

European Centre for Modern Languages

Expert mission in the framework of project C.6 “Training teachers to use the European Language Portfolio” of the ECML’s medium-term programme of activities 2004-2007 Training sessions in Tallinn, Estonia, 27-28 October 2005

More than two years ago, in May 2003, the Ministry of Education and Research of Estonia established a working group whose tasks include 1) drawing up a strategy for introducing the European Language Portfolio in Estonia and 2) more specifically, designing the ELP for school grades 6 to 9 (learners aged 12 to 16). The pilot version of the ELP was developed by August 2004 and in the academic year of 2004-5 50 teachers piloted it with their students. Piloting was supported by four one-day teacher training seminars held in August and October 2004 and in March and August 2005. During the pilot period feedback on different aspects of the ELP and its use was collected. On the basis of this feedback the group is now developing the ELP model which will be submitted for accreditation in September 2006. In parallel with the revising, editing and translating of the ELP, the training of potential teacher trainers has started.

The seminar within the ECML programme was called “*The European Language Portfolio: ways of exploiting its potential*” and it took place in Tallinn, Hotel Olympia Conference Centre, on 27th and 28th October 2005. It was the first in the series of workshops that will be held over the period of one year. 49 participants (experienced teachers of English, German, French, Russian and Estonian as a foreign language) attended the workshop. The group consisted of a) the teachers who have been piloting the ELP and have expressed a wish to train other teachers, b) experienced trainers who want to be involved in the training and c) university teachers who were interested in learning about the ELP and its use.

The aim of the workshop was twofold: 1) to provide participants with a new perspective on the ELP and its use and 2) to suggest ideas and activities for future teacher training sessions.

To achieve these aims the following topics were explored:

- The Estonian and Czech experience with using the ELP
- The Common Reference Levels, scales of language proficiency and their use
- The ELP, curricula and textbooks
- Observation and evaluation of standardized videos of learners’ performances
- Learner self-assessment and activities developing learner autonomy
- Intercultural competence and its development, Learning how to learn
- Competences and activities of teachers as novice ELP users
- Ideas and practical issues related to ELP teacher training

Input sessions were followed by pair and group work activities in which the teachers were asked to apply the subject matter to their specific context.

The activities in which the teachers were involved were as follows:

- Reflection on Estonian experience of using the ELP
- Textbook evaluation - choice of 3 descriptors of communicative activities designed in the Estonian ELP and looking for textbook activities developing learners' corresponding competences
- Evaluation of learners' competences with the help of the Global oral assessment scale (CEF, CUP 2001)
- Discussion about Levels A2 and B1 Sample Interviews – studying transcripts of the interviews and watching videotapes (Cambridge ESOL Main Suite and CELS Speaking Documentation, CE 2004)
- Evaluation of activities encouraging learner autonomy and self-assessment and adjustments of the activities (sets of activities selected from the ELP Guide for Teachers and Teacher Trainers, Little & Perclová, CE 2001)
- Reflection on key features of learner self-assessment (handouts based on Perclová, Babylonia 4/2000)
- Evaluation of teachers' beliefs about approaches to working with the ELP (sets of cards made up by the presenter)
- Reflection on ways to develop intercultural competence (handouts based on <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/methodology/intercultural2.shtml>)
- Reflection on learning strategies – classroom English (handouts designed by the presenter)
- Design of basic competences and activities of teachers as novice ELP users (+ their comparison with the competences and activities designed by the presenter)
- Reflection on the content and methodology of ELP teacher training

Teachers' work was greatly helped by translations of all handouts made by the local coordinator Ülle Türk and by simultaneous interpretation provided during the first day and consecutive interpretation done on the second day by Ülle Türk.

The feedback from the participants was highly positive. The workshop was felt to have been extremely useful and all its components relevant to the participants. The aspects that were considered most beneficial included work on the Common Reference Levels (particularly the discussions of Sample Interviews), textbook evaluation from the aspect of its compatibility with the ELP and the discussion of the competences and activities for teachers as novice ELP users. Several teachers also appreciated the opportunity to learn about the experiences of the Czech Republic and share their own experiences. From the point of view of the Estonian ELP working group the workshop fully achieved its two aims.

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