

## Next steps: whole-school use of the ELP and the challenge of plurilingualism

---

### Whole-school use of the ELP

#### The Milestone ELP

The context:

- The Irish government funds intensive English language courses for adult immigrants with refugee status
- Courses are delivered by Integrate Ireland Language and Training ([www.iilt.ie](http://www.iilt.ie))
- In 2007 courses were offered at 12 centres around the country
- Courses run continuously apart from a two-week break at Christmas/New Year: four terms a year, 20 class hours per week, 15 learners per class
- Most students attend for 2–4 terms

The learners:

- In 2007 we had 901 learners (55% female, 45% male) and 93 nationalities
- The 10 most frequently represented nationalities were: Kurdish, Congolese, Moldovan, Sudanese, Somali, Ukrainian, Iraqi, Russian, Rumanian, Iranian
- Most learners come with some English (A1+/A2-)
- A few have no English and no L1 literacy
- A few have post-intermediate (B1+) English and professional qualifications

Approach to teaching and learning:

- Needs analysis: Courses are planned jointly by teacher and learners on the basis of individual and group needs relative to integration (authentic texts; flexible classroom dynamic)
- Language learning through language use: English is necessarily the medium of teaching and the language in which learners mostly communicate with one another; there is a strong emphasis on writing (the importance of literacy skills; writing as a support for speaking; writing as a reflective tool)
- Learner autonomy: Enhances motivation, ensures focused learning, develops explicit learning skills

Using the ELP:

- 37.2002: versions in English, Dutch, Finnish, German, Swedish ([www.eu-milestone.de](http://www.eu-milestone.de))
- Obligatory for all IILT teachers and learners
- Helps to ensure continuity from term to term and level to level by providing a record of learning progress and learning achievement
- Supports the development of learner autonomy and learner (self-)awareness
- Relates all teaching and learning to the CEFR's action-oriented approach and proficiency levels
- Provides a focus and framework for teacher collaboration; supports the development of a whole-

school learner autonomy ethos (see IILT website for materials)

What the learners say:

- “I want to learn to help my children and also for my future. I always missed medical appointment because I couldn't understand the receptionist when he was speaking to me. But now my English is very good. And my experience now is speaking good English with people and say many thing in English. My experience now is to help my children do their homework and I can write English in letters. Now, when I send my girls to school I can speak to their teacher and when I go to the GP I can speak and understand very well.”
- “I am from Uzbekistan. I am a student on an IILT English language course in Balbriggan. I started this course last year in October. The first time I came it was very difficult but very interesting. Every day I have learnt new words, new rules and many different things as well. The first time I didn't understand my teacher because she spoke very quickly but now it's very helpful for me. My English improved every week and I'm feeling more confident. Before I couldn't go to the GP, the shop or many other places because I couldn't understand any words when Irish people asked me and I couldn't speak properly as well. But now I can go to any place and I am not afraid that I don't understand. I am very happy that I came to this course. Now I can read, write, speak and even think in English. I hope that in the future I will speak more fluently and I can choose and go to any college that I want.”

#### A new ECML project

- European Centre for Modern Languages, Graz ([www.ecml.at](http://www.ecml.at))
- Project on whole-school ELP use (2008–2011)  
Aims:
  - To identify existing whole-school projects in Council of Europe member states
  - To support new whole-school projects
  - To publish a series of case studies
  - To publish guidelines for the design, management and evaluation of whole-school ELP projectsActivities:
  - October 2008: workshop – establishment of network
  - 2008–2010: regular reports of whole-school projects published on ECML website
  - 2010: network meeting
  - 2011: finalization of case studies and guidelines; seminar for deciders

### **The challenge of plurilingualism**

- The concept: “plurilingualism” is a characteristic of individuals, “multilingualism” a characteristic of societies
- CEFR: “the plurilingual approach emphasizes the fact that as an individual person’s experience of language in its cultural contexts expands, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples (whether learnt at school or college, or by direct experience), he or she does not keep these languages in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact” (Council of Europe 2001, p.4)
- How do we develop and implement a plurilingual curriculum?
  - The Council of Europe has just begun work on a set of guidelines for ministries and language educators
- How do we bring instructed and naturalistic plurilingualism into fruitful contact with one another?
  - The ELP is intended to include naturalistic L2 learning
- Our plurilingual capacity is rooted in our L1, whereas the CEFR and ELP are explicitly concerned with L2s
  - We need to expand the ELP concept
  - The Council of Europe’s project on Languages of Education ([www.coe.int/lang](http://www.coe.int/lang), section LANGUAGES OF SCHOOL EDUCATION)

### **Reference**

Council of Europe, 2001: *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.