



EUROPEAN LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO: INTERIM REPORT 2007

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Summary Report

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This report is an attempt to provide a concise summary of ELP activities and their impact from 2001 to October 2007. It is based on information contained in earlier reports¹ and on structured and unstructured feedback gathered from a multitude of sources during this period.

The focus in this report is on some of the key aspects of ELP implementation considered as a common European endeavour. The examples of evidence include, however, experience reported from a variety of contexts by individual, collective, local, regional, national and international stakeholders.

The European Language Portfolio is one of the tools of the CoE and its 47 member states designed to promote linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe through education².

The Committee of Ministers encourages member states to support the use of the ELP (Recommendation No 98 (6) concerning Modern Languages) and the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education of the Council of Europe adopted a Resolution recommending the implementation and widespread use of the ELP in 2000³.

The ELP and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) contribute to the core values of the Council of Europe and specifically to the development of language and intercultural skills necessary for active democratic citizenship.

The following tentative conclusions are based on reported activities, developments and outcomes:

- a) The ELP contributes significantly to the dissemination of European goals, values, concepts and principles
- b) The ELP makes a difference in educational practice
- c) The ELP is an effective catalyst for change at European, national and local levels

1. Reported numbers of ELPs produced, distributed, used

School/academic year	Cumulative total of individual ELPs produced/distributed * 1	Learners using an ELP as reported by school/academic year * 2	Number of ELP models validated during the calendar year cumulative * 3	Average number of copies in use for all validated ELP models * 4	Number of multipliers formed during the design and pilot phase * 5 cumulative
Up to 2000	~	~ 30.000	6	5000	300 300
2001-2002	~	~ 135.000	19 25	5400	950 1250
2002-2003	~	~ 220.000	16 41	5400	800 2250
2003-2004	~	~ 315.000	17 58	5400	850 3100
2004-2005	~ 1.250.000	~ 514.000	11 69	7500	550 3650
2005-2006	~ 2.000.000	~ 504.000 rev.	4 73	6900	200 3850
2006-2007	~ 2.500.000	~ 584.000	15 88	6600	750 4600
2007-2008	~ 3.000.000	~ ?	11 99	?	550 5150

¹ Consolidated ELP report 2001-2004 and interim reports for 2005 and 2006; for full texts consult www.coe.int/portfolio

² Recommendations No. R (82) 18 and R (98) 6 concerning Modern Languages of the Committee of Ministers to the Member States of the Council of Europe

³ Resolution on the European Language Portfolio, Cracow, Poland 15-17 October 2000

The figures in this table are general overall indicators and need careful interpretation. They do not claim to be more than an informed approximation, based on sometimes incomplete data gathered in varying circumstances and reported at different points in time.

- * 1 Not all the ELPs produced are distributed and not all ELPs distributed are being used
- * 2 These totals are composed of ongoing and in some cases planned projects
- * 3 Validated ELP models are contextualisations of the common principles and guidelines
- * 4 Validation stimulates ELP dissemination; the average number of copies in use is an indication of impact
- * 5 The suggestion here is that designing ELP models helps form multipliers (the figures are speculative)

2. The ELP contributes significantly to the dissemination of European goals, values, concepts and principles

The ELP and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) were first proposed at a Council of Europe symposium in 1991. From the outset they were intended to complement each other.

Both instruments are descriptive and promote ideals and goals that underpin the mission of the Council of Europe: respect for linguistic and cultural diversity, mutual understanding beyond national, institutional and social boundaries, and the promotion of plurilingualism and pluricultural education

The CEFR provides a comprehensive, coherent and transparent framework for the development of language curricula, programmes of teaching and learning, learning materials and assessment instruments.

The ELP is designed to mediate to learners, teachers and schools common European values and goals. It is a tool based on a set of principles: plurilingualism, learner ownership, learner autonomy and self-assessment, an understanding that all learning counts and that learning is a life-long process.

These principles tend to challenge established practices both in the educational process and as regards traditional roles of learners and teachers. This helps to explain why the adoption and implementation of the ELP in the daily routine of learning has taken and will take time and why the overall level of penetration is so far not sufficient to reap the full benefits of ELP use. To prove beyond doubt that implementation is worthwhile and self-sustaining in the long term ELP projects need a certain scale.

