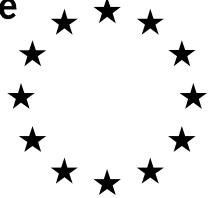


**Council of Europe**

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**Enhancing the pedagogical aspects of  
the European Language Portfolio (ELP)**

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## **Part One**

### **Exploring the educational possibilities of the “Dossier”: suggestions for developing the pedagogical function of the European Language Portfolio by Viljo Kohonen, University of Tampere, Finland**

#### **1. Preface**

The present study has grown out of the need to explore the educational possibilities of the “Dossier” section of the European Language Portfolio (ELP). The need has become apparent in the course of the ELP piloting project (1998-2000) carried out in 15 member states under the auspices of the Council of Europe. A shared experience among several national projects has been that the dossier tends to remain just a folder to hold together the authentic original documents referred to in the Passport or Biography sections of the ELP. This view of the dossier is based on the current principles and guidelines of the ELP whereby it is noted that the dossier offers the learner the “opportunity to select materials to document and illustrate achievements or experiences recorded in the language Biography or Passport”. In this view, the Language Biography is the main pedagogical device to facilitate the learner's “involvement in planning, reflecting upon and assessing his or her learning process and progress” (CDCC Recommendations 2000, 3).

However, at this early stage in the process of developing the ELP as a pan-European tool aimed at promoting learner autonomy, it is desirable to explore different ways of looking at the roles of the different ELP sections. This is the background for the present study. I have worked on developing a holistic approach to foreign-language education over a number of years with colleagues from the Department of Teacher Education in Tampere University, working together with language teachers in the local area. We have carried out several long-term projects to develop collaborative learning, learner autonomy and reflective language learning in ordinary school contexts.

In a recent teaching experiment (co-conducted with my colleague Pauli Kaikkonen), we carried out an action-research project on local school development (1994-98), with some 40 participating teachers from six schools in the Tampere area. We undertook to develop site-based curricula, aiming at supporting self-directed collaborative learning, self-assessment and intercultural learning in a broad reflective learning framework (Kohonen and Kaikkonen 1996). Within this project, a number of language teachers concentrated on the language portfolio (as we called it at that time) as a tool for reflective learning and self-assessment of language skills (see Elo-Rauske 1997; 1999; Kolu 1999; Pajukanta 1998).

As we joined in the Council of Europe's ELP piloting project, we started a new three-year project (1998-2001) with some 20 language teachers and 420 students, (co-ordinated with Ulla Pajukanta, from Nokia Upper Secondary School). As nearly half of the participating language teachers had also participated in the previous local school development project, it was natural for us to continue our emphasis on the dossier-oriented pedagogical work, as this

is, in fact, what we had been doing over the previous four years (although calling it portfolio assessment).

The purpose of the study is to examine the possibilities of integrating self-assessment of language competences into language learning and teaching programmes, focusing on the role of the “Dossier” in the European Language Portfolio and the teacher’s role in student guidance. It is my hope that the paper will be useful to language teachers wishing to promote learner autonomy and explore their foreign-language pedagogy in their own contexts. Obviously, there are a host of factors that need to be considered in developing foreign-language education in the different national contexts, such as national (and regional/local) policies, traditions and resources, institutional learning cultures, and the prevailing educational policies, teaching methods and techniques. This means that the solutions developed in one cultural context may not be transferable as such to another context. They need to be interpreted and modified by national experts.

## **2. Clarification of some basic terminology**

### **2.1 Authentic assessment and the language portfolio**

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 conditions of language use that are as realistic 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 the integration of cognitive abilities with affective learning (O’Malley and Valdez Pierce 1996; Kohonen 1999; 2000a).

The 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 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 (1) to the content, namely, what kind of tasks and materials the student works with, and (2) to 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' portfolios or teachers' professional portfolios). To emphasise the above twin goals in language teaching, however, 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 works, evaluation criteria and checklists to evaluate progress with regard to clearly defined 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 it can be compiled 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, use of the term language portfolio in current evaluation literature must be distinguished from the Council of Europe's concept of the European Language Portfolio which consists of three complementary sections: the Language Passport, Language Biography and Dossier. The concepts of Language Passport and Biography clearly extend the customary notion of language portfolio to emphasise the reporting function of the ELP with regard to the criterion-referenced levels of proficiency, adding the tool for documenting significant linguistic and cultural experiences.

The portfolio concept discussed above combines most of the language biography section and the section within the ELP. It could be fitted into the Dossier section if this is understood in a broad sense so that it contains both the process and product orientations. This entails making a distinction between the "learning" dossier and the "reporting" dossier. This is how we have understood the notion of the "Dossier" in our current Finnish ELP project, based on our previous research and development work on portfolio assessment.

## **2.2 The Language Biography and the Dossier in the ELP**

In their ELP Guide for teachers and teacher trainers, David Little and Radka Perclová (2001) outline two ways of implementing the ELP in pedagogical practice. In accordance with the current definitions of the ELP, the three parts can be used in interaction with each other so that language learning begins with self-assessment and proceeds to goal-setting. The learning outcomes are collected in the dossier and evaluated in the biography. This provides the basis for setting new goals and going on to undertake the learning task, evaluating it and collecting the outcome in the dossier. In this approach the student is, in a sense, shuttling mainly between the Biography and Dossier sections of the ELP. In their Guide they elaborate this process in great detail.

Little and Perclová point out that another way of looking at the process is to reverse the above order. In this approach the teacher starts from the Dossier (for keeping the learning documents) and only later introduces the Biography section for setting the goals and reviewing the learning progress. Later still, the teacher introduces the Language Passport section to engage the students in self-assessment related to the Council of Europe's scales of proficiency (see figures 1.14 and 1.15 in Little and Perclová, 2001). In this suggestion the dossier still remains a folder for the learning documents, and students are guided between the Dossier, Biography and Passport sections during the course of their learning process.

A third option, related to this model suggested by Little and Perclová, is to reconceptualise the role of the Dossier as a dynamic tool for promoting reflective learning, i.e., going beyond the view of the dossier as just a folder for learning documents. In this view, it becomes, in fact, a major pedagogical tool for promoting reflective learning and self-assessment. It becomes a learning tool that can be used in the daily/weekly process of language teaching. The view also entails a redefinition of the role of the Biography section: some of the functions addressed in the current principles and guidelines to the Biography (CDCC Recommendations 2000, 3) need to be included in the Dossier as well. By this I mean the facilitation of the learner's involvement in the planning, reflecting upon and assessing his or her learning process and progress needs.

I would like to suggest a new distinction between the roles of the Biography and the Dossier whereby the Dossier becomes a dynamic and flexible pedagogical tool that can be used regularly in language teaching. The Biography, on the other hand, becomes somewhat more detached from the daily pedagogical work with the students. It is now used to summarise language learning over time, to record the student's significant learning experiences. This view is in accordance with the third and fourth functions of the Biography in the current principles and guidelines: "to include information on linguistic and cultural experiences gained in and outside formal educational contexts; it is organised to promote plurilingualism" (CDCC Recommendations 2000, 3). In this interpretation, then, the Dossier is seen as a tool that is used to carry the pedagogical process forward, while the Biography becomes a more static tool to evaluate and record relevant learning outcomes and experiences by summarising them over time.

### **2.3 Study outline**

In this study I will outline a broad definition of the Dossier, based on our Finnish experiences of working on the dossier in foreign-language learning for some six years. I will first discuss the notion of visibility in the learning processes and outcomes, suggesting ways of making student learning more transparent (and thus more visible) to the participants. I will propose the concept of portfolio-oriented foreign-language pedagogy and discuss the role of the dossier both as a pedagogical and as a reporting tool. Then I will move on to the question of promoting students' awareness of their language learning through the pedagogical function of the dossier and report some empirical findings in relation to student awareness. Finally, I will underscore the importance of in-service teacher education for research and development work and suggest some ways of conducting it in the framework of transformative learning.

## **3. Taking charge of language learning**

Developing learner autonomy in foreign-language learning requires time, pedagogical skill and professional commitment for self-directed learning. As David Little (1999) points out, students do not become autonomous learners simply by being told that they are now in charge of their learning. They can take control of more and more aspects of the learning process only to the extent that they acquire the appropriate knowledge, skills and motivation. To be able to take charge of their learning and extend their skills they need to be actively involved in the whole learning process.

What kind of skills do students need to develop in order to proceed on their way towards learner autonomy? Leslie Dickinson offers the following suggestions for the wide range of knowledge, attitudes and skills that the teacher needs to work on with his or her students to promote independent learning (1992):

- justifying and legitimising independence as a learning goal and thus encouraging students to take a more independent attitude to their learning;
- convincing students that they are capable of assuming independence if they make a serious effort to learn, by helping them gain successful experience in doing so;
- helping them to understand language as a linguistic system and develop their communication skills on their own;
- helping students to understand more about language learning and develop an awareness of what is involved in the process;
- enabling them to cope with emerging problems in communication and learning and to tackle the obstacles;
- helping students to develop explicit learning strategies to plan, monitor and reflect on their learning;
- providing students with concrete opportunities to exercise greater autonomy in their language learning.

These points raise the following important question: what do we actually mean when we talk about learning outcomes in connection with the goal of learner autonomy in foreign-language education? We customarily tend to think that the outcome of language learning is the learner's communicative competence which can be measured through various performance or proficiency tests. Valid and competent communicative performance testing obviously provides a necessary measure of the language student's communicative skills. There are well-known differences in our students' language skills, and competent testing procedures are capable of revealing such differences.

However, concentrating on skills-oriented proficiency tests misses a number of other important learning outcomes which are evident particularly in the goals of teaching languages for learner autonomy and communicative intercultural competence. Intercultural competence 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 ambiguity and respect for diversity in intercultural contacts, which depend on situation-specific cultural norms and expectations (Kohonen 1999; Kaikkonen 2000).

A great deal of personal and social learning relevant for the goals of intercultural competence remain, in an important sense, invisible in the proficiency tests carried out by outside testing agencies or external examination boards. For a more holistic view of the wide range of learning outcomes, we need to explore the processes of foreign-language education. The processes, learning environments and products are intricately intertwined in any learning: the quality of the outcomes depends critically on the kind of processes and the students' learning experiences in them. Therefore, investing pedagogical expertise in the educational processes also involves an investment in the quality of the outcomes of learning.

## **4. Making language learning more visible**

### **4.1 What is “visibility” in language learning?**

What I mean by the visibility issue is that communicative language tests gauge the extent to which students understand language (receptive tests) and can make themselves understood (productive tests). When language tests are administered, particularly to large numbers of testees at the same time (cf. national school-leaving tests), the constraints of economical and reliable scoring (securing inter-rater reliability) often mean that the test types involve rather narrow language and cognitive skills (for example, multiple choice and gap-filling items, short/structured open answers).

While standardised tests provide necessary information about the skills measured they may have a less desirable pedagogical backwash effect on the teaching that has gone before (particularly in upper secondary schools involving tests for high stakes). For understandable reasons, teachers are pressured to coach their students to pass the tests with good marks. Besides, the capacity of standardised tests to provide usable information for pedagogical student guidance is also limited, depending on the open-endedness of the tests used (compare, for example, a multiple-choice test and a conversation test).

