

European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages

A reflection tool for language teacher education

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The following extract contains the introductory text and descriptors for the skill
of speaking/spoken interaction from the self-assessment section

METHODOLOGY**Introduction**

Methodology is the implementation of learning objectives through teaching procedures. It is based on principles deriving from theories of language description, language learning and language use.

Methodology may focus on how teachers can deal with the four main skills of speaking, writing, listening and reading, as reflected in the categorisation of this section. However, in written and oral communication in the classroom two or more skills will usually be integrated and are rarely treated in isolation.

Specific methods and techniques may be applied to support the learning of aspects of the language system, such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. However, methodology should reflect the fact that these aspects of language are always present when skills are being practised and are therefore inextricably linked to communication. Also, the teaching of culture and its relationship with language will require specific methodological insights.

A. Speaking/Spoken Interaction

1. I can create a supportive atmosphere that invites learners to take part in speaking activities.

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2. I can evaluate and select meaningful speaking and interactional activities to encourage learners of differing abilities to participate.

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3. I can evaluate and select meaningful speaking and interactional activities to encourage learners to express their opinions, identity, culture etc.

 ⇒

4. I can evaluate and select a range of meaningful speaking and interactional activities to develop fluency (discussion, role play, problem solving etc.).

 ⇒

5. I can evaluate and select different activities to help learners to become aware of and use different text types (telephone conversations, transactions, speeches etc.).

 ⇒

6. I can evaluate and select a variety of materials to stimulate speaking activities

(visual aids, texts, authentic materials etc.).



7. I can evaluate and select activities which help learners to participate in ongoing spoken exchanges (conversations, transactions etc.) and to initiate or respond to utterances appropriately.



8. I can evaluate and select various activities to help learners to identify and use typical features of spoken language (informal language, fillers etc.).



9. I can help learners to use communication strategies (asking for clarification, comprehension checks etc.) and compensation strategies (paraphrasing, simplification etc) when engaging in spoken interaction.



10. I can evaluate and select a variety of techniques to make learners aware of, discriminate and help them to pronounce sounds in the target language.



11. I can evaluate and select a variety of techniques to make learners aware of and help them to use stress, rhythm and intonation.



12. I can evaluate and select a range of oral activities to develop accuracy (grammar, word choice etc.).



Users' Guide

What is the EPOSTL?

The European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL) is a document intended for students undergoing their initial teacher education which encourages them to reflect on the didactic knowledge and skills necessary to teach languages, helps them to assess their own didactic competences and enables them to monitor their progress and to record their experiences of teaching during the course of their teacher education. The EPOSTL consists of three main sections:

- a **personal statement** section
- a **self-assessment**, which contains lists of 'can-do' descriptors relating to didactic competences
- a **dossier**, in which students can document progress and record examples of work relevant to their teacher education and their future profession.

Background to the EPOSTL

The EPOSTL was developed for the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe by a team of teacher educators from five different countries (Armenia, Austria, Norway, Poland, UK). It arose from a project initiated by the ECML, 'A Framework for Teacher Education', which had the overall aim of addressing the broad question of harmonising teacher education across Europe. It was decided by the project group members to build on existing documents already developed by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe - *Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)* and the *European Language Portfolio (ELP)* as well as the European Commission-financed project *European Profile for Language Teacher Education – A Frame of Reference (Profile)*. These were used in the following ways:

CEFR: The 'can-do' formulations and many terms and insights from the *CEFR* have been incorporated into the descriptors.

ELP: The three-part structure of the EPOSTL (personal statement – self-assessment – dossier) bears some similarity to that of the *ELP*, as is its emphasis on reflection. An essential difference between the two documents is that while the *ELP* is concerned with *language* competences, the EPOSTL is concerned with *didactic* competences.

Profile: The initial idea of providing a 'frame of reference' came from this document. Insights from the *Profile* provided valuable input to the descriptors in the self-assessment section. However, whilst the *Profile* is aimed at teacher educators and curriculum designers, the target group of the EPOSTL is the student teacher.

Aims and uses of the EPOSTL

The central aims of the EPOSTL are as follows:

1. to encourage students to reflect on the competences a teacher strives to attain and on the underlying knowledge which feeds these competences;

2. to help prepare students for their future profession in a variety of teaching contexts;
3. to promote discussion between students and between students and their teacher educators and mentors;
4. to facilitate self-assessment of students' competence;
5. to help students develop awareness of their strengths and weaknesses related to teaching;
6. to provide an instrument which helps chart progress.
7. to serve as the springboard for discussions, topics for term papers, research projects etc.
8. to provide support during teaching practice and assist in discussions with mentors; this will help mentors to provide systematic feedback.

