacher to do the same exercise in the language that she knows least well (and very little of). This is quite a challenging task for us even though we are equipped with our professional linguistic knowledge about languages in general. As language experts we already possess the plurilingual capacity for language learning. We basically know what the task is about even though we do not know what the linguistic forms and details are like in a language that is unknown to us. Still, we do know how to tackle the task on our own if necessary, having a linguistic blueprint of the task.

Without such expert knowledge, it is only natural for language students to feel lost or at least embarrassed when facing self-assessment tasks of their foreign language skills. For one thing, the level descriptors are written in an abstract, fairly technical language which is quite difficult for the students to understand. Secondly, they have obvious difficulties in realising what the communicative learning goals mean in practice. It is therefore very difficult for them to assess the degree of their language skills – degree of what? What is the targeted standard of language proficiency? As David Little (1999, 3) points out, students have seemingly a hopeless task when asked to assess

their linguistic correctness: “How, after all, can learners assess themselves with any degree of accuracy unless they already possess the same degree of linguistic knowledge as the person who set the examination paper or devised the assessment task?” How can they understand and evaluate something when they do not know what it is?

However, even young (or beginning) learners are more likely to know what they can do communicatively in the target language. They are also aware of the general level of proficiency at which they can do it, as David Little points out (1999). The functional “can do” checklists (developed by the Swiss ELP project) can therefore be more the natural thing to start with. As the “can do” statements are designed at the A,B and B levels of proficiency, students can reflect on their skills in the relevant domains and assess how far they can proceed with their current skills (see the Council of Europe’s website for the checklists: <http://culture.coe.int/portfolio>). In today’s world students are in many cases surrounded by foreign languages and they can develop perhaps a surprisingly good “ear” for communication even in languages that are new to them. Providing them with explicit *language awareness* training will sensitise them to language phenomena in general and help them to cope better with their language learning enterprise.

In an interesting way the communicative “can do” statements have been expanded recently to a number of domains that are relevant for language learning, interpersonal communication, career planning and public language use. This work has been undertaken at the Irish Refugee Support Unit at the University of Dublin under the leadership of David Little. The project uses the term **benchmark** to describe objectives that mark a given level of proficiency in language learning and use, with reference to the Council of Europe’s descriptors at the A, B and C levels. Benchmarks provide illuminating descriptors of what the student can do with language and language learning at these broad levels, based on the performance of linguistic tasks.

The benchmark descriptors can offer significant help for the teacher in facilitating the students to plan, monitor and assess their language learning. Similarly, the descriptors help the students to decide on the tasks and activities which will take them to the goals they have set for themselves. I find this use of the benchmarks very useful in making language learning aims and activities more transparent to the participants. In a concrete format they give important tools for the students to conceptualise their learning aims and discuss their language learning with their peers and teachers. I give two examples of the benchmark descriptors in the “learning to learn” and “cultural awareness” domains in Appendix 1 (Little 2000).

In the light of this discussion, then, it makes sense to introduce the notion of self-assessment of language skills by working first on the general language awareness and the functional checklists rather than beginning directly with the component of linguistic accuracy.

Our experience in Finland indicates, however, that it is even more advisable to begin with the *students themselves* as learners in general and as language learners in particular. In other words, students could perhaps best learn a *basic reflective orientation* by working on their own experiences, beliefs and assumptions of learning in the first place. Learning to be reflective about oneself as a human being and as a language student seems to be something that many students find a natural thing to do (while again for some students it seems to be quite a difficult orientation to get hold of). It is helpful to start with simple questions or semi-structured statements designed by the teacher.

We have also discovered that the teacher also needs to justify the benefits of reflection to the students and explain why she is asking them to reflect on their learning and assess their communicative knowledge, skills and attitudes. Once the students realise the purpose of reflection and self-assessment they have crossed the basic *motivational threshold* for reflective activities in class. Perhaps the question is also one of the educational culture in the national (or regional) setting. We need to proceed with caution and see what can be done in our context. In any case, learning reflection as a habit of mind is a complex task and thus always a *question of time, motivation, support and guidance*. It is also a question of developing a supportive atmosphere of mutual trust and respect between the teacher and the students in the class, that is, an environment in which it is safe to explore meanings and make mistakes. (Kohonen 2000a,b; 2001a,d; Kolu 1999; Kujansivu and Pajukanta 2000; Pajukanta 1998; 1999; Huttunen in this volume.)

Making language learning more visible through the ELP

What is “visibility” in FL learning?