Language learning inherently involves a number of personal properties and process-related learning outcomes that are educationally valuable language learning goals in their own right in language curricula. In many national contexts these educational goals are also expressed in curricular frameworks, requiring all teachers to consider them in their subject curricula. In Finland, for example, this has been the case since the 1994 National Framework Curriculum came into being. This emphasises the goals of promoting a holistic student development, learning to learn and responsible social and moral education. For foreign-language learning in particular, a natural goal is to promote intercultural language competence emphasising the language user's capacity to encounter otherness, respecting cultural diversity. Working towards such goals in foreign-language education is very much a question of the quality of the learning processes and environments.

It is important to note that students inevitably bring their personal histories (autobiographies) to our classes. Their autobiographies involve personal properties, beliefs and assumptions of language and (language) learning which they have acquired as part of their learning histories 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 (Jaatinen 2000). They impinge indirectly on the student's observable language performance. While they may remain largely invisible (particularly in the paper-and-pencil tests), they include a number of

properties that are essential for the development of language competence and learning motivation:

- Commitment to and ownership of one's language learning.
- Tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty in communicative situations and learning in general.
- Willingness to take risks in order to cope with communicative tasks and situations.
- Understanding of oneself as a language learner and a language user in terms of beliefs about language use and one's role as a learner.
- Understanding of one's cultural identity and what it means to be an intercultural person and language user.
- Skills and attitudes for socially responsible, negotiated learning and language use.
- Plurilingualism, involving a reflective awareness and appreciation of language phenomena and language learning, as well as assuming respect for and appreciation of cultural diversity and otherness.
- Learning skills and strategies necessary for continuous, increasingly independent language learning, conducted in the social community of learners and in interaction with other learners and the teacher.
- A reflective basic orientation to language learning, with abilities for critical self-assessment and peer reflection.

Properties such as these are crucial for promoting learner autonomy, intercultural communication and the student's personal development (Framework 1996; CDCC Recommendations 2000; see also Byram and Fleming (eds.) 1997; Arnold (ed.) 1999; Kaikkonen 2000; Kohonen 1999; 2000a,b). They are an inherent part of the pedagogical learning processes in any language class, regardless of the degree to which we are aware of them as teachers. To enhance foreign-language education, we need to pay more explicit professional attention to such properties.

In many cases the above learner properties remain invisible in external testing and can be inferred only indirectly from the student's linguistic output data. Unless we pay explicit attention to them, they may remain consciously inaccessible to the participants in the learning process. They thus constitute the so-called hidden, invisible curriculum of which participants have a peripheral awareness. Without a clear awareness of what learning to learn means for them in their own contexts, students may have difficulties in undertaking a conscious reflection and assessment of their language learning. Similarly, teachers may find it difficult to conceptualise their role as facilitators of student learning. Without shared concepts to talk about, it may be difficult to negotiate the processes, provide tutoring on the progress and evaluate the whole range of educational outcomes. Teachers and students therefore need a common language and concrete tools for the pedagogical tutoring, monitoring and reflection of language learning.

In the light of this discussion, it is necessary to reflect on what we mean by the notion of learning outcomes in language learning aimed at fostering learner autonomy. We may need to carefully consider how we understand the relevant concepts in our own cultural contexts, and how we can teach them to our students. In my experience, this kind of thinking and re-

examination is necessary throughout the learning process with the same groups of learners, as the possibilities will change during the course of the work. It is therefore advisable to clarify our professional understanding of the basic “what” question at suitable intervals, also basing our reflections on actual observations and data collected from concrete learning situations and documents. It is also very useful to have regular pedagogical discussions and reflections in supportive collegial teacher teams (Kohonen 2000a; Lehtovaara 2000).

The above properties are naturally present in language classes in different national and regional/local contexts. Therefore, any pedagogical development work needs to be undertaken within the local, regional and national context and traditions. The work is initiated, conducted and evaluated by the national experts. To think of a metaphor, pedagogical development work is like undertaking a long trip: we need to leave from where we are – where else could we begin?

#### **4.2. Increasing visibility of language learning through portfolio-oriented pedagogy**

Portfolio-oriented foreign-language education can open significant avenues for enhancing learning outcomes in language education. It can offer new possibilities for making at least some of the outcomes more visible to students, teachers and other stakeholders of learning. By this I mean that language teachers can facilitate their students to become more aware of desirable processes and outcomes and to direct their conscious attention to these in the course of their language learning. When we make the goals more concrete and emphasise their importance for lifelong learning we can motivate our students to develop a commitment to their own learning. Based on a shared understanding of learner autonomy, we can talk about the concepts to our students and use explicit techniques to facilitate the development of autonomy at least to some extent, just as we do when teaching the traditional linguistic aspects of language and language use. Visible goals are negotiable and accessible to conscious pedagogical and learning efforts.

To develop their language teaching towards more autonomous and responsible learning, teachers should consider the following kind of questions:

- How to facilitate students to develop a more differentiated understanding and awareness of the phenomena of language, communication, learning and the learning processes?
- How to guide them to direct their learning efforts and monitor and assess their language skills?
- How to teach them to establish and maintain mutually beneficial and responsible social relationships in their learning groups and communities?
- How to promote their acquisition of new knowledge, understanding and skills increasingly on their own?
- How to provide sufficient support, tutoring and encouragement?
- How to help them to modify and construct their physical and social learning environments?

There are further questions to consider, for example, how to document to participants (and other stakeholders) that the students have progressed on their way towards autonomous language learning? How to legitimise the goals as something attainable to the students, at

least to some extent, if they make a serious effort? How to help students to explore their learning, both alone and together? How to help them discover more ways of progressing in their learning? We need to consider, therefore, what documentary evidence is yielded by the learning process of progress made in the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes. We need to develop conscious pedagogical ways and means to make the learning goals and outcomes more concrete and visible to the participants (including ourselves) and the relevant stakeholders.

Portfolio-oriented foreign pedagogy suggests a wide range of possibilities for promoting language learning in terms of both the learning processes (the pedagogical function of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) and the learning outcomes (the reporting function of the ELP). This distinction between the pedagogical and reporting functions of the European Language Portfolio is essential for understanding the potential of the ELP for enhancing language education.

The reporting function of the ELP concerns the product perspective to foreign-language learning: providing a record of the linguistic and cultural skills the students have acquired (including both formal and informal learning), by relating the communicative skills to the proficiency levels recognised in the Common European Framework (1996). This reporting takes place in each of the three sections of the ELP: in the Passport section, the Biography section and the Dossier section. Students' self-assessment of their language skills constitutes a significant element in the reporting. This also supports their attitudes, skills and tools for lifelong learning. Students recognise important sources for learning foreign languages in their national and local contexts (using, for example, the Internet, mass media, entertainment industry, fiction, travelling, personal contacts etc., in addition to 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 a conscious effort to take advantage of the opportunities available around them.

Teachers facilitate this process through explicitly teaching the necessary self-assessment skills. They encourage their students to use learning opportunities and provide guidance and support for doing it successfully. Completing the reporting parts of the ELP helps students realise their own role as responsible learners and agents of their own learning: the ELP is their own learning record of which they are in charge. The Dossier provides an opportunity for them to select relevant learning documents of their own and illustrate their current language skills or experiences through authentic personal documentation. This function of the Dossier is consequently part of the reporting function of the whole ELP: to document relevant language learning and reflect the learning experiences.

However, in accordance with the dual function of the ELP, I also suggest making the distinction between the pedagogical and reporting functions of the Dossier, as already noted. While the reporting function of the Dossier illustrates the language-learning outcomes in terms of relevant personal documents (whether written or spoken records), the pedagogical function provides a significant instructional tool to be used in daily classroom work (and in homework assignments). It provides an interface between language learning, teaching and assessment. It functions both as a pedagogical device for teachers to guide learning and as a practical tool for students increasingly to take control of their learning processes under the teacher's guidance and tutoring.

In our Finnish language portfolio experiments, we have repeatedly discovered that the pedagogical 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 learner autonomy. They need to reflect on their own role as socially responsible learners, and how they can become more skilled and competent 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 Dossier part of the ELP provides new pedagogical tools for making language-learning more visible to the participants. I examine these possibilities in the following section.

## **5. Promoting students' awareness of their language learning through the pedagogical function of the Dossier**

In my opinion, autonomous language learning is promoted by a holistic, experiential learning approach to foreign-language education. The student is seen as a self-directed, intentional person who can be guided to develop his or her competence in three interrelated areas of knowledge, skills and awareness: (1) personal identity and self-direction, (2) awareness of language and communication, becoming skilled language learners and users who are also capable of evaluating their own proficiency, and (3) monitoring and reflection of learning processes (Kohonen 1992; 1999; 2000a). I will briefly discuss each of these areas and suggest some pedagogical ideas for the teacher to consider in his or her student guidance. The work discussed in this section is part of the students' learning dossiers and is carried out in connection with their regular classroom work (and as homework).

### **5.1 Personal identity and self-direction**

These develop in learning processes throughout the life cycle. The development can be facilitated in language education by designing the learning environments so that they foster the student's healthy (and realistic) personal growth. This is a question of working towards a community of learners 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.

As teachers we need to be sensitive to the diversity of student images of their roles and responsibilities in the language learning process. Students come to our language classes with widely different beliefs, images, expectations and assumptions of their own role as language learners, based on their personal life histories and prior learning experiences in school. When such formative experiences are in contradiction with the teacher's goal of promoting autonomous, self-organised learning, it is only natural that some students resist the teacher's well-intentioned pedagogical efforts. For a large number of students, on the other hand, a responsible role as self-directed and autonomous learners fits quite easily and they become involved in their work and develop a commitment to their learning.

The teacher might facilitate the students to reflect on their roles as language learners by asking them to keep a personal diary of their experiences and thoughts in the course of the learning process. We have found that it is useful to guide the reflective diary work by asking

students regularly to consider short questions as part of their course work. It may be good to start the work during the language lessons and have the students share their observations in small groups and talk about the findings together in the class. Reflecting on the questions can also be given as homework. By changing the perspectives of the questions the teacher can help the students to recognise progress in their thinking and gradually develop reflective learning as a habit.

The diaries provide the teacher with a good opportunity to take note of student development and plan pedagogical interventions as needed. Reflecting on development helps individual students to realise their own progress as learners. We have used, for example, the following kind of questions in our Finnish portfolio experiments (Kolu 1999; Kolu and Tapaninaho 2000; Kujansivu and Pajukanta 2000; Pajukanta 1998; 1999; Lammi 2000; Päkkilä 2000).

- What kind of things are important for you as a person?
- What three things do you value in yourself? Why?
- What are your strengths as a language learner?
- What weaknesses/shortcomings do you have as a student?
- Why are languages important for you?
- How do you feel about beginning your studies in this class?
- What personal aptitudes might a good language learner have?
- Which of these aptitudes do you have?
- How do you understand your role in the class?
- What kind of person is pleasant to work with? Why?
- How do you work as a group member?
- What do you expect from your language teacher? Why?

In the beginning it may be helpful to give such questions to the students in a more structured format, as statements in which they complete their ideas and opinions, for example, “the following (three) things are important for me as a person ...”; “these are three things I value in myself...”, and so on). In the course of the work we have also invited the students to reflect on their feelings after a given lesson, the week’s work and the whole course, based on immediate concrete experiences in class, for example, my feelings about today’s German lesson are ...). In this way teachers can also receive valuable affective feedback on their work. We have aimed at a reciprocal process whereby students make comments to their peers and the teacher and also receive comments from each other and the teacher. In this way we have attempted to create an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect, aiming at a community of learners.