Both the ELP and CEFR have proved, however, to be influential instruments stimulating reflection on language and language education policy based on common European values throughout Europe and thus have helped to promote unity in diversity.

What follows are a few examples to illustrate how the ELP has helped mediate the goals of the Council of Europe to learners and citizens:

- The 93 validated ELP models have been designed by teams in 28 different member states. They are contextualised applications based on common European principles and guidelines
- In 16 member states the ELP models developed cover all educational sectors from primary to adult which implies reflection and cooperation beyond specific school sectors and administrative boundaries
- Several ELP models have been developed by international teams promoting plurilingual and intercultural learning beyond national, regional and institutional limits
- Most ELP developments have been closely related to curriculum reforms, have helped to shape decisions and in turn have been shaped by educational innovation; the process has helped form professional mediators
- A number of ELPs models have been revised following curriculum reforms. In some cases the work with the ELP influenced such reforms.
- The ELP has been used in a multitude of projects to mediate complex concepts to teachers and learners; e.g. plurilingualism, partial competence, learner autonomy, intercultural competence, self-assessment
- The use of the ELP in an institutional context has stimulated reflections which have led to the formulation of whole-school language policies in a number of cases. These policies include the language of education as well as the use of languages across the curriculum
- The conception of ELP models for different age and target groups has led to a certain differentiation of primary objectives, focuses and approaches e.g. language awareness for junior portfolios taking account

of the presence of learners with different language and cultural backgrounds; the development of learner autonomy and self-assessment in secondary models; the illustration of professional and life situations in models for young adults, for professional education and for academic contexts

- Plurilingualism linked to the concepts of language for communication and intercultural competence has started to attract the attention of large and medium-sized enterprises as a potential asset for the employees as well as for the enterprises themselves
- ELP seminars and workshops for teachers and learners are probably the single most important channel for the mediation of common goals, concepts and competence to the key stakeholders in the field. The offer of such seminars and workshops is on the increase.

3. The ELP works and makes a difference in educational practice

A growing pool of formal feedback⁴ including reports, studies and dissertations provides evidence that the ELP is a practical tool which can make a difference in educational practice. Formal and informal feedback gathered during teacher reflection and learner reporting meetings illustrate a wide and increasing variety of innovative and practical applications.

“If used appropriately” is a qualifier generally added in reports when claims are made that the ELP works and that it produces desirable effects. “Appropriately”, however, seems to have different connotations for different people in different contexts.

“Appropriate” in this report is taken to mean convincing and coherent in the eyes of a specific user or user group, based on self-declaration. The purpose is to illustrate how the ELP is used in different contexts and how it impacts in relation to declared objectives and common principles. It is not the purpose of the report to arbitrate between different positions taken⁵.

The following summary seems tenable considering the available evidence:

- The ELP is an effective learning and reporting tool in a wide variety of contexts
- The ELP fosters dialogue and cooperation in the learning process beyond language learning
- The ELP fosters learner autonomy and positively affects motivation
- The ELP is an effective tool of reflection and helps develop self-assessment competence
- The ELP reflects key educational concerns such as communicative, partial and intercultural competence
- The underlying principles of the ELP promote unity in diversity without being prescriptive

The available evidence shows also that:

- Not all learners and teachers favour a learner centred-approach which shifts responsibility to the learner
- The ELP is not a viable proposition if it is used mechanically to check progress
- The ELP has to yield tangible benefits for the learners, teachers and schools if it is to remain attractive
- A gap too wide between the demands of the curriculum and the ELP principles is difficult to manage
- Space in the working routine is needed to make good use of the ELP
- The status of the ELP needs to be defined on the broad educational level as well as in the local context
- Sustained learner and teacher support is needed to achieve the desirable long-term effects

Processes stimulated through ELP work are rich, multi-faceted and extremely varied. Each application is in some way unique, hence not easily transferable. Joint reflection is needed. Regular teacher seminars in broadly familiar contexts seem to yield good transfer effects.

