Self-assessment and the European Language Portfolio: Towards a new assessment culture

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Overview

- The rationale for learner self-assessment in foreign language (FL) pedagogy
- The European Language Portfolio (ELP) as an instrument for self-assessment
- ELP self-assessment integrated into assessment procedures in formal educational settings
- Necessary prerequisites and conditions for successful implementation
- Concluding remarks
In learner-centred pedagogies calculated to promote the development of learner autonomy, self-assessment plays a central role in shaping and directing the reflective processes on which such development depends. If learners are to be fully involved in the setting of learning targets and the selection of learning activities and materials, they must develop a capacity for self-assessment.

(Little 2005:322)
Learner self-assessment in FL education

Theoretical roots:

- Assessment *for* learning
- Learner-centred ethos in FL education
- Affective/psychological factors and aspects of personal/social development inaccessible to assessment by others
- Learner autonomy
- Needs of modern society: ‘Europe as a common house’ characterised by mobility, international cooperation, professional networks etc. calls for competent language users and lifelong learning
- Education for democratic citizenship: ‘not enough merely to teach about the various modes of democratic participation: students at all levels must also have first-hand experience of the participatory process’ (Little 1999:7)
European Language Portfolio

Structure:

a) a **Language Passport** which summarizes learners’ linguistic identity, language learning and experience and language qualifications in an internationally transparent manner

b) A **Language Biography** which enables learners to assess themselves, set learning targets, monitor their progress and record learning and intercultural experiences

c) A **Dossier** in which learners keep samples of work that best represent their FL proficiency
European Language Portfolio

Functions:

a) **Reporting**: learners record their proficiency in different languages and their learning experiences in a comprehensive, comparable and transparent way.

b) **Pedagogical**: learners develop the capacity for reflection and self-assessment and gradually become autonomous.

These two functions are *interdependent* and are served through summative and formative self-assessment.
Language Passport

- Summative self-assessment for reporting purposes
  - An overview of language proficiency according to six levels (A1-C2) and five skills (listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, writing)
  - Self-assessment grid: provides general information about the ELP owner’s language competence
Self-assessment and the European Language Portfolio
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Listening</strong></th>
<th><strong>A1</strong></th>
<th><strong>A2</strong></th>
<th><strong>B1</strong></th>
<th><strong>B2</strong></th>
<th><strong>C1</strong></th>
<th><strong>C2</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning family, immediate environment, and personal affairs when people speak slowly and clearly.</td>
<td>I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning family, immediate environment, and personal affairs when people speak slowly and clearly.</td>
<td>I can understand the main points of familiar everyday speech on topics related to personal, family, work, and local affairs, with a few reservations, mainly with familiar people, and with whom I feel comfortable.</td>
<td>I can understand the main points of complex familiar speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in everyday situations, especially when the delivery is clear and the language is simple and familiar.</td>
<td>I can understand extended speech and lectures on familiar topics if the delivery is clear and the language is simple and familiar.</td>
<td>I can understand extended speech and lectures if the delivery is clear and the language is simple and familiar.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Reading</strong></th>
<th><strong>A1</strong></th>
<th><strong>A2</strong></th>
<th><strong>B1</strong></th>
<th><strong>B2</strong></th>
<th><strong>C1</strong></th>
<th><strong>C2</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can read very short, simple texts, for example notices and simple posters or catalogues.</td>
<td>I can read very short, simple texts, for example notices and simple posters or catalogues.</td>
<td>I can read texts of medium length, for example notices and simple posters or catalogues.</td>
<td>I can read texts of medium length, for example notices and simple posters or catalogues.</td>
<td>I can read texts of medium length, for example notices and simple posters or catalogues.</td>
<td>I can read texts of medium length, for example notices and simple posters or catalogues.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Spoken Production</strong></th>
<th><strong>A1</strong></th>
<th><strong>A2</strong></th>
<th><strong>B1</strong></th>
<th><strong>B2</strong></th>
<th><strong>C1</strong></th>
<th><strong>C2</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe what I can do and what I like.</td>
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<td>I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe what I can do and what I like.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Writing</strong></th>
<th><strong>A1</strong></th>
<th><strong>A2</strong></th>
<th><strong>B1</strong></th>
<th><strong>B2</strong></th>
<th><strong>C1</strong></th>
<th><strong>C2</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings.</td>
<td>I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings.</td>
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<td>I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings.</td>
<td>I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings.</td>
<td>I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Self-assessment grid of the Common European Framework of Reference © Council of Europe