## **5.2. Awareness of language and communication**

An important part of foreign-language learning will obviously take place in informal contexts, outside the classroom. However, a language classroom still provides a powerful environment for learning. It allows language, communication and learning to be made explicit and discussed and explored together, with the teacher as professional guide and organiser of

learning opportunities (Candlin 1987). As noted above, the quality of this environment depends on what kind of tasks the learners are given and how they are guided.

Language teaching is obviously concerned with the central outcomes of fluency and accuracy in communication. This means developing a wide range of communicative skills and attitudes. For efficient language learning and use, the student also needs to develop a metaknowledge of language at various levels of linguistic description. In our Finnish ELP project we encouraged our students to become aware of their task of language learning by asking them to reflect on the following kind of questions in their learning diaries, as part of their learning dossiers:

- Why do you need to learn foreign languages?
- What language(s) do you like best? Why?
- How do you understand intercultural communication?
- What does it mean for you to be an intercultural speaker?
- How do you understand the concept of language competence?
- What elements and skills does it include?
- What elements do you find easy/difficult? Why?
- What do you understand by communicative skills?
- Which skills are you good at? Which do you need to improve?
- What are your objectives for this course (period, term....)?
- What are your concrete objectives for this week?
- What did you accomplish during the week (course)?
- What are your strengths in language learning?
- What can you do on your own in language learning?
- Where do you need help? Who can you help? How?

The teacher helps students to visualise for themselves the big picture of the whole foreign-language learning enterprise they are undertaking. This means helping them to acquire a kind of personal map of their learning task, helping them to orient themselves in the fuzzy terrain of human communication. Using the metaphor of orienteering, students need a map of the linguistic terrain they are entering as language learners to be able to take charge of their orienteering task. They need to learn to “read” the map properly, by understanding the symbols on the map and being able to match them to the appropriate features in the terrain. The map needs to unfold gradually in terms of accuracy, having several scales from a broad atlas to a detailed street map. This awareness guides their work of putting together the different linguistic elements in the language curriculum (Kohonen 2000a).

## **5.2 Awareness of learning processes**

This helps language learners monitor their learning towards increasingly self-directed, negotiated language learning and self-assessment and involves knowledge about learning strategies. These strategies refer to the behaviours of language learning and language use in which students engage in foreign-language learning. Strategies are problem-oriented, that is,

learners utilise them to respond to an identified learning or communication need. At a higher level of abstraction, the metacognitive knowledge of learning helps learners improve their planning and organise their learning tasks and processes.

Negotiating (at least part of) the curriculum aims, contents and processes with students helps them grasp the tasks for themselves. It is also necessary for them to see where they stand in relation to the aims and what progress they are making towards their goal. 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 the learning tasks. The plans should specify the timeframe (agreeing on the deadline for returning completed work), the contents to include in the report, and the expected outcomes, possibly with (minimum) requirements for acceptable work (for example, in terms of the range of topics to be dealt with, the quality of the language and the length of the work).

To promote independent work, learning tasks should be open enough to leave space for real choices, with respect to the students' age, learning skills and level of proficiency in the given language. Seeing options, making choices, reflecting on the consequences and producing new action plans are essential elements for the development of increasingly autonomous learning. The options need to be adjusted to the constraints of school/institutional curricula and available resources. We have used the following kind of questions to facilitate students to reflect on the learning processes and their role as participants.

- What do you expect from your work (in German) this week?
- What aims do you wish to set for this course/week?
- How are you going to achieve your aims?
- How do you know that you have reached your aims?
- What has helped you to progress/complete your work?
- What has been surprising in your work (on this course)?
- What difficulties/obstacles have you met in your work?
- How have you been able to solve (some of) them?
- What have you realised about the ways you work?
- How might you improve your ways of working?
- What changes/improvements can you identify in your work?
- What have you learned about yourself as a learner?
- What help have you received from your classmates?
- What help have you given them (on this course)?
- How might you improve your work as a member of the group?
- What effort have you made on this course to do well?
- How well have you done, in relation to the effort you made?
- What could you improve on the next course?

The purpose of the questions is to direct the students' attention to their own role and their working habits as learners, both when working alone and as a member of a group. By learning to reflect on their roles, expectations and effort as learners they can discover what they are good at and what aspects of their work they can and should change in order to do better.

Questions will vary and evolve depending on the specific aims of the course and how students' social skills and learning skills (and attitudes) progress. As with any new skill, the teacher needs to teach reflection in concrete ways by giving the students simple, meaningful questions on which to reflect and guiding them gradually towards more complicated reflective tasks.

The teacher makes comments on the progress of individual students and groups in the class (and the class as a whole). He/she designs further questions and reflective tasks on the basis of observations in class to direct the students' attention towards those aspects which need to be improved. Receiving specific and concrete feedback on their progress and improvements in their learning motivates students to work on those aspects which they should improve. The reflective process facilitates the student to develop a personal awareness and identity as a person and as a learner. The learning tasks and processes are formative for learner development, providing the learner contextualised and specific feedback about who he or she is as a person and what progress is taking place.

#### **5.4 An example of a negotiated learning process**

To use another metaphor, language learning can be seen as a long and challenging journey that the students are undertaking. Like any big journey, it needs careful preparation, knowledge and adjustment on the way. To progress on their personal journeys, students need to be involved in the process of planning their curriculum. This raises the concept of a negotiated curriculum whereby the students are actively engaged in the process of enacting the curriculum. Negotiation means bringing together the experiences and the aims of the participants into a shared learning intent that is carried out and evaluated. The processes and outcomes of the action are reflected upon and evaluated together.

Negotiating the curriculum contents and processes with learners helps them grasp the tasks for themselves. It is also necessary for them to see where they stand in relation to the goals and what progress they are making towards their goal. The negotiation process includes five broad elements (Boomer 1992): (1) preparatory planning of the work (of the course/period of work), (2) setting the aims, (3) the interactive learning process, (4) consolidating learning, and (5) course evaluation and reflection. The following checklist of questions might be helpful to the teacher:

*(a) Preparatory planning of the work – “mapping the territory”:*

- what consistency is there between the proposed work and the principles of learning being aimed at?
- do the topics have the potential to challenge and engage my students?
- how justifiable are the aims for them?
- how are the topics and contents connected with their previous work and experience?

- is the plan flexible enough to allow for alternative ways of working?

(b) *Setting the aims with the students – “preparing for the journey”:*

- do the students feel that the journey is worth making and possible for them to undertake?
- do they understand and accept the rationale and the goals?
- what are the negotiable and the non-negotiable requirements of the work to be completed?
- do they have opportunities to shape the course of their work (sequencing, resources, outcomes)?
- to what extent are they committed to the learning contracts and aware of possible modifications?

(c) *Interactive learning process – “on the journey”:*

- are the students utilising the available resources?
- are they initiating questions/ discussions?
- how are they working together and facing problems? Are they helping each other?
- how am I helping them to cope with difficulties?
- am I giving them individual help and feedback?
- does the process continue when I leave the classroom?

(d) *Consolidating learning - “arriving at the (interim) destination”:*

- are the students drafting and revising their work?
- how committed are they to strive for quality work?
- are they showing signs of owning their work (defend/talk/improve/seek advice, guidance)?
- how are they coping with difficulties and problems?
- are they sensitive to the needs of others?

(e) *Course evaluation and reflection – “reflecting on the journey”:*

- to what extent did we achieve what we intended to do?
- was there something unforeseen?
- how valuable was the process as a learning experience?
- what were the best/worst aspects of the work?
- am I asking students to be critical of my role as the teacher?
- am I providing them with sufficient learning space?
- how are they progressing towards the goals?

- are they growing in their ability to articulate their own ideas, expectations and values?

These stages overlap in practice and involve cyclical processes, but it is helpful to discuss them as separate stages. The model is useful for planning and conducting project work that involves a relatively long period of time (several lessons/weeks and independent work outside school as homework). The work can be done individually and in small groups, with a clear emphasis on sustained student-initiated work. Students keep their finished work assignments in their learning dossiers, including guided reflections on the process and self-assessment on the outcomes.

## **5.5 An action research experiment on negotiated learning**

In a teaching experiment carried out the Teaching Practice School of the University of Tampere, we used Boomer's model in the design of two foreign language units (in English and Swedish; Tervaoja and Tuukkanen 1995; Kohonen 2000a, pp. 45-47). The teachers decided to explore how they could bring the negotiated curriculum to the grass-roots level of their daily encounters with the students. The students were 9th graders in the Finnish comprehensive (lower secondary) school. The experiment consisted of teaching one unit in the spring term (some 35 lessons given daily during an intensive study period of seven weeks, from early February to early April).

The teachers chose the core curriculum with certain grammatical elements and textbook materials that were compulsory for all. In addition to this basic core they provided optional texts for individual choices. As the third element, they expected the students to undertake project work as part of the unit requirements, for which they could negotiate a topic of their own choice. We thus built varying degrees of learner choice among the tasks studied.

The teachers agreed on working procedures and evaluation practices jointly with the students. The basic texts were studied together mainly in teacher-directed classes. In the optional texts, however, the students could proceed at their own pace in small groups with their classmates who had chosen the same texts. The teachers provided regular guidance, both personally and on separate worksheets. The students could listen to audio tapes containing the texts when they wished. The teachers provided optional tasks and resource materials in the classes and were available for help and comments. For the project work, they guided the learners to produce a plan of their own, including time-tabling questions, co-operation in teams and how to present the product to the whole class.

Unit evaluation consisted of the joint core unit test, a test on the optional texts studied and project work and other work samples, all documented in the learner dossiers. Students were also instructed to carry out continuous self-assessment during the process by writing their observations in their reflection diaries (as part of the dossiers). A number of students were able to do this on their own, while some needed the teacher to remind them and give prompts and support. The teachers also discussed the learning contents and processes together with the class during the lessons and modified their action plans when necessary. They guided the students to make comments on their classmates' projects. The teacher had a short tutoring session with every learner at the end of the unit when the unit grade was negotiated together, based on the student's suggestion. The whole process was evaluated together after completion.

The experiment showed that a negotiated curriculum along the lines developed by Boomer is a possible way of redesigning work in language classes. The students had, however, great difficulty in identifying their aims in specific language learning terms. They also had difficulty in linking their aims with the materials and techniques. Obviously they were facing a demanding learning task, not being able to conceptualise what it was that they ought to learn. The teacher's help was crucial for their progress. They needed a great deal of guidance and feedback by the teacher to organise their learning. Some of them found the process quite difficult and expected a more direct teacher role, particularly in the teaching of the common core grammar.

Students generally found it easier to make their own decisions about their working techniques (who to work with, how to proceed) than about the contents. About half of them expected the teacher to check that homework assignments had been done properly by everybody. The whole idea of self-directed learning by taking charge of one's own learning was quite difficult to accept for some students. This was obviously because they were not accustomed to planning their learning and working on their own. Giving specific help, support and encouragement became a central element in the process for the teachers.

We discovered that the essence of the whole experiment was how to support the idea of the self-direction and ownership of language learning. This is primarily a question of justifying and legitimising the idea to the students and motivating them to assume increasing amounts of responsibility. The teacher needs to delegate some of her pedagogical power to the learners and to help them realise the importance of the idea for themselves. Secondly, the process needs to be facilitated with specific (and timely) guidance and support, tailored as far as possible to the varying learner needs. The process needs clear guidelines, agreement on deadlines and a certain amount of firmness by the teacher, reminding the students and intervening as necessary. It also needs time and skill in sequencing learner responsibility as a gradual process, progressing in sufficiently small steps.

