

Patterns of implementation– Austria

The ELP is used ...

to set educational standards

- ESP as a “pathway” to “Educational standards” for 14 year-olds (learning targets formulated as can-do statements); based on the CEF; A2, prospectively
- to encourage discussion on current methods of assessment in Austrian schools
- to encourage self-assessment and autonomous language learning in Austrian schools
- thus, to prepare gradually for the introduction of self-assessment centres in Austria

to assess learning outcome

Assessment by others: Hopefully not!

In Austria, we try to sensitize teachers that the ELP is an instrument belonging to the learners and that the role of the teachers is that of a learning companion and advisor rather than that of an instructor.

Possibly the biggest challenge facing teachers is the fact that they have to reconcile two conflicting requirements:

- They must accept that the ELP is the property of the learner and that the learners decide how they want to use it. The ELP must not become a tool for evaluation by the teacher.
- At the same, teachers will need to provide some initial help with the use of the ELP. Especially younger pupils will need to be introduced and shown how the ELP can support self-assessment, self-reflection and the definition of new learning goals.

As a **tool for self-assessment** the ELP does imply a paradigm change in Austrian schools.

to cope with diversity

Yes, by all means! The Austrian model for 10 – 15 year-olds has proven to be a tool encouraging the users to deal with linguistic and cultural diversity by a close look on the learner’s as past, present and future language learning or intercultural experiences.

In Austria teachers have to cope with pupils with different cultural backgrounds and mother tongues, especially in Carinthia, Vienna and Burgenland; the piloting phase has shown that the use of the ELP has an considerable impact on the value and status of minority languages in the classroom.

as an agent for change

The ELP can bring about a change in teaching and especially in assessing modern language learning. Teachers, however, are still reluctant to accept the role as a mediator and language advisor. Although autonomous learning is not an unknown concept teachers do not believe that their (still young) students /pupils are able to assess themselves. As a consequence they must learn how to develop the competence of self assessment of their students.

Even more reluctance can be foreseen when teachers suddenly realise that they will have to re-think their own teaching. Teaching towards learning targets is new to many teachers and the reflective process lying behind this form of targeted teaching is still very strange for many teachers.

for quality development and quality assurance

Cf. Point 1, “to set educational standards”

Main challenges

Awareness raising and dissemination

Not only teachers and pupils, but also media, parents and the economic sector, shall become aware of the ELP itself, its use for the development of language competence and the contribution it may make to international exchange, mobility and career chances.

This will be a stony path to go especially as the Austrian Ministry is very supportive but does not intend to “impose” the ELP to learners in any way. The ELP is therefore seen as a supportive but non-obligatory instrument. What we can count on in Austria is the “snowball effect” which has proven successful also in other innovative projects and has the benefit that teachers who decide to use the ELP out of their free will are usually the best “vendors” of this innovative idea.

A special focus on dissemination will be laid by the ÖSZ by participating in the project ***Equal Chances to European Integration through the European Language Portfolio***.

The aim of the Socrates project *Equal Chances* is to promote the European Language Portfolio as a quality assurance tool and to promote lifelong language and intercultural learning, to support the development of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism, to develop learner autonomy and self-assessment.

The project involves the organisation of an information campaign to encourage learners of different ages to use the ELP in their language learning and the joint development and dissemination of materials and tools.

Participation in the Equal Chances project ensures a two-way exchange of information and feedback. It allows the ÖSZ to feed the results of Austrian research and experience into the international development process and at the same time ensures that effective strategies developed elsewhere in Europe can be drawn on for the promotion, dissemination and implementation of the ELP in Austria.

Teacher education/ in-service training

Our next aims:

Developing a concept for teacher in-service training with modules for different demands (different types of schools, instruction units from two hours up to two or more days, development of several materials like folders, videos, pupils material, power point presentations etc) which are available for all teacher trainers and teacher trainer institutions.

Monitoring

The dissemination of the ELP can be monitored by the selling rates of the Austrian national version, which can only vaguely be completed by the output of other versions (e.g. from the Viennese Board of Education), especially when ELPs are offered online.

The actual use of ELPs (especially some time after their introduction) is hardly measurable. (Besides what would “use” mean? E.g. when a student used his/her ELP once a week or once a year?)

Best experience

The pilot phase for the Austrian ELP was extremely successful:

Implementing theory in practice: Pilot phase and evaluation of the Austrian ELP¹

Using the ELP in the classroom means that more attention is focused on the cultural experiences and linguistic background of the pupils and on strategies that can help them become independent learners. If the introduction of the ELP is to be successful, teachers and learners will need to adopt a new perspective on learning and also reformulate their own goals.

What these new goals could be, how they can be attained and how the necessary changes in the classroom might be effected are questions that we hope the pilot phase will resolve.

The pilot phase started in March 2003, when 750 pupils and 43 teachers in secondary schools throughout Austria received the *European Language Portfolio*. They have until March 2004 to explore the various facets and applications of the ELP and test its usefulness as a learning companion. At the end of the pilot phase all involved will hopefully be convinced that rather than diverting attention from the "essential purpose of the language classroom", which is acquiring the foreign language, the ELP is a fascinating tool which adds a new dimension to language learning.

