

The European Association of Language Testing and Assessment (EALTA) held their second annual conference in the picturesque town of Voss, Norway, from 2-5 June and attracted the interest of about 200 participants who came from far and apart in order to discuss the latest developments in testing and assessment and share expertise, experiences and concerns. This year the Conference was under the auspices of the University of Bergen with **Prof. Angela Hasselgreen** serving as head of the organising committee and co-ordinator.



### Features of the Conference

The Conference featured:

- Plenary sessions
- Concurrent presentations
- A Poster Presentation
- Two two-day-pre-conference workshops –a workshop in Classical Test Theory held at the University of Bergen by **Dr Norman Verhelst** (CITO, Holland) and a workshop on Introducing Teachers and Teacher Educators to the European Language Portfolio (ELP) held in Voss, by **Prof. Viljo Kohonen** (University of Tampere, Finland)
- A panel discussion on **ethical and other critical issues that impact on professionalism in language testing and assessment** with **Mike Milanovic, Alan Davies, Glenn Fulcher, Sylviane Granger** and **Reidun Oanus Andersen** on the podium
- The Annual General Meeting (AGM)
- Coffee and lunch breaks
- The Conference dinner with Nordic music and dance
- A trip to the Norwegian fjords

### The ELP Workshop

The pre-conference workshop on the European Language Portfolio conducted by **Prof. Viljo Kohonen** was attended by about twenty EALTA members from countries such as Austria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Norway, Spain, Switzerland and the UK. Participants had the chance to view all aspects of the Portfolio use, discuss the situation in their respective countries and get valuable feedback.

The European Language Portfolio is both a European and a local phenomenon. On the one hand it is firmly tied to the Common European Framework and reflects the language policies of the Council of Europe; on the other it accommodates national, regional and sectoral educational traditions, values and curricula, respects the needs of various target groups, and is open to flexible exploitation.

The ELP was first launched as a European concept in 1997, on the basis of *Proposals for development* [CC-LANG (97) 1]. By the end of the pilot projects, in 2000, a variety of ELP models had been developed and trialled, the standard adult passport had been designed, and the *Principles and Guidelines* had been drawn up.

The *Principles and Guidelines* define the ELP's "common core" in abstract terms, essentially:

- an obligatory three-part structure;
- a concern with plurilingualism, intercultural learning and learner autonomy;
- and the use of the Common Reference Levels of the Common European Framework for self-assessment.

### ***The European Language Portfolio: origins, structure, functions***

The Council of Europe has always stood for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law: its key instruments are the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights. This explains the Council of Europe's interest in education for democratic citizenship, the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity, and the facilitation of individual mobility. The teaching and learning of second/foreign languages plays a key role in the pursuit of this agenda.

The ELP has three components:

- the *language passport*, which summarizes the owner's linguistic identity and language learning experience and achievement;
- the *language biography*, which is used to track the learning process -set intermediate learning goals, review progress, and record significant language learning and intercultural experiences;
- and the *dossier*, in which the owner collects samples of his/her work in the second/foreign languages he/she has learnt.

The ELP has a *reporting function*: it presents information about the owner's experience of learning and using second/foreign languages and concrete evidence of his/her achievements; and a *pedagogical function*: it helps to make the language learning process more transparent to learners, developing their capacity for reflection and self-assessment, and thus enabling them gradually to assume more and more responsibility for their own learning.

Kohonen drew our attention to three principal benefits of the ELP:

- *transparency*: any language curriculum that aims to develop learners' communicative proficiency can be restated in terms of the common reference levels elaborated in the CEF and included in the language passport of the ELP;
- *transferability*: because it is based on the common reference levels, the ELP facilitates "transfer" both inside and outside educational systems;
- *awareness raising and reflection*: it is fundamental to the ELP that it involves the learner in planning, monitoring and evaluating learning; the ELP can thus facilitate the development of learner autonomy.

Kohonen stated that feedback from portfolio users throughout Europe confirms that learners of all ages value the ELP to the extent that it is central to their language learning experience.

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## Pedagogical challenges

The ELP aims to promote plurilingualism by developing genuine plurilingual competence

- by valuing the learner's linguistic and intercultural experience, wherever it has been gained;
- by giving evidence of partial competences, not only in languages taught at school but also in languages learnt outside the educational system.

The expected pedagogical impact of the ELP is

- to bring about a change of attitude among teachers:
  - focus on learners
  - pedagogical co-operation among teachers
  - change strategies, teaching methods, assessment criteria
- to develop self-assessment/autonomy in the learner -a process that can be learnt (it needs positive feedback from others).

Promoting learner autonomy suggests an approach where teachers guide their students to enhance their learning, development and awareness in three inter-related areas

- (1) Personal awareness: personal identity, realistic self-esteem, self-direction and responsible autonomy.
- (2) Process and situational awareness: management of the learning process towards increasingly self-organised learning and self-assessment; acquiring the necessary strategic and metacognitive knowledge and skills.
- (3) Task awareness: knowledge of language and intercultural communication; the meta-knowledge of language at the various levels of linguistic description.

Feedback on portfolio assessment indicates that these aspects can be fostered in language learning by using relevant contents and reflective learning processes. Cooperative learning provides helpful techniques for integrating individual and group goals. The development of autonomy is thus a matter of personal, social and moral education.

The shift towards negotiated learning procedures entails a significant pedagogical reorientation for language teachers. Teachers need to work on their beliefs and assumptions of their role as language educators. They need to see themselves as reflective learners and encounter the uncertainties of self-assessment and self-directed learning. They have found it helpful to share their experiences with their colleagues in teacher seminars and workshops, to gain personal experiences of reflective learning in practice. Promoting portfolio assessment is thus a question of the teacher's professional growth that needs to be supported systematically over a long period of time. In other words **teachers need to teach their students to see for themselves the whole picture of the foreign language learning enterprise.**

The workshop served to remind us of our diversity: twenty people from different countries with different kinds of language background, different educational systems and structures, different political, cultural and educational priorities and different purposes in implementing the ELP. For some of us the priority was to promote plurilingualism, for others it was to develop learners' intercultural awareness, and for others again it was to engage learners in planning, monitoring and assessing their own learning. However we all agreed that whatever our particular focus of implementation (plurilingualism, intercultural awareness/learning, learner autonomy), the ELP must be mediated to learners, which means that we must find ways of engaging and supporting teachers.

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