The findings emphasise the teacher's role as a significant resource for self-directed learning. The teachers noticed that their role shifted towards becoming an observer and organiser of student learning. The process required a great deal of flexibility, sensitivity to student needs, and tolerance of uncertainty when facing unanticipated and surprising situations. Preparatory work outside the classes was also increased. A central concern for the teachers was how to learn to ask good, stimulating questions and give hints and suggestions, thereby encouraging the students to proceed on their own. The teachers felt that they had benefited from the experiment professionally, learning new skills of collaboration and student guidance.

Negotiating the curriculum means inviting the students to make a personal contribution to their language learning, so that they have a real investment both in the learning process and the outcomes. Negotiation also means making explicit the constraints in the learning context due to the curriculum framework with its goals. The elements that are compulsory in the curriculum are non-negotiable and everybody does them. In addition to this, the language curriculum needs to provide optional and open elements that allow space for individually negotiated contents. The actual journey of learning is the real, live curriculum as experienced by the student. It entails the contents and processes of discovering the new language and making sense of one's learning (Boomer 1992; Van Lier 1996; Kohonen 2000a.).

## 6. Getting started in the class – where to begin?

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

For one thing, the level descriptions are written in an abstract, fairly technical language which is quite difficult for them to understand. Secondly, as they have obvious difficulty in realising what the communicative learning goals are it is very difficult for them to assess the degree of their language skills – degree of what? What is the targeted standard of language proficiency? How can they understand and evaluate something when they do not know what it is? 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?"

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 the early stages of their language learning students have very understandable difficulty in assessing the extent to which they can control and assess the accuracy dimensions (phonology, morphology, syntax) of the target language. To be more sympathetic to the student's dilemma it is actually helpful for us to do the same exercise in the language that we know least well - 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 accuracy forms and details are like in a language that is unknown to us. 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.

However, even though young learners or beginners find it very difficult to assess the accuracy of their (elementary) language skills they are more likely to know what they can do communicatively in the target language and the general level of proficiency with which they can do it, as David Little points out (1999). The functional "can do" statements (developed by the Swiss ELP project) can be more natural to start with. We generally have a fairly good (at least intuitive) knowledge of what we can do communicatively with our first language (and other languages we know well). In today's world students are often surrounded by foreign languages and can perhaps develop a surprisingly good "ear" for communication, even in languages that are new to them. Language awareness training (in early learning) will also sensitise them to language phenomena in general, helping them cope with unknown languages and develop positive attitudes to languages, their speakers and their cultural backgrounds.

In the light of this discussion, then, it makes sense to introduce the self-assessment of language skills with the functional and fluency dimensions of language skills rather than with the dimension 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 beginning with their own experiences, beliefs and assumptions of learning. Learning to be reflective about oneself

as a human being and as a language student seems to be a natural thing to do for many students, while for some students it seems to be quite a difficult notion to grasp.

The teacher also needs to justify and legitimise the benefits of reflection to the students and why he or she is asking them to reflect on their learning and assess their communicative knowledge, skills and attitudes. Once the students realise the purpose and goals of reflection and self-assessment they have crossed the basic motivational threshold for reflective activities in class. Perhaps the question is also one of educational culture in a national (or regional) context; we therefore need to proceed with caution and see what can be done in our language classrooms. In any case, learning reflection as a habit is a complex task and thus always a question of time, motivation, support and guidance.

## **7. Student reflections based on Finnish Dossier work**

Below are a number of examples of student reflections in our portfolio projects using the three goal areas discussed in section 3 above: (1) who learns, (2) what he or she learns and (3) how he or she learns.

### *(a) who – personal awareness of oneself as a (language) learner*

A German upper secondary school teacher discussed the goals of dossier work with her students and then asked them to reflect on their views of a good “portfolio student”. For them, a good portfolio student “does his work properly and according to his talents”; “does not leave things to the last moment”; “does her best and is active in the lessons”; “likes to work in pairs and groups”; “realises that it is necessary to work on one’s own, not just when asked by the teacher”. The students’ comments indicate that they understand their responsibility for their own language learning and also for contributing to the learning of others in the groups (Pajukanta 1998).

The following student’s comment (lower secondary school, 8<sup>th</sup> grader) shows that she has assumed responsibility for her own learning: “I did not understand some things, but that is my fault because sometimes during the lessons I only think of my own doings and I therefore don’t know what to do at home when trying to do my homework” (in connection with a test in Swedish). She realises that she could have done better on the Swedish test if she had concentrated more on the tasks at hand during the lessons (Kolu 1999).

Students also note that the dossier tasks help them to understand themselves better as learners: “Many dossier tasks are such that they help me realise my own resources”; “A silent student can also present what she is able to do [with her language]”; “Self-criticism is difficult for me”; “Continuous self-reflection helps me to know myself better in other areas of my life, not just in language studies”. Producing texts of their own in their dossiers seems to encourage their communicative confidence: “I have a growing feeling that if I met a German speaker in the street who asked me something – well, I would be able to answer and say something!”

Many students become very motivated by their dossier work: “I am enthusiastic about my inspiration. I did most of my work last night. I could not go to sleep as my creative powers were so strong”; “We had a top idea: we will make a video of it. That will be good! .... It took us three hours to get the camera work done as we took some of the scenes several times ... but we had great fun. Doing the dialogues, I was glad to notice that I was able to find adjectives, accusatives and datives and what not in my mind.” Several students got emotionally attached

to their dossiers. Saying goodbye to them (at the end of the three-year experiment) filled the following student's mind with fond longing (Pajukanta 1998):

"Dear Diary, I don't know how to begin. There is much to say and so little time.... It is time to say goodbye soon. Time to leave behind my German dossier and diary ... I feel longing ... the fond feeling is increased when I read the old beautiful works (with so many errors) and notice how I made mistakes and what I had in mind at that time when I was 'little'. At times I feel like laughing, then again like crying... these works are so nice no matter how many times I was crying when I was doing them, but still. I would not want give up a single day. ... I have a great dossier! *Ich liebe meine Tasche! Ich werde mich nach meiner Tasche sehnen!*"

*(b) what – task awareness, of language and communication*

Students find that their dossier work helps them to gain a clearer understanding of their language learning task: "I can see what I can and cannot do"; "I notice my mistakes and correct them, so I know how things go"; "I can see what words I know". They also note that their dossier work helps them to develop a perspective on the progress of their language learning: "I notice my progress when I compare my current work with my previous work [in the dossier]".

The following comments show that the student has learned a great deal about her language learning and social responsibilities (Kolu 1999): "I have learned to introduce myself to the others. I learn by speaking, reviewing and writing... the 'teach yourself' tasks are very useful. Variety during the lessons makes learning interesting. My behaviour is affected by how others relate to me. I pay attention to other persons when speaking, listening and interacting." (lower secondary school 9<sup>th</sup> grader).

They notice that learning languages is a long-term task and requires hard work: "I realise how much work I need to do to achieve my aims"; "It is difficult when I study so many languages, so the past and perfect tenses get mixed up, now, was it *avoir*, no I think that is French...but surely, these things will clear up".

While the dossier work encourages a clear majority of the language students in our experiments, a number of them do not like to work on their own. This is particularly true of lower secondary school students at the beginning of their dossier work. Being accustomed to more teacher-directed work they resist their new role as responsible learners. They would like to pass their language studies with as little effort as possible: "I don't like dossier work at all, it takes too much time and trouble"; "It's stupid"; "At times I could burn my whole dossier, I'm so fed up with it!" These students seem to have a dependency orientation to their learning, expecting the teacher to carry the learning responsibility on their behalf. Their attitudes to dossier work seem to become more positive as they get older and gain a better understanding of the benefits of work for their own learning. Upper secondary school students are clearly more mature in this respect.

*(c) how – process awareness, of learning and social interaction*

Students seem gradually to develop a better understanding of their learning processes and themselves as learners: "As a student of German I have learned to express myself in written texts far better and in a bigger variety of ways. As an individual I have learned to work more independently and make decisions and choices of my own. I have gained more courage in the process. I have also developed in my co-operation with the others" (Pajukanta 1998).

They recognise the usefulness of teacher and peer comments and learning from their own mistakes: "I try to learn from my mistakes for the following dossier work"; "I can see how well I can assess my skills"; "Teacher corrections are helpful"; "It is useful to get comments from the classmates"; "I like more independent work and individual planning"; "The whole class learns to work better together".

They also increase their awareness of the learning processes: "I did not learn much English [during the group sessions], some new words. I learned, however, at least a bit about co-operation and paying attention to the classmate when we took turns in writing the story. I learned to look up words in the dictionary. I enjoyed the group work, but our group roles were a bit mixed up" (lower secondary school 8<sup>th</sup> grader, Kolu 1999).

Based on their previous learning histories, however, a number of lower secondary students believe that traditional teacher-directed and textbook-oriented work would be better: "Ordinary classroom work might be more efficient"; "I learn more from the textbook". They feel that they do not have so much to learn from their classmates during group work sessions. Consequently they see group work as less efficient. For them, teacher-directed work is safer and carries the authority of learning. It is therefore very important for the teacher to legitimise the idea of self-direction and justify autonomous learning through repeated discussion of what learning is about in the perspective of lifelong learning. This is thus a question of motivating them to assume responsibility for their learning. Furthermore, students need to be taught how to use the necessary tools for reflective and increasingly autonomous language learning. It seems advisable to teach student reflection in connection with concrete learning tasks, providing supportive tutoring and comments.

In the light of this discussion, the teacher has a significant function as a resource person for self-directed reflective learning. The participating teachers noticed that their role shifted towards becoming an observer, a tutor, a professional consultant of student learning and an organiser of learning opportunities (Kujansivu and Pajukanta 2000). The process required a great deal of flexibility, sensitivity to learner needs, and firmness about the agreed plans and deadlines. The work also required tolerance of uncertainty when facing unanticipated and surprising situations. For these reasons the teachers found that collegial support and continuous in-service education during the project were crucial for their professional development.

## **8. Preparing to undertake the ELP in a language class**

### **8.1. In-service teacher education in the Finnish ELP project**

As an essential part of our project (1998-2001), we arranged regular monthly seminars for the piloting teachers (22 seminars during the first two years, mostly full-time). The teachers' seminars constituted the core for the research and development work conducted in the project, with professional reading and practical work assignments between seminars. The seminars involved intensive reporting by the pilot teachers, stock-taking of national experience on portfolio assessment, guest presentations by invited international experts (Irma Huttunen, Günther Schneider, Rolf Schärer), and much sharing of personal experience and ideas in small collegial groups.

More specifically, in our seminars we focused on:

- studying/ discussing the Common Framework and the models developed elsewhere (including some US models);
- discussing the Finnish translations of the Framework (Viitekehys, Huttunen and Huttunen 1998) and the Teacher's Guide (Huttunen 1997);
- studying the theoretical backgrounds of authentic assessment/portfolio assessment (with several duplicated articles distributed to the teachers – a total of some 850 pages so far);
- sharing ideas and developing collegial trust and commitment;
- designing the site-based work to be conducted in schools;
- developing teacher diaries for the teachers' professional growth;
- developing the national evaluation scale (4-10) using criterion-referenced level descriptions;
- learning to use the Council of Europe's proficiency level descriptors through intensive workshops;
- preparing and monitoring the project action plan together;
- designing data collection for evaluation in schools/the whole project.