Portfolio-oriented foreign language pedagogy offers new possibilities for making at least some of the language learning outcomes more *visible* to students, teachers and other stakeholders. By this I mean that language teachers can help their students to become more aware of the desired learning outcomes and to direct their conscious attention to the learning processes in the course of their language study. When we make the aims more concrete to our students we can motivate them to work for their learning. Based on a shared understanding of learner autonomy, we can teach them the relevant concepts at least to some extent. Further, we can use explicit techniques to facilitate learning, just as we do when teaching the traditional linguistic aspects of language and language use. Visible goals are negotiable and accessible to conscious learning efforts. They help to make learning more transparent to the participants.

Developing foreign language education raises the question of what are the learning outcomes that we wish to promote and what kind of a process orientation might lead to desired outcomes. In the traditional communicative framework we customarily think that the outcome is the learner's communicative competence which can be measured using various performance or proficiency tests. Valid communicative testing obviously provides a necessary measure of the language student's communicative skills, making language learning manifest. There are well-known differences in our students' language skills, and competent testing procedures are capable of revealing such differences.

However, concentrating on the skills-oriented proficiency tests misses a number of learning outcomes which are important particularly for student autonomy and intercultural communicative competence, which builds on communicative competence. Whereas communicative competence relates primarily to the language user's knowledge and skills in communicative situations,

intercultural competence also focuses on his or her personal and social abilities. It further emphasises the importance of relating to otherness and foreignness in human encounters. It underscores the tolerance of uncertainty and respect for diversity in intercultural contacts, which depend on situation-specific cultural norms and expectations (Byram and Fleming 1997; Kohonen 1999; 2001a,b; Kaikkonen 2001).

I wish to argue that a great deal of personal and social learning relevant for intercultural communicative competence remains, in an important sense, invisible in the proficiency tests carried out by outside testing agencies or external examination boards. For a more comprehensive view of the wide range of learning outcomes, we need to explore the processes of foreign language learning. The learning processes, environments and outcomes depend critically on the students' learning experiences. Therefore, investing pedagogical expertise in the educational processes also means an investment in the quality of the learning outcomes.

Language learning necessarily involves a number of important affective, social and personal student properties that are educationally valuable learning goals in their own right, not just as means for promoting cognitive aspects of learning (cf. Arnold 1999). It is important to note that students inevitably bring their personal histories (autobiographies) to our classes. They carry with them their personal beliefs and assumptions of language learning which they have acquired as part of their learning biographies in their families and in school. These features evolve, one way or another, in connection with the affective, social and cognitive processes of language learning. They impinge indirectly on the student's observable language performance. Such invisible learning outcomes include a number of properties that are essential for the development of language competence and motivation for language learning:

1. commitment to and ownership of one's language learning
2. tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty in communicative situations and learning in general
3. willingness to take risks in order to cope with communicative tasks
4. understanding of oneself as a language learner and a language user in terms of the beliefs about language use and one's role as a learner
5. understanding of one's cultural identity and what it means to become an intercultural speaker
6. skills and attitudes for socially responsible learning and language use
7. plurilingualism, involving a reflective awareness and appreciation of languages and language learning, as well as assuming respect for and appreciation of cultural diversity and otherness
8. learning skills and strategies necessary for continuous, independent language learning
9. a reflective basic orientation to language learning, with abilities for self-assessment

Properties such as these are crucial for learner autonomy, intercultural communication and the student's personal development (see Byram and Fleming 1997; Arnold 1999; Jaatinen 2001; Kaikkonen 2001; Kohonen 1999; 2000a,b; 2001a,b,c,d; Lehtovaara 2001; Byram in this volume). These aims are also evident in the Common European Framework (CEF 2001) and in the

principles and guidelines for the ELP (see section “The European Language Portfolio”). Unless we pay explicit attention to them, they may remain largely inaccessible to the participants.

An outline of awareness in foreign language education

In my understanding, autonomous language learning is promoted by a holistic, experiential learning approach as a broad theoretical orientation to foreign language education. In terms of the conception of man, the student is seen as a self-directed, intentional person who can be guided to develop his or her competences in three inter-related areas of knowledge, skills and awareness: (a) personal awareness and self-direction, (b) awareness of the language and communication, and (c) awareness of learning processes. In this paper I can only suggest a brief outline of the model discussed in more detail elsewhere (see Kohonen 1992; 1999; 2000a,b; 2001a,b,c,d).

(a) **Personal awareness and self-direction** develop in learning processes throughout the life cycle. The development can be facilitated in language education by designing learning environments so that they foster the student’s healthy (and realistic) personal growth (see Huttunen in this volume). This is a question of working towards a kind of learning community in which the students feel safe to explore the uncertainties involved in language learning and communication. In this process language learning expands beyond the notion of communicative competence towards intercultural competence: relating to otherness in human encounters.

