

## Learner autonomy and the ELP

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### **The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR; Council of Europe 2001)**

- Developed to provide “a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe” (p.1)
- Comprises a complex descriptive apparatus for the specification of L2 proficiency at six levels in relation to five communicative activities: listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, writing
- Embodies an action-oriented approach:
  - We use language to perform communicative acts which may be external and social (communicating with other people) or internal and private (communicating with ourselves)
  - Communicative acts comprise language activity, which is divided into four kinds: reception, production, interaction and mediation
  - In order to engage in language activity, we draw on our communicative language competence
  - Language activity always occurs in a context that imposes conditions and constraints
  - Because we must cope with often unpredictable contextual features, our communicative language competence includes sociolinguistic and pragmatic components
  - Language activity entails the performance of tasks, and to the extent that they are not routine or automatic, those tasks require us to use strategies in order to understand and/or produce spoken or written texts
- The CEFR’s action-oriented approach assigns a central role to language use in language learning:  
“Language use, embracing language learning, comprises the actions performed by persons who as individuals and as social agents develop a range of competences ...” (Council of Europe 2001, p.9)
- Thus the “I can” descriptors of the self-assessment grid (ibid., pp.26-27) and the “can do” descriptors of the illustrative scales

refer to the autonomous L2 user, but also to the autonomous L2 learner

### **The European Language Portfolio and learner autonomy**

- Conceived as a companion piece to the CEFR
- Reflects the Council of Europe’s concern with (among other things) the development of (i) the language learner and (ii) the development of the capacity for independent language learning
- Is (among other things) the property of the learner and a tool to promote learner autonomy
- Encourages self-assessment (ELP Principles and Guidelines, Council of Europe 2006)
- Three obligatory components: language passport, language biography, dossier
- Based on the CEFR in the sense that it uses the CEFR’s common reference levels in two ways:
  - In summary form (the self-assessment grid) in the language passport, which the owner updates at regular intervals to provide a summary of his/her experience of learning and using L2s
  - In “I can” checklists, usually to be found in the language biography, which the owner uses to identify learning targets, monitor learning progress and assess learning outcomes
- In principle the ELP can support the “autonomy” classroom in three ways:
  1. When checklists reflect the demands of the official curriculum, they provide learners (and teachers) with an inventory of learning tasks that they can use to plan, monitor and evaluate learning over a school year, a term, a month or a week
  2. The language biography is explicitly designed to associate goal setting and self-assessment with reflection on learning styles and strategies, and the cultural dimension of L2 learning and use
  3. When the ELP is presented (partly) in the learners’ target language, it can help to promote the use of the target language as a medium of learning and reflection

### **The CLCS Learner Autonomy Project (1997-2001)**

- Research goals:
  - to stimulate pedagogical experimentation in a number of post-primary French and German classrooms
  - to use various empirical means to explore the impact of experimentation on teachers and learners (Little et al. 2002)
- Pedagogical aims:
  - to get learners to accept responsibility for their learning
  - to foster the use of the target language in the classroom
  - to help teachers to develop their planning skills
  - to look for a new way of “teaching for the exams”

### **Workshop task**

How would you design an ELP so as to

- promote greater learner involvement and responsibility?
- focus attention on the development of communication skills: language learning through language use?
- facilitate teacher planning?
- stimulate a positive interaction between teaching-learning processes and syllabus/examination objectives

### **References**

- Council of Europe, 2001: *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Council of Europe, 2006: *European Language Portfolio: Key reference documents*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.  
Downloadable from [www.coe.int/portfolio](http://www.coe.int/portfolio), section PROCEDURE FOR VALIDATION.
- Little, D., J. Ridley and E. Ushioda, 2002: *Towards greater autonomy in the foreign language classroom*. Dublin: Authentik.