Decisions concerning the project implementation were discussed and negotiated together. For this purpose we established a project planning group consisting of the two co-ordinators (Viljo Kohonen and Ulla Pajukanta) and three teachers from the participating schools. The group made all the decisions regarding the programmes for seminar days. The seminars and joint planning work created a spirit of professional sharing and negotiated learning in the project. The seminar days included a central element of small group discussions which encouraged participating teachers towards mutual, interactive learning.

Our experiences indicate that language teachers should not be left alone with portfolio work. Sufficient support and in-service education are indispensable for teachers and schools. This support needs to be made explicit at the relevant levels of school administration: the national central administration (National Board of Education), the local educational authorities (Director of Education, Municipal Educational Offices) and the head teacher of the school. Regular progress updates should be provided to the whole school staff at teachers' meetings. Rather than being restricted to foreign languages alone, it is also desirable, as far as possible, to link the portfolio work with a school-wide approach to promoting socially responsible reflective learning as a public pedagogical orientation and commitment shared by the whole school.

## **8.2. Some suggestions for in-service teacher education**

Our experience shows that teachers benefit greatly from studying relevant professional literature, as suggested above. In addition to the essential literature, teachers should be given professional in-service training extending over a long period, including regular interactive workshops with project co-ordinators. It is also beneficial for the teachers to have another language teacher to work with, preferably in the same building, for easy-to-arrange professional discussions and reflection. A supportive collegial relationship is mutually very useful for sharing pedagogical ideas and experiences and reflecting on essential concepts and

progress in classwork (and also, if the need arises, for considering problems and difficulties together).

Teachers who have little experience in working on self-directed, autonomous language learning might find it useful to take time to clarify their views of learner autonomy, language, (intercultural) communication and evaluation. They may wish to consider how to promote learner autonomy by conscious pedagogical design. It might be expedient to reflect on questions such as the following:

- How do I understand language competence and intercultural learning as goals in foreign-language teaching?
- To what extent do I see myself as an intercultural learner?
- What are my personal views of foreign-language learning?
- How do I understand learner autonomy and the student's role?
- How do I see my role as teacher?
- How do I see the role of reflection in the process of learning to learn?
- How might I help my students to develop their metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness?
- How do I organise learner guidance in my classes?
- When and how should I give feedback to my students?

There will, in fact, be a host of questions arising during the process that need to be considered, identified and solved, one way or another. Solutions also need to be modified during the course of work so as to systematically allow more space for the students' own ideas, initiative and responsibility.

It is helpful if teachers agree to keep a personal diary of their professional development as language educators (at least for an extended period of time). If they work on their own pedagogical portfolio it is easier for them to review the possibilities and problems entailed in self-reflection, self-assessment, learner tutoring and collaboration. Through such experiences, they will become more competent (and also more confident) tutors of their students. This is a question of committing oneself to a long-term process of professional development as a language educator. This process could well be supported by collegial collaboration aiming at a school-wide approach to improving student learning (where possible). As such a process is likely to take several years, it is also essential to obtain the necessary support from relevant sources.

It is reassuring to realise that any major change in life is usually a complex process for human learners. It poses an element of threat to our need for emotional security, implying that part of our knowledge or skills are becoming obsolete and need to be replaced by new ones. The process of change often entails feelings of ambiguity and uncertainty, sometimes even of anxiety and being lost. To come to terms with such feelings, teachers need knowledge, emotional support and facilitation. Working from traditional teacher-directed instruction towards increasingly responsible learner autonomy is likely to involve feelings of fear for many students (as well as for a number of teachers). However, the process also entails

rewarding feelings of success and increased competence once some of the difficulties are overcome (Kohonen 2000a,c).

### **8.3 Transformative learning in teacher growth**

As noted repeatedly in this study, there is an integral connection between language learning, teaching, evaluation and the teacher's professional growth. The teaching profession is moving towards a new educational paradigm at the time of major social restructuring, coupled with an economic depression and reduced resources. All these circumstances pose a significant challenge to the teacher's professional competence (Kohonen 2000 a,c).

It is thus with good reason that Chittenden cautions that classroom practices will only mirror the most superficial characteristics of reform without the extensive professional development of teachers. Chittenden notes that the fundamental question is how to help teachers become better observers and more responsive to learners in their classes. He points out further: "The connection between professional development and assessment reform, especially at the primary level, is inseparable" (quoted in Niyogi 1995, p. 9). In my opinion the connection is inseparable in any educational context that aims to support responsible learner autonomy in language learning.

Education to enhance learner autonomy is part of a more general concept of teaching values in school. This is an ethical question of the respect for human dignity in the school community. Teaching values is an inherent part of any encounter between learners and the school staff. As Jackson et al. (1993) point out, schools do much more than pass on knowledge. They also affect the way learning is valued and sought after and thus lay the foundations of lifelong habits of thought and action.

Schools have the potential both for having a positive moral influence on those they serve, and for doing moral harm. It is possible that the unintentional outcomes of schooling, the ones that emerge in daily classroom life and are seldom planned in advance, are of greater moral significance than those that are intended and consciously sought. This is because many of the unintended influences are in operation all or most of the time, whereas the intended ones are more episodic and self-contained (Jackson et al., p. 44). Consequently, the teacher's awareness of and commitment to moral life in school is crucial for the quality of student learning.

The emerging concept of teacher professionalism emphasises teacher autonomy and the moral nature of teaching. Professionalising teaching involves a new collegial culture in school. It involves a commitment by teachers to their own professional learning and the learning of others (Kohonen and Kaikkonen 1996; Kohonen 1999; 2000a,b,c). Darling-Hammond (1996) notes that there is a "quiet revolution" in rethinking teacher development. Reforms need to focus on teachers as learners, encouraging them to enhance their professional competence, in collaboration with other teachers. She points out that regulations as such cannot transform schools. Transformation can be achieved only by the teacher, together with parents and administrators.

The teacher's professional growth and the possibilities of supporting the process through in-service teacher education have been discussed in recent literature with reference to transformative learning. Essential in this concept is that the teachers are emancipated from

their constraining beliefs and assumptions and create for themselves new pedagogical solutions. The change is an experiential process that integrates the cognitive, social and emotional aspects of professional learning. The process is community-based and aims for a new culture of collegial sharing and caring. The development of the collegial community creates more space for individual growth. There is thus a reciprocal relationship between community development and the growth of its individual members.

Transformative learning includes the following properties (Cranton 1996; Darling-Hammond 1998; Askew & Carnell 1998; Kohonen 2000b,c):

1. Realising the significance of professional interaction for growth.
2. Developing an open, critical stance to professional work and seeing oneself as a continuous learner.
3. Developing a reflective attitude as a basic habit, involving reflection on educational practices and their philosophical underpinnings.
4. Developing new self-understanding in concrete situations.
5. Reflecting on critical events or incidents in earlier life and learning from personal insights.
6. Conscious risk-taking: acting in new ways in classes and in the work community.
7. Ambiguity tolerance: learning to live with uncertainty concerning the decisions to be made.

The approach emphasises the teacher's self-understanding as an educator and the importance of pedagogical reflection based on concrete situations with students. There is an important interplay between teacher growth and curriculum development. The reflective orientation can lead to a new kind of "pedagogical literacy" in classroom situations. A teacher who has become sensitised to his or her own growth is likely to be in a better position to perceive and support growth processes in her students and colleagues as well. The procedures that we developed in the Finnish ELP project are thus in accordance with transformative learning for professional growth.

Teachers need to address the basic questions of the purpose of education and what it means, for them, to be teachers in today's school. In so doing they develop a critical understanding of their profession that enables them to take an active charge of developing it together, for the benefit of student learning. Transformative professional learning thus entails teachers moving from the role of being consumers of expert knowledge and implementors of curricula towards the professional stance.

Linda Darling-Hammond (1998) emphasises the importance of learning from actual, concrete experiences with students in classes. Teachers learn by observing and listening to their students carefully and looking at their work thoughtfully. This helps them to understand what students believe about themselves, what they care about, and what tasks are likely to give them enough challenge and success to sustain motivation. She points out that teachers learn best by studying, doing and reflecting on their pedagogical experiences in collaboration with other teachers. They learn by looking closely at students and their work, and by sharing what they see. Teacher learning therefore needs to be linked with actual teaching and supported by

ongoing theory-building. In-service teacher education aimed at transformative learning attempts to combine the elements of theory, practice, reflection and collaborative inquiry.

## **9. Conclusion**

Based on our findings, I wish to propose that the pedagogical dossier work can constitute a major part of the “missing link” between the goals of socially responsible learner autonomy and the instructional ways of fostering it in foreign-language education. For this purpose I suggest making the distinction between the learning dossier and the reporting dossier. This distinction is in line with the pedagogical and reporting functions of the ELP and clarifies the role of the dossier as a pedagogical learning device.

For reflective language learning to become a habit for students, it is necessary to use the ELP frequently in language learning, integrating ELP work with language curricula. The ELP should not be seen as “extra” work to be done occasionally; it should be an integral part of foreign-language teaching. The learning dossier is a vital concept for encouraging the regular use of the dossier in language classes. It provides important ways of supporting ongoing reflective learning and self-assessment of language skills in daily language learning. Emphasising the dossier as a learning tool in the first place promotes the pedagogical function of the ELP.

We have used the dossier as a reporting device by helping students to choose some of their portfolio works for grading purposes towards the end of the course/unit (or term). We are currently making plans for our pilot students to put together their language portfolios in Spring 2001 when the three-year experiment comes to an end. We will help them compile their ELPs so that the portfolios will comprise the updated Language Passport, Language Biography and Dossier sections to report their foreign-language learning outcomes, including actual work samples in their (reporting) dossiers.

The ELP, like any major pedagogical innovation, will take time and require commitment. The changes should not be rushed through in the interest of efficient management. Students, teachers and schools need to take time to understand what the ELP philosophy is about and how it can be practised in language classes. Creating pressures without sufficient support is likely to lead only to loss of interest and withdrawal. While the change seems natural and relatively easy for a majority of the language students, some find it difficult to accept. Consequently, student training, tutoring, guidance and feedback are essential for the progress of negotiated learning and self-assessment of language and learning skills. The change from teacher-directed learning to socially responsible self-directed learning needs to be supported and facilitated with concrete learning tools.

It seems advisable to start the dossier work with the students’ personal learning beliefs and assumptions, initially teaching them a basic reflective orientation to language learning. Using brief probing questions, we have guided the students to reflect on themselves as (language) learners. Students have learned to consider their own roles as learners and their expectations towards language, communication and language learning. In this way we have helped them become more reflective and skilled language learners. We have found that this autobiographical, reflective approach is helpful before moving on to the use of checklists and self-assessment grids for the assessment of language skills. In our holistic approach, we have

thus attempted to provide a kind of “soft landing” to the use of the criterion-referenced linguistic self-assessment.

Our findings underscore the importance of teacher’s professional development for a competent pedagogical tutoring of portfolio-oriented foreign-language learning. Language teachers have a crucial role in how their students experience their foreign-language learning. We suggest that it is mandatory for the teachers to have enough time and resources for professional preparation before they start serious ELP work with their students. The portfolio-oriented work also needs a great deal of long-term support, both material and professional. Asking language teachers to undertake the work without adequate professional preparation may lead to disappointment and frustration. A major professional re-orientation is not a matter of occasional reading, lectures or workshops; our experience suggests a sustained support extending over several years.