The EPOSTL is the property of the student teacher and is an instrument to promote professional growth through reflection and dialogue. As such it should be seen as a means of enhancing autonomous learning. This does not mean that the role of the teacher educator is not important: he or she will need to provide guidance as to when and how the EPOSTL might best be used.

The EPOSTL should be made available to students at the beginning of their teacher education and it should accompany them throughout their teacher education, teaching practice and into their profession. It should be incorporated into existing course structures and relate to what is being taught and learned. It should be used over a period of time, if possible throughout the teacher education programme. This will help to chart progress and growth.

Although primarily intended for students, the EPOSTL will assist teacher educators who are involved in curriculum design by providing a tool which helps to clarify aims and specify content and which thus points to strengths and weaknesses in teacher education programmes. It may thus play a useful complementary role to that of the *European Profile for Language Teacher Education*. Further, the EPOSTL can facilitate discussion of aims and curricula between teacher educators working within different national or European contexts.

Contents of the EPOSTL

The EPOSTL contains the following sections:

- An **Introduction**, which provides a brief overview of the EPOSTL
- A **personal statement** section, to help students about to begin their teacher education to reflect on general questions related to teaching
- A **self-assessment** section, consisting of 'can-do' descriptors, to facilitate reflection and self-assessment by student teachers
- A **dossier**, for students to make the outcome of self-assessment transparent, to provide evidence of progress and to record examples of work relevant to teaching
- A **glossary** of the most important terms relating to language learning and teaching used in the EPOSTL
- An **index** of terms used in the descriptors
- A **users' guide**

Introduction

This can be used by student teachers who are beginning to use the EPOSTL to familiarise themselves with its main aims, content and uses. It contains the most essential information from the users' guide.

Personal Statement

The personal statement provides some activities which help student teachers to reflect on aspects related to teaching in general and to think about questions that may be important at the beginning of their teacher education. It is suggested that activity 4 should be done, since the following text on the role and value of reflection builds on this activity.

Self-assessment

At the heart of the EPOSTL are the 193 descriptors of competences related to language teaching which comprise the self-assessment section. These descriptors may be regarded as a set of core competences which language teachers should strive to attain. It should be noted that the descriptors are aimed at future school teachers in secondary education (ages 10 – 18), teaching general language. Other descriptors might be needed for other contexts; for example, for primary school teachers (i.e. young learners), for CLIL, for adult education etc.

The descriptors were formulated by members of the ECML project group and have been agreed upon after consultation with student teachers and teacher educators from 33 European countries. However, the descriptors should not be regarded as a prescriptive list, nor as comprising a fixed qualification profile. Rather they should be seen as competences that both student teachers and practising teachers will attempt to develop continuously throughout their education and teaching career. Whilst the EPOSTL does not aim to impose a rationale or methodology, it is hoped that by identifying core competences and making these competences transparent, it will make a small contribution to those wishing to cross both institutional and national borders and to seek for common principles which might be applicable across Europe.

Categorisation of descriptors

The descriptors are grouped into seven general categories which have the following headings:

- Context
- Methodology
- Resources
- Lesson Planning
- Conducting a Lesson
- Independent Learning
- Assessment of Learning

The seven categories represent areas in which teachers require a variety of competences and need to make decisions related to teaching.

At the beginning of each section is a brief introductory text on the respective topic area. These texts are not intended to provide a comprehensive discussion, but merely highlight certain aspects of the topic which are dealt with in the 'can-do' descriptors.

Each general category has been sub-divided. For example, 'Conducting a Lesson' includes the sub-headings: 'Using Lesson Plans', 'Content', 'Interaction with Learners', 'Classroom Management', 'Classroom Language'.

Both with the general categories and with individual descriptors it has been necessary, for reasons of clarity, to present them as discrete items. In reality, however, there is overlap between them. For example, similar decision relating to the teaching of reading will apply to methodology, planning a lesson, conducting a lesson, assessment etc. For the same reason of clarity, different aspects of language such as speaking, vocabulary, grammar etc. have been listed separately. In teaching and learning these aspects will, however, usually be integrated. Also, whilst several descriptors make references to principles of autonomous learning, these are spread through various sections. This reflects the fact that learner autonomy pervades many aspects of learning and teaching.

