Autonomy and 2nd language learning Overview

- Learner autonomy: a working definition and its implications
- Learner autonomy, the ELP and the CEF
- Why is learner autonomy important?
- What must the teacher do? Three pedagogical principles and their operationalization
- Some questions for discussion
The “ability to take charge of one’s own learning”

“This ability is not inborn but must be acquired either by ‘natural’ means or (as most often happens) by formal learning, i.e. in a systematic, deliberate way”

“To take charge of one’s learning is to have … the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning …”

(Holec 1981, p.3)
The first step towards autonomy is acceptance of responsibility for one’s own learning.

Acceptance of responsibility is a matter of conscious intention.

Learner autonomy entails the development of explicit skills of reflection, analysis and evaluation.

Learner autonomy means learning how to learn.

An autonomous learner is a motivated learner.

Reminiscence from generative grammar epistemological background.
Learner autonomy and the ELP

According to the *Principles and Guidelines*

- The ELP reflects the Council of Europe’s concern with
  - the development of the language learner [which by implication includes the development of learning skills]
  - the development of the capacity for independent language learning

- The ELP
  - is a tool to promote learner autonomy
Learner autonomy and the CEF

“In its most general sense, savoir–apprendre is the ability to observe and participate in new experience and to incorporate new knowledge into existing knowledge, modifying the latter where necessary”

“Ability to learn has several components, such as language and communication awareness; general phonetic skills; study skills; and heuristic skills”

(CEF, pp. 106f.)
Autonomy is a basic human need that is as relevant to learning as to any other aspect of life.

Autonomy is nourished by, but in turn nourishes, our intrinsic motivation, our proactive interest in the world around us.

Learner autonomy solves the problem of learner motivation.
Because autonomous learners are motivated and reflective learners, their learning is efficient and effective (conversely, all learning is likely to succeed to the extent that the learner is autonomous)

The efficiency and effectiveness of the autonomous learner increases substantially the applicability of the acquired knowledge to situations that arise in the “outside” world
In all formal learning, learner autonomy entails reflective involvement in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating learning.

Language learning depends crucially on language use: we can learn to speak only by speaking, etc.

Thus in formal *language* learning, the scope of learner autonomy is always constrained by what the learner can *do* in the target language.
Affective dimension
- Learner involvement

Metacognitive dimension
- Learner reflection
  - (metacognitive)

Communicative dimension
- Target language use
What does the teacher do?

- Use the target language as the preferred medium of classroom communication and require the same of her learners.

- Involve her learners in a non-stop quest for good learning activities, which are shared, discussed, analysed and evaluated with the whole class – in the target language, to begin with in very simple terms.

- Help her learners to set their own learning targets and choose their own learning activities, subjecting them to discussion, analysis and evaluation – again, in the target language.
What does the teacher do?

- Require her learners to identify individual goals but pursue them through collaborative work in small groups.
- Require her learners to keep a written record of their learning – plans of lessons and projects, lists of useful vocabulary, whatever texts they themselves produce.
- Engage her learners in regular evaluation of their progress as individual learners and as a class – in the target language.
Questions for discussion

“[It] is not the function of the Framework to promote one particular language teaching methodology, but instead to present options” (CEF, p. 142) Consider those options (CEF, p. 143; provided on a separate handout) and answer these questions:

- Which of the options best characterize language teaching practice in your context?
- How many of them are compatible with learner autonomy as elaborated in this presentation?
- Which of them are most likely to accommodate work on the ELP?

How would you encourage learner autonomy in your context?
References


From the Common European Framework of Reference to the European Language Portfolio
Overview

- What is the European Language Portfolio?
- The challenge that the ELP poses to
  - pedagogy
  - curricula
  - assessment
- The challenge to language education policy
- Conclusion
What is the ELP?