The university-school partnership that we have developed in our Finnish curriculum development projects is a good example of the kind of support that has been helpful in our context (Kohonen and Kaikkonen 1996; Kohonen 2000c). We have been able to develop a number of ways for facilitating the processes of professional growth towards transformative professional learning. The rich personal and collegial reflections during the ELP project have created an atmosphere of community and collegial trust that are necessary for open professional dialogue and mutual learning. In a supportive environment, teachers can feel safe to explore their professional images, beliefs and assumptions and take the risks of questioning and modifying these where they consider it possible and appropriate.



## **Part Two**

### **The European Language Portfolio as an instrument for documenting learning experiences- implementing the pedagogical function or how hard can we make the soft pages?**

**Presentation at the 4th European Portfolio Seminar  
Enschede, The Netherlands on 22-25 April 1999 by Gerard Westhoff**

#### **1. Prologue**

About ten years ago, I attended an international conference in France for the first time in many years. During working sessions interpretation was obviously provided, but there were many breaks and even more social events. For some reason, on each occasion I happened to be the lucky one, honoured to be the table companion of an important French official. My French was not quite up to standard and in spite of courteous statements that my French, albeit my third foreign language, was infinitely better than their Dutch or any other foreign language they might call their first language, I felt uneasy and, once home, I decided to do something to improve my French.

On the basis of my expertise in foreign-language acquisition I decided that I would need a lot of i+1 input and should organise some “pushed output”, preferably combined with corrective feedback. I asked colleagues for suggestions and after some attempts I found out that I could read Regine le Forge’s “La bicyclette bleue” with an effort, but without ‘losing the thread’. Le Forge’s book is a relatively easy to read, unpretentious, entertaining, cleverly written hybrid of a doctor’s novel, a Du Maurier and “Gone with the Wind”, (with which it has so many similarities that the author was sued for plagiarism). In three volumes and 1400 pages it covers France in the second world war. After that I took two volumes of Pagnol’s memories: “La gloire de mon Père” and “Le château de ma mère”, another 500 pages that, though not as trivial as Le Forge, would not have yielded me many credits from my former French teacher at school who would have preferred me to read Camus, Proust or Yourcenar.

Yet, French friends, whom I visited two years later, expressed their surprise as regards my progress in communicative competence. I noticed myself that, on this occasion, I was learning more from my ever-cumbersome conversations with them than I had done before. After two or three days of being forced to express myself in French I could participate in discussions, which I had not been able to at those terrible, frustrating dinner parties two years before.

I seemed to have reached a higher level of foreign-language competence but I had no other proof of it than my own impression and that of my friends. Yet the experience I had organised for myself had apparently been fruitful and I thought it would most probably also be useful for other people in or outside school. This brought me to two puzzling questions. Firstly, how can learners who are not experts in foreign-language acquisition be enabled to choose such effective learning experiences, and secondly, how do we make sure that they get the credit for it?

And then... somebody invented the ELP.

## 2. Introduction: Two functions of portfolios

According to the definitions in European documents, “a language portfolio is a document (...) in which individual learners (...) can assemble over a period of time, and display in a systematic way, a record of their qualifications, achievements and experiences in language learning, together with samples of work they have themselves produced” (Trim, 1997, p.3). This definition is in accordance with much of what we find in the international literature. (Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991), often quoted in relation to portfolio-use by younger learners, define a portfolio as “a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the students’ efforts, progress, and achievement in one or more areas. The collection must include student participation in selecting contents, the criteria for selection, for judging merit, and evidence of student self-reflection.” (p. 60).

However, from the different approaches we recognise in the implementation and in the different requirements and accents in identifying problems to be solved, we see that this simple definition does not mean quite the same to everybody. It depends on whether a portfolio is primarily product-oriented (in terms of the ELP “the reporting function”) or process-oriented (in ELP terms “the pedagogical function”). For some, a portfolio is primarily a tool that can help us to describe learning achievements that cannot easily be measured with the usual instruments. For others, portfolios can provide us with a device to elicit and direct learning processes that cannot be evoked by the usual tools such as closed assignments. In this pedagogical function two sub-functions can be distinguished: portfolios as instruments to elicit learning activities in the cognitive domain (experiences that can be assumed to have contributed to foreign-language acquisition, such as visits abroad, reading foreign literature) and the metacognitive function (activities that are thought to benefit learning to learn and learner autonomy, such as self-observation and reflection on experience). This difference is reflected in a different emphasis that is put on a number of aspects in the implementation. I summarise them in the table below.

*Table 1: Two functions of portfolios*

Product-oriented	Process-oriented
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reporting</li> <li>▪ Assessment tool</li> <li>▪ Qualifying</li> <li>▪ Certification</li> <li>▪ Conclusive force</li> <li>▪ “Hard” pages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Pedagogical</li> <li>▪ Learning tool</li> <li>▪ Motivating</li> <li>▪ Experiences</li> <li>▪ Potential learning opportunity</li> <li>▪ “Soft” pages</li> </ul>

It is easy to understand that experts who view portfolios primarily as assessment tools emphasise the importance of transparency, the quality and verifiability of the documentation, whereas others stress the need for formats, hints, instructions, directions and ideas that can

direct the process, by structuring the learners' activities and reflections. In many cases, including the ELP, an attempt is made to combine both. In some cases this combination is even seen as the added value of the instrument. For example, Paulson et al. (1991) state that portfolios "are not just instruction or just assessment but rather, both. Together, instruction and assessment give more than either gives separately." (p. 61). In the following I hope to show that both types in fact share the same need for catalogues of activities with a high learning potential<sup>1</sup> and catalogues with forms and formats for their documentation.

### **3. Reporting and pedagogical functions in ELP documents**

Assessment tool or learning tool? The documents underlying the European portfolio project are not very clear with respect to this dilemma. In its origins the project clearly emerges from needs related to assessment and certification. These origins lie in the Rüschlikon Symposium. This Symposium dealt with the lack of transparent terms for the information of clients and colleagues. For this purpose a "common framework" had to be developed, necessary for the description of an international set of parameters and categories describing language proficiency. In its report, "*Transparency and coherence in language learning in Europe: objectives, evaluation, certification*", the Symposium also recommended that, once the Framework had been elaborated, a document should be devised allowing individuals who so desire to maintain a record of language learning experiences (formal and informal) "*which would provide positive evidence of achievement* [my italics] in a manner that is transparent across national boundaries."

But in its elaboration, this clear, although possibly unconscious, choice became less unambiguous. In the Rüschlikon report it is also argued that the portfolio "would enhance and sustain motivation in language learning in a lifelong perspective *and help learners to plan, manage and assess their learning*". This means that the portfolio should also help them to organise their own learning activities and develop their ability to do so independently. The portfolio should not only make the learners' "level of mastery" of foreign languages transparent, it should also benefit the achievement of goals such as "learning to learn" and "learner autonomy". In other words, it should provide both an assessment tool and a learning tool in the metacognitive domain. Accordingly, the Proposals for Development, published by the Secretariat of the Education Committee, explicitly state that:

"The portfolios aim to fulfil *the double function* [my italics] of:

- I. helping learners to reflect on their significant cultural and linguistic experiences on an ongoing basis (pedagogical function);
- II. reporting clearly (...) learners' qualifications and other relevant experiences at particular points in their learning or career (reporting/information function)."

(Secretariat, 1997, p.2).

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<sup>1</sup> It is astonishing and maybe significant that there seems to be no word in English to indicate the property that someone will probably learn much from having a certain experience or performing a certain activity. In this paper I have chosen "with a high learning potential" or "instructive", although, to my taste, the latter word is too teacher-centred. But there seemed to be no good alternatives. The word "illuminative" is too restricted to having insights and does not include learning a skill, for example, by practising. Informative, similarly, is too restricted to getting to know new facts. Valuable is far too general and can refer to many other aspects besides learning. Perhaps we have to invent new words. What about learnative/learnativity, learnsome/learnsomeness or learningful/learningfulness?

This double function is explicitly repeated on p. 18: “*The portfolio has both a learning and a reporting function*”. However, the “Proposals” are neither very clear nor completely consistent over the different contributions in implementing this double function:

- On page 4, nine ways in which the ELP can help to achieve the portfolio's aims are summed up. Only one deals with the learning function and an additional one with the motivational possibilities. The others are about assessment. However, in the next question about what the ELP should contain there are suggestions for all three functions to be present in the third part of the portfolio (Trim, 1997).
- On page 8 several activities are suggested for the Dossier part of the ELP in the domain of metacognition. But in the same document, in the description of the three parts of which an ELP should consist (Dobson, 1997, p. 19), very little about the metacognitive learning function can be found. The possibilities in the cognitive domain are absent here.
- In Trim (1997, p. 4), part 3 of the portfolio may include results of self-observation or reflection on experience and Dobson (1997, p. 6) puts as the key question whether gathering information from part three will help “to enhance the learning process”. But the suggestions for the content refer almost exclusively to supporting evidence and illustrations for the other two sections. The same is true for the proposed ELP-content for young learners (Debyser, 1997, p. 31) and for junior learners (Christ, 1997, pp. 41 and 43).
- In Schneider & North (1997, p. 76), the pedagogical function is explicitly mentioned as a desideratum for future portfolios. But in spite of the formulation “like in this draft”, I could not find clues as to how to implement this function in the portfolio as it is presented in the “Proposals”. The prototype mainly elaborates the “hard” aspect of certification. In this proposal, too, the “Dossier” is described as a box full of illustrations.
- Schärer (1997, p. 90) also explicitly mentions the pedagogical function. But here too there are no clues regarding implementation. Schärer is the only one in the document who explicitly takes a position about how “hard” this pedagogical side should be. Not very hard. To be “hard” is apparently an exclusive property of the reporting part: “*In contrast to the flexible 'pedagogic' part* [my italics] of the Portfolio common forms and codes are needed to report in a transnationally comprehensible way. There needs to be certainty that entries are valid, particularly in high-stake situations.”(p. 90).

This lack of clarity is not exceptional. It is even to be found in Paulson et al. (1991), the champions of the double function. According to the title of their publication, they promise to give us eight guidelines that “will help educators encourage self-directed learning”. On closer examination, only one of them directly refers to the learning function (a portfolio should contain proof of self-reflection) and one indirectly (portfolios should contain the rationale for activities that are reported on). Most of the others concern the reporting function and its credibility such as proof of growth and relation of reported outcomes to the goals of the instruction programme.

What many formulations have in common is a terminology that does not reflect a very high degree of appreciation or acknowledgement. The pedagogical part is in the “soft pages”, “flexible”, etc. This may be the reason why there are so few suggestions as to how to make the pedagogical part as “hard” as possible. Yet, in my view, it is a very important issue. As I will now attempt to argue in the following section, an ELP without a well-elaborated and implemented pedagogical part will have little added value and will shrink to a folder with

diplomas. I believe that the success and acceptance of the pedagogical function is to a great extent dependent on how hard we are able to make its reporting function.