Within each sub-heading each descriptor is numbered for ease of reference. The sequencing should not necessarily be regarded as significant. In general, similar descriptors are grouped together and on occasions the order might correspond to the order of a particular teaching sequence – for example, in the 'Methodology – Listening' section, 'I can select texts appropriate to the needs, interests and language level of the learners' precedes 'I can provide a range of pre-listening activities which help learners to orientate themselves to a text' but the order of many of the descriptor lists does not represent any form of prioritisation.

Self-assessment scales

Each descriptor is accompanied by a bar, which enables students to assess their own competence. Students can colour in the bar according to their own assessment. This may take place at different stages of their teacher education.

On completion of her teacher education programme a student teacher may have produced a bar which looks something like this.

1. I can create a supportive atmosphere that invites learners to take part in speaking activities.

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In the above example the student has made a self-assessment at three stages of her teacher education but does not feel completely confident in her ability and has left part of the bar blank. She has also added the date on which the self-assessment was carried out.

Whilst in the *Common European Framework* and in the *European Language Portfolio* self-assessment descriptors are scaled (A1, B2 etc.), the EPOSTL does not use any numerical scale since the authors believe that it is very difficult to quantify didactic competences.

It should be noted that it is not expected that all bars should be filled in at the end of the teaching education programme. Acquiring didactic competences and becoming a good teacher is a life-long process!

Wording of the descriptors

It is intended that the meaning of all descriptors should be transparent to users since this is a pre-requisite for self-assessment. For this reason, the authors have tried to avoid complexity and difficult terminology. A glossary is included at the end of the EPOSTL, which explains the most important terms used and the way in which the EPOSTL uses them.

Many of the words used are open to individual interpretation. e.g. 'meaningful', 'appropriate'. It follows that there is no 'key', 'answer' or 'solution' to the issues raised by the descriptors but that individual answers will emerge from reflection, dialogue among students, between students and their educators and between students and their mentors in school. Moreover, many descriptors will be interpreted in light of local contexts.

Beyond descriptors

The descriptors list didactic skills and competences that need to be acquired. They do not address important issues which underlie them. For example, the descriptor 'I can identify and evaluate a range of coursebooks/materials appropriate for the age, interests and the language level of the learners' throws up a series of questions relating both to materials and learners. Additional questions that need to be asked by both students, teacher educators and mentors include:

What theories of learning, language, culture etc. are relevant to the general categories and to individual descriptors?

What learning and teaching principles feed into competences and skills?

What knowledge is required to accomplish a skill?

What beliefs and values are reflected in individual descriptors?

If you think you can accomplish a certain skill, how do you know you can do it?

Although the descriptors provide a systematic way of considering competences, they should not be regarded simply as a checklist! It is important that they act as a stimulus for students, teacher educators and mentors to discuss important aspects of teacher education which underlie them and that they contribute to developing professional awareness.

The Dossier

The primary function of the student teacher dossier is to help students support claims that their self-assessment of 'can do' statements is an accurate reflection of their

specific skills and abilities. To do this they can collect a dossier of evidence of their work. The dossier will provide them with the opportunity to make the results of both personal and dialogic reflection transparent and to think about their progress and development as a teacher.

The dossier can be seen as representing a bridge between the skills specified in descriptors and the underlying knowledge necessary to acquire these skills and also between the descriptors and the content of the teacher education programme.

Whilst the dossier remains the property of the student teacher, he or she may wish to make items available to tutors, mentors, peers etc.

The dossier could contain:

- A. Evidence from **lessons** the student teacher has given
- B. Evidence in the form of **lesson observations** and **evaluations**
- C. Evidence such as detailed **reports, comments, checklists** etc compiled by different people involved in the teacher education programme
- D. Evidence from an **analysis** of what students have done as a teacher
- E. Evidence in the form of **case studies** and **action research**
- F. Evidence from **reflection**

A 'list of documents' checklist can be found at the end of each category to help students collect evidence systematically.

The Glossary

Here terms related to language learning and teaching which occur in the EPOSTL are defined – in the specific sense in which they are used in the document. In many cases terms are defined according to the way in which they are used in the *European Common Framework*.

The Index

The index helps users to locate terms used in the descriptors. It takes the form of a chart in which terms relating to language learning and teaching are listed vertically and the sections of the self-assessment, horizontally. This will aid cross-referencing: it is possible, for example, to discover at a glance in which sections terms such as 'culture' or 'grammar' occur.

References and links

Information on the EPOSTL project: <http://www.ecml.at/mtp2/FTE/>
Council of Europe (2001) *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, Modern Languages Division/Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Information on *CEFR* and *ELP*:

[http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Co-](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Co-operation/education/Languages/Language_Policy/)

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