Three obligatory components:

- *Language passport* – Summarizes the owner’s linguistic identity and language learning and intercultural experience; records the owner’s self-assessment against the Self-assessment Grid in the CEFR
### Self-assessment grid (CEF and standard adult passport)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A1</th>
<th>A2</th>
<th>B1</th>
<th>B2</th>
<th>C1</th>
<th>C2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding</strong></td>
<td>I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.</td>
<td>I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.</td>
<td>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</td>
<td>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 news or TV programmes on current affairs or</td>
<td>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</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Listening</strong></td>
<td>I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, example on notices and posters or catalogues.</td>
<td>I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, example on notices and posters or catalogues.</td>
<td>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 my reply. I’m trying to say.</td>
<td>I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on familiar topics.</td>
<td>I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing argument or answer in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td>I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.</td>
<td>I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<td>I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text which is appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Speaking</strong></td>
<td>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 my reply. I’m trying to say.</td>
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<td>I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on familiar topics.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Spoken interaction</strong></td>
<td>I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.</td>
<td>I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.</td>
<td>I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.</td>
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<td>I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.</td>
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</table>

I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area 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).
What is the ELP?

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What is the ELP?

Three obligatory components:

- **Language passport** – Summarizes the owner’s linguistic identity and language learning and intercultural experience; records the owner’s self-assessment against the Self-assessment Grid in the CEFR.

- **Language biography** – Provides a reflective accompaniment to the ongoing processes of learning and using second languages and engaging with the cultures associated with them; uses “I can” checklists for goal setting and self-assessment.
# CercleS ELP: goal-setting and self-assessment checklists

## Level B1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Description</th>
<th>My next goal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can readily handle conversations on most topics that are familiar or of personal interest, with generally appropriate use of register</td>
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<td>I can sustain an extended conversation or discussion but may sometimes need a little help in communicating my thoughts</td>
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<td>I can take part in routine formal discussion on familiar subjects in my academic or professional field if it is conducted in clearly articulated speech in standard dialect</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can exchange, check and confirm factual information on familiar routine and non-routine matters within my field with some confidence</td>
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<td>I can express and respond to feelings and attitudes (e.g., surprise, happiness, sadness, interest, uncertainty, indifference)</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can agree and disagree politely, exchange personal opinions, negotiate decisions and ideas</td>
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<td>I can express my thoughts about abstract or cultural topics such as music or films, and give brief comments on the views of others</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can explain why something is a problem, discuss what to do next, compare and contrast alternatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can obtain detailed information, messages, instructions and explanations, and can ask for and follow detailed directions</td>
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<td>I can handle most practical tasks in everyday situations (e.g., making telephone enquiries, asking for a refund, negotiating purchase)</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can provide concrete information required in an interview/consultation (e.g., describe symptoms to a doctor), but with limited precision</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can take some initiatives in an interview/consultation (e.g., bring up a new subject) but am very dependent on the interviewer to provide support</td>
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</table>
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- **Dossier** – Collects evidence of L2 proficiency and intercultural experience; supports portfolio learning
What is the ELP?

Two functions:

- **Pedagogical function** – The ELP is designed to make the language learning process more transparent to the learner and foster the development of learner autonomy (cf. the Council of Europe’s commitment to education for democratic citizenship and lifelong learning)

- **Reporting function** – The ELP provides practical evidence of L2 proficiency and intercultural experience (cf. the Council of Europe’s interest in developing a unit credit scheme in the 1970s)
What is the ELP?

Key features:

- Values all language and intercultural learning, whether it takes place in formal educational contexts or outside them
  - Some educational traditions find this problematic

- Designed to promote plurilingualism and pluriculturalism
  - This has posed a particular challenge to ELP design
  - The revised French ELP for older adolescents and adults (5.2000 rev.2006) marks an important breakthrough
A brief history


- Recommended the development of a Common European Framework
- Recommended the establishment of a working party to consider possible forms and functions of a European Language Portfolio
- Proposed that the ELP should contain a section in which formal qualifications are related to a common European scale, another in which the learner him/herself keeps a personal record of language learning experiences, and possibly a third which contains examples of work done
A brief history