#### **4. Prerequisites for fulfilling the pedagogical function**

If we wish the ELP to be accepted as providing added value and worth putting energy into, it must meet the requirements of three groups of users: the learners (the “supply side”, so to speak), the “demand side” in the form of employers and others (for example, training courses, schools, colleges, universities, etc.) and the “organisers”, the curriculum developers. For the reporting function this is not a big problem. All sorts of descriptive documents already exist. The only problem is to make them fit into a common framework, which is provided by the Common European Framework (CEF). It will, however, be quite an effort to calibrate all the existing reporting systems so that they can be brought into line with that common framework.

As far as the pedagogical function is concerned, the problem is more fundamental. In the documents it is repeatedly stated that the ELP should give learners the opportunity to show that they have taken part in activities that can be expected to enhance learning. The very fact that this aim had to be formulated shows that there are apparently such activities which are not already covered by the usual educational programmes. The reason is probably that there are experiences with substantial instructive power whose effects cannot be easily demonstrated by common instruments of measurement. If we try to “save” them by incorporating them into a portfolio, the problem is how to make them convincing. For that purpose it is important to know for each of the three groups of users which activities are instructive and which characteristics in these activities are responsible for the effect. The learners want to know, because they wish to make calculated choices, the demand side wants to know approximately what can be expected as an effect, and the curriculum developers need some indication as to the content, properties and conditions of what they have to prepare and organise. In other words: all three groups need a catalogue of learning activities, based on learning theory, to help the developers to create, the learners to choose and the suppliers “to believe”.

Before the “demand side” is willing to believe, another requirement has to be met. The employer will not only want to be convinced that the described activity or experience is very instructive, he will also want some certainty with respect to *the extent* to which the said experience has occurred. In order to meet this requirement a repertoire of documentation forms and formats will have to be developed. This is not only important for the “demand side”. The learner and the curriculum developer also share an interest in that the documentation of the learning experiences is convincing and transparent both to the supplier (the learners) and to the demand side (employers, other training courses). For a learner it is not very motivating to perform an activity if it is not certain that future potential employers will be impressed by it. Since it seems to be impossible to show the outcomes in the usual way, he has an interest in forms or formats for documentation that will be convincing to the demand side. The curriculum developer will know that the activities he designs will not be very popular if they do not result in convincing credits.

*Table 2: Questions for the parties involved*

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### **“The demand side”**

- What can I expect the learners to have learned?
- How do I know that they really have done it?

### **The learners**

- What and how much do I learn from the suggested activity, compared to the time invested?
- How do I convince the demand side:
  - that it was valuable?
  - that I really have done it?

### **The curriculum developers**

How do I describe experiences in such a way that learners:

- See that they are valuable?
- Understand how to perform them?
- Can document the crucial elements convincingly?

*Table 3: Estimated interest in a documentation repertoire and a repertoire of useful and powerful learning experiences*

	<b>Demand side</b>	<b>Learner</b>	<b>Curriculum developer</b>
<b>Repertoire of useful and powerful experiences</b>	X	xx	xxx
<b>Documentation répertoire</b>	Xxx	xx	x

## **5. The roots of portfolios as learning tools for cognitive objectives**

One of the potential added values of portfolios lies in the fact that they can fill a gap that was caused by the trend in curriculum development to describe curricula in terms of clear instructional objectives. In its most extreme form the requirements for such objectives were formulated by Mager (1962). According to Mager, educational objectives had to be defined in terms of observable behaviour. The subject of the behaviour to be assessed had to be clearly indicated and the minimal acceptable performance had to be specified in measurable terms. The movement was a reaction to the prevailing vagueness in the curricula and the broadly perceived desirability of making those responsible for the organisation of educational programmes accountable. The application of Mager's requirements made it easier to judge

these programmes more fairly, objectively and verifiably. This was a particular advantage for educational authorities, responsible for the quality of educational programmes and educational institutions, funded with public finances. As a consequence Mager's ideas had much influence on curriculum development.

The disadvantage was that learning activities that could not easily be linked to clear and predictable outcomes became less popular, indeed, almost extinct. However, the awareness that there are many instructive and sometimes even irreplaceable experiences kept educational scientists looking for a means to incorporate them into the official curricula. One of them was Elliott Eisner who defined two other types of educational objective and described them in two influential publications (Eisner, 1969; Eisner, 1972). According to Eisner there are educational objectives that are, distinct from Mager's homogeneous "instructional objectives", not *per se* homogeneous. He distinguished two types. Firstly there is a type of learning situation:

"in which meanings become personalised and in which children produce products, both theoretical and qualitative, that are as diverse as themselves. Consequently the evaluative task in this situation is not one of applying a common standard to the products produced but one of reflecting upon what has been produced in order to reveal its uniqueness and significance."

Eisner named such outcomes "expressive objectives". In order to achieve them, "educational encounters" have to be organised.

A few years later Eisner introduced a third type of objective, which is a hybrid of instructional and expressive objectives. Because he could not find a satisfactory name, he labelled this category "type III objectives". With instructional objectives they had in common that it was relatively easy to decide whether the product met the requirements set out beforehand. They share with expressive objectives the characteristic that the number of correct outcomes was in principle indefinite. In this case the objective was not formulated in terms of educational encounters, but in open assignments, such as designing a building that meets given requirements.

*Table 4: Three types of objective*

<b>1) Instructional objectives (Mager)</b>
a) Observable behaviour
b) Specified, under which conditions
c) Minimal performance in measurable terms
<b>2) Expressive objectives (Eisner)</b>
d) Outcomes not uniform
e) All outcomes acceptable
f) To be specified in “educational encounters”
<b>3) Type III objectives (Eisner)</b>
g) Exact requirements to be met
h) Indefinite number of acceptable outcomes
i) Specified in “open assignments”

With expressive objectives, only the experience is given. With type III, the assignment is open and has an indefinite number of different outcomes. Both characteristics make them unfit for the regular way of organising and assessing learning processes. Yet it is clear that leaving these objectives out of the curriculum would weaken its instructive power, perhaps even substantially. Incorporating them in a portfolio can create an opportunity to give them an official and acknowledged status in the curricula. If that is our hidden agenda, it is also very clear that the need for a convincing, preferably theory-based and empirically confirmed catalogue of powerful encounters and assignments is even stronger, because we will have to convince not only the “demand side”, but also the “supply side” financiers and their agents: the educational authorities.

## **6. Instructive experiences in foreign-language acquisition**

The next question is of course, how far it is justified to expect expressive and type III objectives to be especially important and useful in the field of foreign-language education? Why shouldn't we first experiment a little in the field of social science, religion and the like? Of course I do not pretend to have found the complete answer. What I will try to do is to sketch a conceptual framework from which we can start to look for it. In order to find an answer it seems promising to take a closer look at what is known about activities that apparently facilitate the process of foreign-language acquisition. I will summarise the main points very briefly.

### **6.1 Input**

Although very few of Krashen's ideas could be confirmed empirically and although there have been long and fierce debates regarding this issue, there seems to be a broad consensus in the recent literature that being exposed to foreign-language input is a crucial prerequisite for

foreign-language acquisition (Krashen, 1985). Without input, no output. Although it has turned out to be impossible to operationalise the famous  $i + 1$  level, few seriously doubt that being opposed to input is more effective if its level of difficulty is not too far above the learner's foreign-language knowledge. Other factors frequently found in literature are attractiveness, functionality in terms of containing information the learner would like to know and realism (the sort of language utterances that the learner is likely to encounter later in real-life situations).

## 6.2 Content-oriented processing

There also seems to be little doubt that being exposed to input is only effective if the input is processed (or in more practical terms, if the learner has tried to understand its meaning). We do not know, however, what learners learn from this content-oriented processing. There are indications that the effect of processing the same input in terms of acquired knowledge differs from one learner to the other. We do not seem to have much influence on that. So it is an illusion that a closed curriculum can direct this process in such a way that it leads to prescribed outcomes. This does not seem to be a disadvantage. Learners do not need the same knowledge for the same performance. Groot, for example, reports the results of some experimental investigations into the relationship between coverage and text comprehension. He postulates that, besides the knowledge of the 2500 most frequent words, knowledge of *any* [my italics] 5000 words, selected by the individual reader on the basis of a combination of criteria such as frequency and personal interest, will yield such a dense coverage of general L2 texts, that they can be understood without a problem (Groot, 1994a; Groot, 1994b).

## 6.3 Form-oriented processing

There is far less agreement about the role of grammar or so-called "formal instruction". Yet a growing support for the *weak interface hypothesis* (Ellis, 1990) seems to be emerging. This hypothesis tries to explain the paradox that formal instruction, combined with a great deal of content-oriented input processing, leads to better results than input processing alone, but that taught grammar rules are not used in producing output. The weak interface hypothesis claims that part of the learner output is rule-directed, but that we do not know the rules. Learners form hypotheses about form aspects of the language by processing input. Formal instruction works indirectly by making them aware of morphological form aspects. That leads to both form- and content-oriented processing. As in the case of vocabulary, we know very little about these hypotheses, not even whether they are the same for all learners or whether they occur in all stages of acquisition. For the time being we will probably have to be content with the assumption that our learners apparently form them, as long as we stimulate them to do so, in one way or another.

## 6.4 (Pushed) output

Recently there has been support for the facilitating and stimulating role of output production. Several arguments are given in its favour. It is assumed to enhance fluency, it makes language learners conscious of their deficits and through that increases their motivation to learn. According to this output hypothesis (Swain, 1995; Swain & Lapkin, 1995), pushed output contributes to form-orientation and gives the teacher or the communication partner the opportunity to give corrective feedback (for an overview of its effect see Spada, 1997). In some cases this is even assumed to be the only possibility of providing the learner with

“negative evidence” about the formal correctness of certain utterances (like when to use *vous* or *tu* for an anglophone learner). Experiments seem to confirm this claim (Nobuyoshi & Ellis, 1993; Swain & Lapkin, 1995).

Two varieties can be distinguished. Part of our language utterances consists of unanalysed combinations (chunks) that are perceived as a whole. Their use is mainly formulaic speech. Pushed output increases the learner's ability to use these chunks in different situations and combinations. The other variety is somewhat misleadingly labelled “creative speech”. misleading because it has little to do with poems or creative writing. The term is used for rule-guided production. Although there is not much reason to assume that a large part of our spontaneous speech production is consciously rule-guided, let alone that we would know these rules, practising with this variety is one of the main activities of most closed curricula.