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### Global benchmarks of communicative proficiency – Listening and Reading

(for details see Language Proficiency Benchmarks)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A1 BREAKTHROUGH</th>
<th>A2 WAYSTAGE</th>
<th>B1 THRESHOLD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>LISTENING</strong></td>
<td>I can understand words and phrases about myself, my</td>
<td>I can understand most instructions given inside</td>
<td>I can understand detailed instructions given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>family and school and simple questions and</td>
<td>and outside school and can follow topics</td>
<td>in school. The main points of topics presented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>instructions.</td>
<td>covered in the different subject classes.</td>
<td>in different classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>READING</strong></td>
<td>I can recognize the letters of the alphabet and</td>
<td>I can understand short texts on familiar</td>
<td>I can understand descriptions of events,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>can understand signs and simple notices in the</td>
<td>subjects and can use the alphabet to find items</td>
<td>feelings and wishes and can use comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>school and on the way to school. I can understand</td>
<td>in lists (e.g., a name in a telephone book).</td>
<td>questions to find specific answers in a piece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>words on labels or posters in the classroom and</td>
<td></td>
<td>of text. I can also use key words, diagrams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>some of the words and phrases in a new piece of</td>
<td></td>
<td>and illustrations to help me understand texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>text.</td>
<td></td>
<td>I am reading. I can follow written instructions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Example:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A1</th>
<th>A2</th>
<th>B1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>READING</strong></td>
<td>17/5/2005</td>
<td>26/9/2005</td>
<td>18/10/2005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* with a lot of help  ** with a little help  *** with no help

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**Self-assessment and the European Language Portfolio**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spoken Interaction</th>
<th>A1 BREAKTHROUGH</th>
<th>A2 WAYSTAGE</th>
<th>B1 THRESHOLD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can say hello and goodbye, please and thank you, can ask for directions in the school, and can ask and answer simple questions.</td>
<td>I can answer questions about my family, friends, school work, hobbies and holidays. I can keep up a conversation with my classmates when we are working together, and can express my feelings.</td>
<td>I can talk fluently about school, my family, my daily routine and my likes and dislikes. I can take part in classroom discussions and can hold conversations with other students about things I am interested in. I can repeat what has been said and pass the information on to another person.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Spoken Production | I can give a simple description of where I live and people I know, especially members of my family. | I can describe my family, my daily routines and activities, and my plans for the immediate or more distant future. | I can retell what has been studied in class or the plot of a film I have seen or a book I have read. I can describe a special family event (religious festival, birthday etc.) and can explain my opinions and plans. |

| Writing | I can write my name and address and the name of the school. I can write labels on charts and diagrams and copy short sentences from the board. | I can write new words in my European Language Portfolio and can write short texts on familiar topics. I can write a short message (e.g., a postcard or e-mail) to a friend. | I can write a short letter, a summary of a book, poem or film, an account of my opinions or feelings about an event or situation, and a short dialogue. |

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Language Biography

- Formative self-assessment for pedagogical purposes

Checklists of descriptors arranged on levels and skills used for:

- Planning, monitoring and reflecting on learning
- Defining learning goals
- Identifying learning tasks
- Determining assessment criteria
- Designing (task-based) curricula
- Use of the target language (TL) as a medium of reflection and self-assessment because they are available in each of the ELP owner’s TL
**Self-assessment Checklist**