⁴ For additional information and links to additional information consult the countries pages in previous progress reports

⁵ The purpose is not to harmonise views or to resolve possibly conflicting statements e.g. test specialists might argue that self-assessment does not yield sufficiently valid and reliable information to formally assess language competence, while specialists in learner autonomy might argue that self-assessment is an essential part of a more inclusive assessment culture and hence one of the keys to learner autonomy and as such a desirable innovation

The following example produced a steep learning curve during a mixed teacher-learner reflection session, despite the fact that the setting, the learners involved and the activities chosen seem atypical. IT students at a professional school each accepted to select each a literary text in English or French, to read it and present a structured summary and a personal reflection on their experience to their fellow learners.

At the beginning of the school year they outlined their work plans to a meeting of teachers involved in ELP projects; at the end of the school year they presented the outcome which included five presentations in English and several videos documenting the process.

The performance of the learners was impressive, yet most teachers declared themselves unable to assess the level of language produced nor to pin down benefits derived through the use of the ELP.

Interestingly the learners offered convincing answers to the issues raised and some teachers started to offer related parallel examples illustrating their own concepts, experience, solutions and benefits⁶.

4. The ELP as change agent and catalyst

The ELP is based on concepts and principles which challenge traditional learning and teaching practices and hence imply change. As change is rarely perceived as comfortable, energy and sustained effort are needed to produce lasting results.

The predominantly positive outcomes reported in regard to the learning and reporting functions of the ELP are a necessary basis for widespread implementation but do not automatically bring it about.

Engineering and implementation change in large systems is a complex venture; different stake-holder groups are involved, variables often escape control, coherence is difficult to maintain in a changing system, priorities might shift over time.

A number of implementation projects seem now to have reached dimensions necessary for long-term effects and benefits on a system level to develop. These include among others:

- The Spanish ELP project, which covers all regions and school sectors and includes regional as well as international languages
- The decentralised Swiss ELP implementation project, which covers all languages, school sectors and school types
- The ELP implementation project of Thüringen (Germany), with a reported penetration of 40% despite reduced financial support
- The ELP implementation project of the Russian Federation, which uses a snowball strategy in its multilingual and multicultural territory
- Irish ELP projects that focus on the linguistic integration of immigrants
- The Dutch electronic ELP project, which is breaking new ground
- The institutional ELP projects of ALTE/EAQUALS and CercleS in the adult and further education sectors respectively

A number of implementation projects do not seem to have developed as well as initially planned. Reasons seem to include: shifts in policy and priorities, insufficient clarification of ELP status, diffuse expectations and objectives, imbalance between goals and allocated resources, tensions between the official curriculum and the underlying concepts of the ELP, e.g. only few curricula so far define their goals in “can do” terms that correspond to the “I can” descriptors in the ELP checklists), etc.

Both the positive and the not so positive developments warrant further analysis against the background of the increasingly rich pool of experience and know-how which is building up throughout Europe.

The ELP as catalyst

Reported activities and general feedback also suggest that the ELP functions as an effective catalyst.

It values different learning styles and methods and can bring together different types of learning activities across the curriculum. It stimulates dialogue and cooperation beyond traditional administrative boundaries.

⁶ Source: ELP coordination and dissemination meetings of the canton of Zurich Switzerland. For reports see: www.fs-fremdsprachen.zh.ch

Several ELP projects reach beyond national, institutional and linguistic borders.

A new generation of learning and teaching materials incorporating the concepts and principles of the CEFR, the ELP and related revised curricula is being developed and promoted.

Large-scale research projects such as the EU-sponsored DYLAN project which aims to provide scientific backing to the concept of plurilingual repertoires will certainly produce relevant insights in relation to the ELP.

What these examples have in common is that stakeholders outside the core ELP project groups have demonstrated an active interest in developments related to the ELP.

The overall strategy of promoting the concepts of communication, plurilingualism and diversity through the CEFR and the ELP seems to have been outstandingly effective.

Ideally, relevant stakeholder groups outside the core ELP group will be included in future activities.