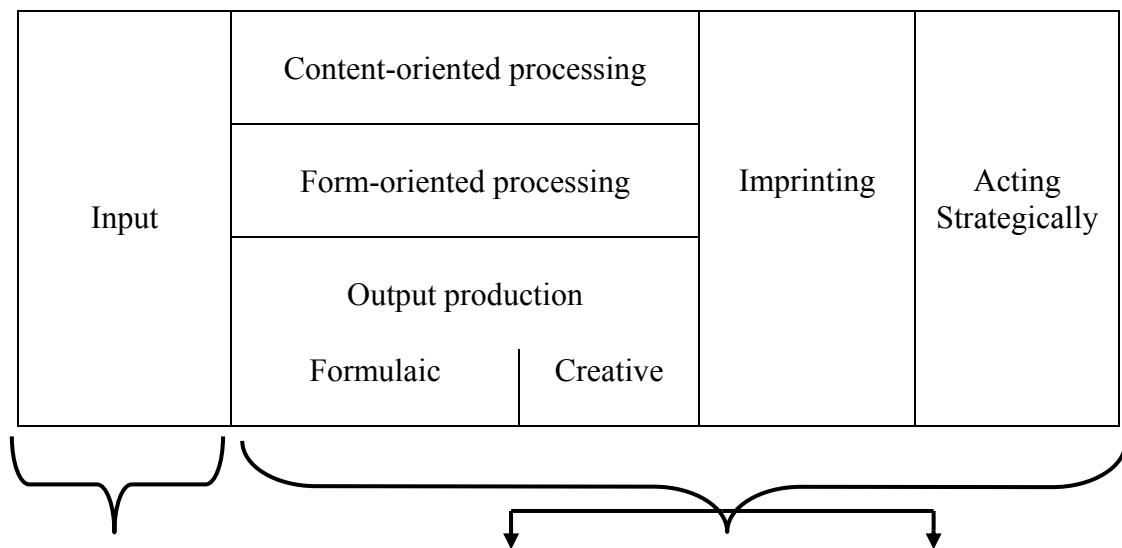
## **6.5 Imprinting**

Input processing results in storing part of the processed content in the long-term memory. Performing mnemonics can enhance the availability of this knowledge when needed. Since the Ancient Greeks, much literature has appeared on this issue and some of these strategies are very well known, such as repeating, associating, categorising, etc.

## **6.6 Acting strategically**

Generally speaking, for foreign-language acquisition there is only limited time available. That means that there will always remain greater or lesser gaps in our knowledge. For that reason it is useful and practical to develop a repertoire of strategies to compensate for deficiencies. We can compensate for deficiencies in receptive skills with reading and listening strategies, such as inferring unknown elements, using prior knowledge, etc. To make up for deficiencies in productive skills we can use communication skills such as negotiating meaning, avoiding, description, fillers, and the like.

*Diagram: Components of foreign-language acquisition*



Content	Activity	Assignments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <math>i + 1</math></li> <li>• attractive</li> <li>• realistic</li> <li>• functional</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• powerful</li> <li>• efficient</li> <li>• functional</li> <li>• realistic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• valid</li> <li>• clear</li> <li>• suitable</li> <li>• feasible</li> </ul>

## 7. Implications for portfolios

As I explained before, Eisner formulated his two types of objectives for those learning processes that have outcomes which cannot be predicted and which are most probably different for each learner. As was evident from the short review of aspects of foreign-language acquisition, summarised before, the process of learning a foreign language has many characteristics of Eisner's expressive and type III objectives. This has two implications. Firstly, they cannot be formulated in terms of closed curricula and instructional objectives as regular educational programmes try to do. Secondly, portfolios can contribute substantially to making foreign-language acquisition more effective on condition that we:

- take the pedagogical function very seriously,
- consider the experiences-to-be-documented as essential and important elements of the educational process, and
- formulate them carefully, so that their instructive value is clear and convincing to all involved.

This is not what has happened until now. The “pedagogical function” is indicated in the documents as the “soft pages” (The European Language Portfolio – Proposals for development. Language learning for European citizenship 1997). That does not sound very serious. It will be our challenge to make these soft pages as hard as possible, both in descriptions of “powerful learning experiences” with precise and concrete criteria they have

to meet in order to have the assumed instructive value and in terms of a repertoire of documentation forms that will have conclusive power for the demand side.

It is true that we cannot be very strict in our desiderata for the outcomes, but we can try to be very “hard” in formulating the required characteristics of the experiences. The stricter we are in this respect, the greater the effect and acceptance. In this paper I can only give a few examples. If you agree with me, elaborating them will have to be one of the aims of our project.

## 8. Cognitive learning activities

Precisely because  $i+1$  cannot be operationalised, it is very difficult to incorporate something like “rich input processing” in a closed curriculum. Not only will the appropriateness of a certain piece of language in terms of  $i+1$ , attractiveness, functionality and realism be different for every learner, but also the learning product of processing the same input will differ from one learner to the other. Thinking in terms of instructional objectives therefore easily leads to leaving such activities out of the curriculum. A portfolio can help us to save this very useful activity, because it enables us to concentrate on the experiences and their potential learning effect instead of on the outcome. For we know the properties that give it its learning power ( $i+1$ , realistic, functional and the like). As a consequence, learners can be asked to document in their portfolios that their experiences had these properties, in terms of quality and quantity. For example:

- Document that you have been in situations in which you were exposed to the foreign language.
- Document why you think that the language you were exposed to was about  $i + 1$ .
- Why do you think it was realistic?
- How much was it?
- What gives you reason to think that you learned something?

Such an assignment will not only make it possible to estimate the instructive value of the experience, but also direct the learning process in such a way that the learner will be stimulated to look for the most instructive settings without explicit instructions.

I argued that the curriculum developer or the teacher has very little influence on what is actually acquired by input processing. This means that it does not matter very much what input is processed, provided it meets the criteria mentioned before. What counts is that the learner is stimulated to process the content. Types of assignments that do so can be incorporated in portfolios. For example, the instruction to keep a diary for vocabulary, idioms and expressions (ten words, one idiom, one expression per day) during a stay abroad, will suffice and can be very easily documented in the form of “my own lifelong vocabulary book”.

What was said about content-oriented processing is, *mutatis mutandis*, true for form-oriented processing. The activity is open and the outcome up to the learner. It is crucial that the learner gets an assignment that encourages him to be aware of morphological form aspects. Similar to the open-content orientation assignment, a portfolio could “enhance learning” by requesting during a stay abroad one morphological form rule every day from the language the learner is

exposed to (such as: with *he*, *she*, *it*, a verb usually ends in an -s) and to document it in the portfolio under the heading “my own lifelong grammar book”.

For organising output production in general, portfolios can easily be used to stimulate the learner by asking him to document some form of communication, orally and in writing, with someone in the target language. The instructive value of this activity can be further increased by asking learners to document additionally how they organised feedback on their products and what they learned from their own attempts and from the feedback they received.

It is clear that in almost all these cases keeping a learning diary is one of the main tools. It is also clear that this activity can greatly improve the instructive value when it is carefully structured by the teacher or curriculum developer, based on their insight of how to elicit learning processes. For a learner and teacher or curriculum developer a catalogue of possibilities to structure this type of documentation in terms of activities with a strong learning effect, connected to suitable documentation forms would be very helpful, for the teacher to be able to give hints and to assess the effectiveness of student plans and for learners to be able to make calculated choices or to experiment with different possibilities in order to build up a personal repertoire. So far, such a catalogue has been lacking in our prototypes. It is my conviction that without this aspect, the contribution of the ELP to its pedagogical aim is only a small part of what it could be.

*Table 5: Examples of possible “instructive” experiences in the cognitive domain*

<p><b>Exposure to input</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ i+1?</li> <li>▪ Realistic?</li> <li>▪ Quantity?</li> <li>▪ How do you know what you learned?</li> </ul> <p><b>Content-oriented input processing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Personal lifelong vocabulary book</li> </ul> <p><b>Form-oriented input processing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Personal lifelong grammar book</li> </ul> <p><b>Output production</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How much?</li> <li>▪ How did you organise feedback?</li> </ul>
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## 9. Metacognitive learning experiences

What has been said about the cognitive learning experiences is probably even truer for metacognitive learning experiences. I think that imprinting in itself is not the first thing to consider in looking for means to take advantage of a portfolio. But for learning to learn this issue has possibilities. From training studies in strategy learning we know that reflection is a powerful learning activity. There are few subjects about which so many strategies have been

described in literature as imprinting. These lists are very well-suited to practising learning to learn. Students can be asked to try the proposed strategies out and reflect on the results. In various publications portfolios are presented as especially good tools for training metacognitive skills in general and for structuring reflection in particular (for an overview see, for example, Korthagen & Wubbels (1995) and Wade & Yarbourgh (1996). Again, this structuring is not given in the phenomenon itself. It has to be built in carefully. But it seems to be as good as the only substantial contribution to learning to learn that a portfolio can make. What was said about imprinting in particular is also true for strategy use in general. An important issue to be worked out for the ELP will be to develop examples of how this structuring reflection can most effectively be achieved. One of the few examples is the five questions that we use to structure reflection in teacher education.

*Table 6: Five questions for structuring reflection*

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What did you want to learn (how)?</li> <li>2. Did you succeed?</li> <li>3. How do you know?</li> <li>4. Can you explain the result?</li> <li>5. What do you learn from answering the previous questions?</li> </ol> |
|---|

(Westhoff, 1993)

All questions can be answered regardless of whether the outcome was positive or negative. In both cases answering is an illuminating experience. When they know in advance that they will have to answer them, the questions will have a “steering” effect. Question one stimulates learners to plan in a goal-oriented way, question three stimulates them to organise their own feedback. Through answering again and again, question four learners build up a theory about their own learning. The last question leads to resolutions that can serve as answers to the first question the next time. Again the learners' diary will probably have to play a role. That makes this diary one of the crucial elements of the ELP. As far as I know, not much work has been produced on this subject so far.

## 10. Documentation forms with conclusive power

It is clear that there are many clues in the proposals so far of *what* should or could be reported in the portfolios. However, very little exists about what is probably one of the critical factors for success and, most of all, acceptance: how do we give the reports an element of conclusive force? Yet the demand side will not only want to be convinced that, in principle, the documented experiences have the instructive value that they should have. They will also want to make sure that they take place in the most effective way. Let us assume that living in a country where the target language is the medium of communication for three months is a useful and powerful learning experience. How do you make it plausible (let alone how do you prove) that you were there all the time. Let us also assume that the effective ingredient of this experience is to be forced to use the foreign language exclusively all the time. How do you give an accurate impression of the degree to which your stay has met this criterion? It makes a big difference whether you were all alone in a native family, lived in a youth hostel with

people from your own country, or in a dorm with an international student population or were lying on the beach with your girl/boyfriend from home all the time. How do you “document” that?

I am a specialist in didactics. The organisation of learning operations is my field. I am not an expert in the domain of documenting learning experiences. That may be an explanation for my ignorance. In that case I am too pessimistic. But I doubt whether learners and employers even have a common language or terminology that would enable them to answer or understand very general basic questions such as:

- what have you done?
- for what reason?
- what you have learned by doing this activity?

Let alone the much more difficult (and important) ones such as what did that experience teach you about:

- the way you learn a foreign language, and
- how your way of learning may be made more effective.

I had a quick scan done in the Eric database and not very much (not to say nothing) was found on this subject. For some strange reason it does not seem to have evoked much interest among educational scientists. That means that for most useful learning experiences a repertoire of documentation forms and formats with reasonably convincing “conclusive force” will still have to be developed. That again is a great challenge to our project, because it seems (as in the European Project) to be an underestimated and unexplored problem, whereas it is probably at the same time an important factor influencing the social acceptance of the portfolio.

In other areas the solution is sought in test results. With respect to the ELP this solution is recommended. The ELP should also contain “a record of language qualifications obtained” (Trim (1997, p. 4), but it should be recognised that this is something quite different from and possibly not always compatible with showing the ability “to plan, manage and assess their own learning” (p. 4). The less we succeed in developing the means to make the effect to be assumed from other learning experiences visible with conclusive force, the more these regular ways of reporting one’s language abilities, reported in the so-called “hard pages” (Dobson, 1997, p. 17) will dominate the ELPs. Through that we will miss the substantial potential added value of the ELP. For the successful implementation of the pedagogical function we need repertoires for instructive experiences and documentation formats and forms that are transparent, informative, concrete, convincing, motivating, and

*As hard as possible.*



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