When the schools were selected, our main criteria were: to have approximately the same number of secondary modern schools and grammar schools participating in the pilot scheme, to include schools in all the Austrian provinces and to introduce the ELP in as wide a spread of languages as possible. We also tried to have at least two teachers involved in each school to ensure that they could discuss any problems that might arise, agree on procedures and generally support each other.

The pilot schools include three bilingual schools for Croat and Slovene minorities, three secondary modern schools that offer two foreign languages and two schools which use English as a medium of instruction in several subjects.

| Schools by type | Number of schools, teachers and pupils involved in the pilot phase | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--|------|----------|------|--------|------|
| | Schools | | Teachers | | Pupils | |
| Secondary Modern Schools | 14 | 54 % | 22 | 51 % | 323 | 43 % |
| Grammar Schools | 12 | 46 % | 21 | 49 % | 427 | 57 % |
| Total | 26 | | 43 | | 750 | |

Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

The majority of the 43 teachers who participate in the project teach English (which for most of the pupils is the first foreign language), some teach French (offered as first or second foreign language at grammar schools), Italian (offered as second foreign language at secondary modern schools in Carinthia) or Croat (minority language). One group of Carinthian pupils and two groups of learners in Burgenland use the ELP in two language classes, in English and Italian and English and Croat, respectively.

¹ Drawn from: "From insight to self-reflection: Developing competence with the European Language Portfolio." *Erziehung und Unterricht* 9-10/2003. Wien: öbv&hpt, 2003.

| Languages | Number of teachers and pupils involved in the pilot phase | | | |
|---------------------|---|------|------------|------|
| | Teachers | | Pupils | |
| English | 34 | 79 % | 614 | 82 % |
| French | 4 | 9 % | 62 | 8 % |
| Italian | 3 | 7 % | 13 | 2 % |
| Croat | 2 | 5 % | - | - |
| Italian and English | - | - | 27 | 4 % |
| Croat and English | - | - | 34 | 5 % |
| Total | 43 | | 750 | |

Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

Working together and not alone: Support during the pilot phase

All the teachers received a manual entitled *Leitfaden für Lehrerinnen und Lehrer²*, which contains practical examples and tips on how the ELP can be introduced in the language classroom, explains how pupils can work with the different parts, and also includes additional materials and a chart comparing the aims of the ELP with the goals and targets set out in the Austrian syllabus for lower secondary schools. The manual further includes a bibliography, links, a glossary and Frequently Asked Questions.

The pilot phase opened with a two-day seminar in Graz in March 2003 where the teachers were given a general introduction to the principles underpinning the ELP and shown how the Austrian pilot project and model fit within the overall European context. The teachers were also given some hands-on experience with the ELP's self-assessment procedures. To facilitate coordination and cooperation with the development team, five regional groups were set up. Three regional meetings were scheduled at which the groups will have the opportunity to discuss methodological and organisational issues, share their experiences and exchange materials. All the documents and materials will be collected and made available to other teachers wishing to introduce the ELP after the end of the pilot phase.

Concurrent evaluation and further development

The first two regional meetings were held in May and June 2003 and focused on the children's reactions to the ELP, as well as feedback and comments from other teachers and parents. The pupils were proud to have been selected to participate in the piloting of this innovative instrument. The teachers remarked that most pupils needed help in developing self-assessment skills and recommended a preliminary awareness-raising phase during which pupils could practice self-evaluation. Some of the weaker students had problems with the abstract wording of the checklists and found it difficult to apply the descriptions to their own linguistic proficiency. All agreed that the tips for more efficient learning were extremely useful and that there had been a reappraisal of the value of the language(s) spoken by children outside the classroom. The third and final workshop was held after the end of the project phase in March 2004.

² Abuja, Gunther, et al. *Das Europäische Sprachenportfolio als Lernbegleiter in Österreich: Leitfaden für Lehrerinnen und Lehrer*. Graz: Leykam/ÖSZ, 2004 (revised and updated after the pilot phase; www.sprachen.ac.at/download/esp/esp_LL_gesamt.pdf).

Advice to other ELP-project managers

- Educational developments usually take up a lot of time. A year for development and one for piloting seemed the minimum to us.
- Never underestimate the time layout and production take! Especially when you try to develop a professional looking version (and this is often needed to make this instrument attractive for their future users) and co-operate with a publishing house development can be a tiresome process (you will never find ALL the typos ...!).
- Working with a working group of linguistic and school experts may give you the right balance between theory and practice. We shouldn't underestimate how cruel school reality can be ...
- Piloting the ELP will give you first hand experience and valuable comments on what you forgot, underestimated or were simply ignorant of when racking your brains and producing version after version for 12 months ...
- When you slowly and warmheartedly familiarize your piloting teachers with the function and use of your cherished ELP you will hopefully create a group of enraptured fans of this instrument who will spread the gospel ...

And finally: Never ever take advice from other ELP developers!