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# **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

# Learner self-assessment in FL education

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)

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# 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

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# 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

		A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
<b>U N D E R S T A N D I N G</b>	<b>Listening</b>	I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
	<b>Reading</b>	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structural or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.
<b>S P E A K I N G</b>	<b>Spoken Interaction</b>	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in areas where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation of discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
	<b>Spoken Production</b>	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
<b>W R I T I N G</b>	<b>Writing</b>	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select a style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.

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

**Global benchmarks of communicative proficiency – Listening and Reading** (for details see Language Proficiency Benchmarks)

		A1 BREAKTHROUGH	A2 WAYSTAGE	B1 THRESHOLD
U N D E R S T A N D I N G	<b>Listening</b> 	I can understand words and phrases about myself, my family and school and simple questions and instructions.	I can understand most instructions given inside and outside school, and can follow topics covered in the different subject classes.	I can understand detailed instructions given in school, the main points of topics presented in different classes, and short films about things I am familiar with. I can follow most conversations between other students without difficulty.
	<b>Reading</b> 	I can recognize the letters of the alphabet and can understand signs and simple notices in the school and on the way to school. I can understand words on labels or posters in the classroom and some of the words and phrases in a new piece of text.	I can understand short texts on familiar subjects and can use the alphabet to find items in lists (e.g., a name in a telephone book).	I can understand descriptions of events, feelings and wishes and can use comprehension questions to find specific answers in a piece of text. I can also use key words, diagrams and illustrations to help me understand texts I am reading. I can follow written instructions for carrying out school activities.

**Example:**

		A1			A2			B1		
		*	**	***	*	**	***	*	**	***
<b>Listening</b> 		15/9/2004	17/10/2004	14/11/2004	18/12/2004	15/2/2005	20/4/2005	17/5/2005	20/9/2005	19/10/2005

		A1			A2			B1		
		*	**	***	*	**	***	*	**	***
<b>Listening</b> 										
<b>Reading</b> 										

\* with a lot of help

\*\* with a little help

\*\*\* with no help

Global benchmarks of communicative proficiency – Speaking and Writing (for details see Language Proficiency Benchmarks)

		A1 BREAKTHROUGH	A2 WAYSTAGE	B1 THRESHOLD
S P E A K I N G	Spoken Interaction 	I can say <i>hello</i> and <i>goodbye</i> , <i>please</i> and <i>thank you</i> , can ask for directions in the school, and can ask and answer simple questions.	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.	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.
	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.
W R I T I N G	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.

	A1			A2			B1		
	*	**	***	*	**	***	*	**	***
Spoken Interaction 									
Spoken Production 									
Writing 									

# 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:

In columns 1 and 2

- ✓ I can do this under normal circumstances
- ✓✓ I can do this easily

In column 3

- ! This is an objective for me
- !! This is a priority for me

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



## Listening

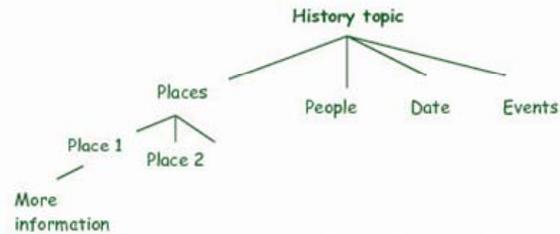
	Me	My teacher/another	My objectives
	1	2	3
I can understand when someone speaks very slowly to me and articulates carefully, with long pauses for me to assimilate meaning.			
I can understand simple directions how to get from X to Y, by foot or public transport.			
I can understand questions and instructions 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



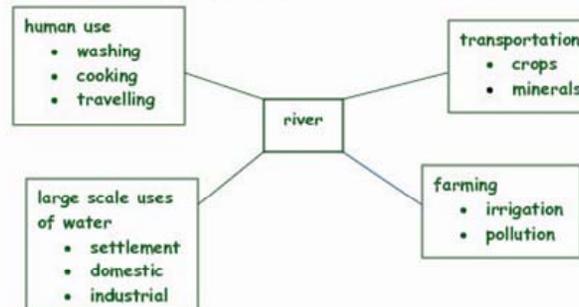
Example 2: An information grid

Topic	Main points	Important vocabulary	Page(s) in text book
<i>Rivers</i>	<i>3 stages etc.</i>	<i>valley ox-bow meander etc.</i>	15-20

Example 3: Definitions and examples

<i>meander</i>	<i>to meander: A river meanders when it is old a meander: a bend in a road or river</i>
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Example 4: Categorising information and vocabulary



# 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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- **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)

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