(b) **Awareness of language and communication.** An important part of foreign (and particularly second) language learning will obviously take place in informal contexts, outside the classroom settings. However, the language classroom still provides a powerful environment for learning. It allows language, communication and learning to be made explicit and discussed and explored, with the teacher as a professional guide and organiser of the learning opportunities. As noted above (section “Portfolio assessment as part of authentic assessment”), the quality of this environment is a question of what kind of tasks the students do and how they are guided to work on what they do.

(c) **Awareness of the learning processes** helps language learners to monitor their learning towards increasingly self-directed, negotiated language learning and self-assessment. This involves knowledge about learning and communication strategies. At a higher level of abstraction, the metacognitive knowledge of learning helps learners to evaluate the ways they plan and organise their learning processes, and to improve them.

Negotiating (at least part of) the curriculum aims, contents and processes with the students makes it easier for them to grasp the tasks. It is also necessary for them to see where they stand in relation to the aims and what progress they have made. They need to see optional courses of action and make personal choices, taking responsibility for the decisions. In this way they learn to make their own action plans for their learning. The plans should specify the time frame (agreeing on the deadlines for consulting and returning the completed assignments), the contents to include in the report, and the expected outcomes, possibly with (minimum) requirements for acceptable work (e.g. in terms of the range of topics to be dealt with, the quality of the language and the length of the work).

To promote more independent work, the learning tasks should be open enough to leave space for real choices, as appropriate with respect to the students' age, learning skills and the level of proficiency in the given language. Seeing options, making choices, reflecting on the consequences and making new action plans are essential elements for the development of increasingly autonomous learning. Without a clear awareness of what learning to learn means for them students may have difficulties in undertaking a conscious reflection and assessment of their language learning. Similarly, teachers may find it difficult to conceptualise their task as facilitators of student learning. Without shared concepts to talk about, it is difficult to negotiate the processes, provide tutoring on the progress and evaluate the whole range of the educational outcomes.

Teachers and students thus need to develop a common language and concrete tools for the pedagogic tutoring, monitoring and reflection of language learning. The European Language Portfolio, as part of the CEF, provides significant new concepts and tools for language teachers and students to proceed towards such a holistic view of foreign language education. Our experiences indicate strongly, however, that language teachers should not be left alone with the portfolio work. Sufficient support and inservice education are indispensable to the teachers and the schools. This support needs to be made explicit at the appropriate levels of school administration: the national central administration, the local educational authorities and the head teacher of the school. It is also desirable to link portfolio-oriented language learning with a school-wide approach for promoting socially responsible reflective learning as a public pedagogical orientation of the whole school.

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ACTIVITY: Learning about the workplace – The learner can ...

Tasks	Access level (Threshold 1)	Entry level (Threshold 2)	Independent user (Vantage)	
Describing an educational system	... give a factual account using simple language. Needs time to add detail. Uses bilingual dictionary for specific terms.	... give a detailed account. Uses circumlocution or ask for assistance with vocabulary.	... comment on and explain different facets of a system.	<i>Planned speaking and writing</i>
Compare educational systems	... use basic terms of comparison e.g. same; not the same.	... describe similarities and differences using a range of different formulations.	... examine advantages and disadvantages of different systems.	<i>Spoken/written production</i>
Review educational experiences	... explain own experience of an educational system in factual terms.	... comment on own experience using narrative and reflection.	... respond to queries on own experience and ask others for fuller explanations.	<i>Spoken/written production</i>
Identify learning strategies	... use general statements about ways of learning.	... explain own ways of working and respond to questions in order to clarify a point.	... describe precise ways of working and explain or justify them.	<i>Heuristic knowledge</i>
List learning strategies	... use a limited range to describe how things get done.	... use explicit terms to describe ways of working.	... describe, categorise and rank different ways of working.	<i>Heuristic knowledge</i>
Discuss and report on learning experience	... describe personal experience in general terms. In a discussion focus in on own contribution.	... give a full account of own experiences. Understand reports of others and ask questions for clarification.	... use domain specific terms and descriptions. Reacts to others' reports asking for elaboration and detail.	<i>Spoken interaction/ Listening</i>
List learning activities	... use general terms to describe learning activities such as copying, reporting, discussing, etc.	... use a range of terms to describe and explain activities.	... comment on and categorise activities.	<i>Heuristic knowledge</i>
Discuss learning activities and report on them	... use general terms to describe learning activities and classroom procedures.	... use specific terms in describing language learning activities.	... use a variety of meta-linguistic terms to comment on activities.	<i>Spoken interaction/ production</i>

Learning to learn is a central activity in the development of the course and the learners' skills. The task focus is primarily pedagogic with emphasis on a process of self evaluation and assessment.