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EuroIntegrELP

(Equal Chances to European Integration through the use of the European Language Portfolio)



EuroIntegrELP is a European project aiming to contribute to the promotion of language learning at high quality standards among adults belonging to various social and professional groups through the use of the European Language Portfolio as a quality instrument. It seeks to enhance opportunities for social integration and professional development through language learning, including less widely used and taught languages.

The project starts from the premise that in a multicultural and multilingual Europe it is necessary that language learners should be encouraged to value their already existent partial competences in various languages and to develop new ones, to take responsibility for their own learning and to develop self-evaluation skills. Learning foreign languages increases the learners' chances of social integration in their own country and in an international (European) environment, as well as their opportunities for personal development.

Partners in the project	
Romania:	PROSPER-ASE Language Centre (co-ordinator)
Austria	Österreichisches Sprachen-Kompetenz-Zentrum, Graz
Belgium	Karel de Grote-Hogeschool, Antwerpen
Croatia	Octopus - jezikne usluge
Estonia	Dialog, Tallinn
Greece	ELT NEWS, Athens QLS - The Panhellenic Association of Language Schools of Accredited Quality
Italy	The British School of Trieste
Lithuania	Utena College, Utena
Poland	PASE Poland - The Polish Association for Quality Language Services
Romania	QUEST Romania - The Romanian Association for Quality Language Services EURISC -European Institute for Risk, Security and Communication Management, Bucharest EuroEd Foundation, Iasi International Forum, Timisoara
Slovakia	TUKE, Technical University of Košice

The European Language Portfolio

The European Language Portfolio fulfils two functions: it is simultaneously an information tool and an accompaniment to language learning. It provides information about language proficiency and inter-cultural experiences in a clear, easily comprehensible way, with internationally comparable descriptions. At the same time it stimulates and helps with language learning. It is based on the overall reference system for language learning developed by the Council of Europe -Common European Framework of Reference.

The European Language Portfolio is intended to:

- facilitate mobility in Europe by presenting language qualifications in a clear and internationally comparable way;
- encourage the learning of foreign languages;
- emphasize the value of multi-lingualism and multi-culturalism, and contribute to mutual understanding in Europe;
- promote autonomous learning and the ability to assess oneself.

The European Language Portfolio helps learners to:

- evaluate and describe their language proficiency;
- situate their language proficiency on the internationally comparable scale of the Council of Europe;
- document and reflect on their language learning inside and outside school and on their intercultural experiences;
- inform anyone concerned about their proficiency in different languages, for example when changing schools, starting a language course, participating in an exchange programme, or applying for a job;
- set personal language objectives and plan further learning.

The European Language Portfolio helps teachers, schools and other training institutions to:

- recognize the needs and motivation of learners and help them to set learning goals and put together programmes;
- obtain information about the learners' previous language learning experiences inside and outside school;
- evaluate and document performance on a differentiated scale;
- situate final certificates and qualifications on the scale of the Common European Framework of Reference;
- describe their language programmes and produce attestations of language learning experiences.

The Language Portfolio helps firms, offices and employers to:

- obtain a differentiated picture of the language proficiency of their employees, of job applicants and make better use of their language abilities;
- specify their employees' qualification requirements and plan in-house and external training programmes;
- prepare attestations on the use of foreign languages in the workplace and periods of professional development in other language areas.



The partners of the programme are involved in a number of activities in their respective countries such as seminars, meetings with interested parties, group discussions etc and a lot has already been achieved.

The Thessaloniki EuroIntegrELP seminar

During the last weekend of August an informative seminar on the European Language Portfolio was held in Thessaloniki organised by QLS and ELT NEWS. Language teachers from many parts of Greece and Directors of Studies at QLS Schools gathered together to familiarize themselves with the content and format of the Portfolio, discuss pedagogical issues and get valuable feedback on the use of the ELP in various European countries. **Mrs Grete Nezbeda** from the partner Institute Österreichisches Sprachen-Kompetenz-Zentrum, Graz, was the instructor.



Grete Nezbeda

Grete Nezbeda focused on the reporting and pedagogical function of the Portfolio. She explained that in its reporting function it presents information about the owner's experience of learning and language learning achievement thus supplementing formal language qualifications. In its pedagogical function the ELP helps to make the language learning process more transparent to learners, developing their capacity for reflection and self-assessment, enabling them gradually to assume more and more responsibility for their own learning; in this way the ELP serves as a tool for promoting the development of learner autonomy.

Autonomous learners are defined as those who:

- understand the purpose of their learning programme;
- explicitly accept responsibility for their learning;
- share in the setting of learning goals;
- take initiatives in planning and executing learning activities;
- regularly review learning and evaluate its effectiveness.

According to the theory of learner autonomy, learning depends on partnership: learners share in planning learning (which is the beginning of reflection), and learners as well as teachers take initiatives. This means that learners are sometimes teachers and teachers are sometimes learners. The ELP's checklists of target skills can help the teacher to plan dynamically and flexibly. The ELP can also help learners to understand syllabus objectives in terms of their developing communicative repertoire, to analyse textbook units and examination tasks in terms of underlying target skills, and to understand what they are doing and why.

Self-assessment

As Grete Nezbeda explained self-assessment is fundamental to effective use of the ELP. It is fundamental to the processes of planning, monitoring and evaluating learning. Truly autonomous learners know what they have achieved, how they achieved it, and what remains to be achieved. Self-assessment and assessment by others should support one another: achieving complementarity and balance between them is one of the aims of the ELP.

During the ELP pilot project (1998- 2000; see Schärer 2000) many teachers worried about the accuracy of learner self-assessment, but this mostly proved to be unnecessary: when language skills are expressed as “can do” statements, learners usually assess their communicative capacities fairly accurately.

Learner reflection

Grete Nezbeda pointed out that reflection in all its forms plays a central role in every aspect of classroom practice. Some possible focuses for reflection are:

- My general aims
- Setting goals and thinking about learning
- Things I notice about language and culture
- How I solve communication problems
- Methods I use to learn languages
- Intercultural experiences

Learner reflection grows out of appropriate classroom interaction - What are we doing? - Why are we doing it? - How are we doing it? - With what results? - What are we going to do next? From the beginning reflective activities should be carried out in the target language. Writing plays a crucial role in developing learners' reflective capacity; by writing things down we provide ourselves with something to reflect on, making it easier to step back from what we say and think. Writing things down also stimulates the development of new thoughts and insights.

Learner motivation

When learners are involved in planning their learning, they become at once autonomous language learners and autonomous language users. And when that happens, the problem of motivation -often identified by teachers as the greatest barrier to successful learning- has been solved.

Conclusion

Portfolio-oriented 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 we 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 for life.

For more information on EuroIntergELP please contact Anastasia Spyropoulou (anastasia@eltnews.gr)