*Language:*

*Use this checklist to record what you think you can do (Column 1). Ask someone else, for example your teacher, to also assess what they think you can do (Column 2). Use Column 3 to mark those things that you cannot yet do which you feel are important for you (Column 3 = Objectives). Add to the list – perhaps with your teacher – other things that you can do, or that are important for your language learning at this level.*

*Use the following symbols:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In columns 1 and 2</th>
<th>In column 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓✓ I can do this easily</td>
<td>! This is a priority for me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓✓ I can do this under normal circumstances</td>
<td>!! This is an objective for me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*If you have over 80% of the points ticked, you have probably reached Level A1.*

### Listening

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Me</th>
<th>My teacher/another</th>
<th>My objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- I can understand when someone speaks very slowly to me and articulates carefully, with long pauses for me to assimilate meaning.
- I can understand simple directions how to get from X to Y, by foot or public transport.
- I can understand questions and instructions addressed carefully and slowly to me and follow short, simple directions.
- I can understand numbers, prices and times.
Dossier

- Both summative and formative self-assessment
  - ‘process’ dossier: a collection of materials that supports learning in progress
  - ‘display’ dossier: a selection of learners’ work that shows off their proficiency to good effect
Ways of recording vocabulary and information

Example 1: A vocabulary tree

History topic

Places
- Place 1
- Place 2

People
Date
Events

More information

Example 2: An information grid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Main points</th>
<th>Important vocabulary</th>
<th>Page(s) in text book</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rivers</td>
<td>3 stages etc.</td>
<td>valley ox-bow meander etc.</td>
<td>15-20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 3: Definitions and examples

meander: to meander: A river meanders when it is old
a meander: a bend in a road or river

Example 4: Categorising information and vocabulary

- Human use
  - washing
  - cooking
  - travelling

- Large scale uses of water
  - settlement
  - domestic
  - industrial

- Transportation
  - crops
  - minerals

- Farming
  - irrigation
  - pollution

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Self-assessment through the ELP

The ELP ‘encourages learner self-assessment and the recording of assessment by teachers, educational authorities and examination bodies’

(Council of Europe 2006:10)

Given that the ELP is the property of its owner, the recording of teacher assessment is always independent of the learner’s self-assessment and not used to correct it.
ELP self-assessment & external assessment

Complementary rather than mutually exclusive:

‘Self-assessment is based on the learner’s developed capacity to reflect on his or her own knowledge, skills and achievement, while assessment by others provides an external, objective measure of the same knowledge, skills and achievement’.

(Little and Perclovà 2001:57)
Dialectic assessment

- **ELP assessment**
  
  a) Formative self-assessment through the biography & dossier
  
  b) Summative self-assessment through the passport & dossier

- **External assessment**
  
  a) Continuous assessment by teachers
  
  b) School examinations
Necessary prerequisites & reforms

- Reconciling final examinations with the ELP
- Constructive alignment of FL curricula
- Adopting appropriate approaches to FL teaching
- Teacher education and continuous professional development (CPD)
Concluding remarks

- ‘Exploration, challenge and change’
- Re-conceptualisation of the concept of assessment and re-examination of its role and functions in education
- Not a panacea but its appropriate implementation can have a transformative impact on FL learning, teaching and assessment
- Teacher motivation, good will and a clear understanding of the ELP philosophy essential for a bottom-up approach to implementation
- From ELP assessment to a whole-school ELP-oriented theory of language learning and teaching
Contact details & useful links

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  [kostopos@tcd.ie](mailto:kostopos@tcd.ie)

- **Useful links**
  - [www.coe.int/portfolio](http://www.coe.int/portfolio) (European Language Portfolio, Council of Europe)
  - [www.tcd.ie/immigration](http://www.tcd.ie/immigration) (English Language Support Programme, Trinity Immigration Initiative)
References


