

Achieving widespread use of the ELP: ESL in Irish primary schools

The context

- Since the 1990s large numbers of immigrants have come to Ireland
- Whatever the status of their parents, all children and adolescents resident in the state must attend school
- There are currently some 12,000 pupils in primary schools whose L1 is not English or Irish
- The Department of Education and Science funds ESL support on a withdrawal basis – usually one class per day for two years per pupil (almost 2,000 special teaching posts in 2007)
- IILT is responsible for curriculum, learning/teaching supports, assessment, and in-service seminars for teachers

Basic considerations

- The primary ESL curriculum must
 - clearly reflect the purpose of ESL support: to give ESL pupils access to the mainstream curriculum
 - describe learning progression in a way that corresponds to teachers' experience
 - be presented in a form that encourages and facilitates frequent use
 - support a communicative pedagogy and the development of communicative learning materials
 - foster the development of learner autonomy (a general goal of the Irish primary curriculum)
- The CEFR as an obvious model and source

A curriculum based on the CEFR

- English Language Proficiency Benchmarks – a reworking of the first three levels of the CEFR to make them age-appropriate and domain specific
- Part I comprises two grids:
 - Global benchmarks of communicative proficiency (listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, writing)
 - Global scales of underlying linguistic competence (vocabulary, grammar, phonology, orthography)
- Part II comprises thirteen grids:
 - Units of work (the global benchmarks restated in terms of recurrent curriculum themes)

The ELP as a key learning support

- Language passport
 - Focuses on the ESL pupil's linguistic identity

- Provides for regular summative self-assessment
- Language biography
 - Focuses on the pupil's daily exposure to language in the environment and learning how to learn
 - Provides detailed goal-setting and self-assessment checklists for the 13 units of work
- Dossier
 - A table of contents page
 - "Open" pages related to the Units of Work
 - Additional work sheets
 - A place to keep finished work

Advantages of using the ELP

- It embodies the dynamic nature of the ESL curriculum, making it visible to ESL teachers, learners, class teachers, principals, parents, and school inspectors
- It also makes clear to all these stakeholders an approach to L2 learning that emphasizes learner involvement, learner reflection, and communicative use of the target language
- It places at centre stage a version of the CEFR's action-oriented approach to language use and language learning, capturing the evolving features of autonomous learner-users of English L2

Scale of use

The ELP for primary ESL learners in Ireland is widely used

- not because it is recognized as a tool for developing learner autonomy
- but because it
 - mediates the curriculum to learners
 - is the foundation for a substantial array of teaching and learning resources
 - supports forms of peer and self-assessment that are fully harmonious with the official tests (also developed by IILT; see Little 2005)

Two web addresses

www.coe.int/portfolio

- For everything to do with the ELP

www.iilt.ie

- To find out more about the work of IILT
- To download the English Language Proficiency Benchmarks (primary and post-primary versions) and the ELPs for primary and post-primary ESL learners