- 1997: publication of proposals for the development of ELPs for language learners of different ages and in different domains (CoE 1997)
  - 15 countries
  - 3 INGOs: ALTE/EAQUALS, CercleS, ELC
  - About 2,000 teachers
  - About 30,000 learners
A brief history

Supports provided by the Language Policy Division:

- D. Little (ed.), *The European Language Portfolio in use: nine examples*, 2003
- D. Little and B. Simpson, *The intercultural component and learning how to learn* (language biography templates), 2003
- Data bank of descriptors for use in checklists, 2003
A brief history

Today the Council of Europe’s website lists

- 80 validated and accredited ELPs from
  - 25 countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom
  - 3 INGOs: EAQUALS/ALTE, CercleS, European Language Council
  - 1 consortium: Milestone Project (Socrates–Comenius 2.1)

- According to figures submitted by ELP contact persons in Council of Europe member states, approximately 2 million ELPs had been distributed by 2005
A brief history

There is a small but convincing body of empirical research to show that the ELP can make a positive difference to language learners and teachers, for example:

- Finland (Kohonen 2002, 2004)
- Czech Republic (Perclová 2006)
- Ireland (Ushioda and Ridley 2002, Sisamakis 2006)

But a wealth of anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a lot of resistance to the ELP: 2 million ELPs may have been distributed, but it seems that only a small percentage are in regular use.

Because the ELP (with the CEFR behind it) poses a challenge to pedagogy, curricula and assessment.
The ELP is designed to promote the development of learner autonomy.

It does this by stimulating reflection on the content and process of learning and (especially) assigning a central role to self-assessment.

This aspect of ELP use requires significant pedagogical innovation: despite the aim of many national curricula to promote learner independence and critical thinking, self-assessment and other forms of reflection are not widely practised.

The challenge to pedagogy is also a challenge to teacher education.
The challenge to curricula

- The ELP is often felt by teachers and learners to demand additional effort that is not obviously related to the curriculum.
- This might change if curricula were expressed (partly) in the CEFR’s action-oriented (“can do”) terms.
- An example: Ireland’s approach to teaching English as a second language to immigrant pupils in primary schools:
  - Scaled (“can do”) curriculum (CEFR levels A1–B1)
  - ELP mediates curriculum to pupils via “I can” checklists
  - ELP and “pre–ELP” used on a large scale
The CEFR offers to bring curriculum, pedagogy and assessment into closer interaction with one another than has often been the case.

Each “can do” descriptor implies:
- A learning target
- Teaching/learning activities
- Assessment criteria

The self-assessment checklists in the ELP can serve the same three functions.

Do national/public examinations likewise reflect an action-oriented approach?
According to the *Principles and Guidelines*, the ELP should support the development of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism.

- Every model should accommodate *all* the second/foreign languages the owner knows, including those learnt outside formal education.
- Every model should prompt the owner to reflect on his/her developing plurilingual and pluricultural identity.
- In this way the ELP reflects the ideal (necessity?) of a Europe strongly committed to lifelong language learning.
The plurilingual/pluricultural dimension of the ELP requires significant pedagogical innovation: it can be realized only if schools use the ELP to underpin the teaching of all languages in some kind of interaction with one another.

The plurilingual/pluricultural dimension also challenges national authorities to reconsider key features of their language education policy:

- Which languages should be offered?
- How many languages should the individual student learn, for how long, and to what level(s)?
The ELP has the capacity to transform language teaching and learning
- It supports the reflective cycle of planning, implementing and evaluating learning
- It makes language learners aware of their evolving plurilingual/pluricultural identity
- It can facilitate the implementation of language education policies that assign a central role to plurilingualism
- It provides practical evidence that complements the more abstract evidence of exam grades and certificates
Conclusion

- The ELP is unlikely to become a fixture in national educational systems unless it is
  - strongly promoted by ministries
  - given a central role in language teacher education
  - supported by a curriculum that defines language learning goals in “can do” terms
  - complemented by examinations that are explicitly shaped by an action-oriented philosophy