

Vorsprung durch Technik: developing an on-line version of the European Language Portfolio (ELP)

OVERVIEW:

In our paper, we introduce the concept of the European Language Portfolio (ELP). We then give a brief overview of the Language Online Portfolio (LOLIPOP) project (LOLIPOP website, 2007) which has as its main focus the development of a multilingual, interactive, online ELP, known as the LOLIPOP ELP. A selection of key elements and features of the LOLIPOP ELP are then presented and their potential impact on the language learner assessed.

THE EUROPEAN LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO INITIATIVE:

The European Language Portfolio (ELP) is a language learning tool introduced by the Council of Europe (CoE) in 1998 (CoE website, 2007). It is a document consisting of a Passport, a Biography and a Dossier. The Passport provides an identity profile of its bearer relating to the person's experiences and abilities in different languages and intercultural contexts. In it, the language learner records formal qualifications as well as a self-assessment of his/her language skills. Self-assessment is defined in terms of proficiency levels set out by the 'Common European Framework of Reference for Languages' (CEFR), (Council of Europe, 2001). The CEFR contains both a global scale containing descriptors from A1 (beginner) to C2 (advanced) as well as a series of five scales from A1 to C2 for listening, reading, writing, spoken production and spoken interaction. The Biography section of the portfolio is an updateable record of how, why and where a learner has learned each language that he/she knows. It fosters learner independence by assisting the learner to set, monitor and evaluate relevant language learning aims and objectives, and by encouraging him or her to reflect on language learning and intercultural experiences. Thirdly, in the Dossier, the language learner is encouraged to showcase samples of work as evidence of his/her competence in the target language. The Dossier helps the learner to reflect on progress and can also be used to demonstrate their capabilities to others, perhaps employers or directors of academic courses.

When the notion of an ELP was originally introduced, it was envisaged, primarily, as taking a hard-copy format, for example, a ring binder or a plastic/paper folder containing a number of pages and to which materials could be added by the language learner. This has largely continued to be the case up to the present day. The paper versions of the ELP have a number of disadvantages in that they tend to be unwieldy and difficult to navigate containing as they often do large amounts of material repeated in the different languages concerned. By their nature, they also fail to exploit the opportunities offered by ICT in the field of language learning. The aim of the project described in the following section, the Language Online Portfolio Project (LOLIPOP), is the development of a multilingual, online, interactive version of the ELP.

THE LANGUAGE ONLINE PORTFOLIO PROJECT (LOLIPOP) 2004-7:

This project represents a pan-European partnership of twelve higher education institutions from eight countries and is funded by the Socrates (Lingua 2) programme. As mentioned above, the focus is on the creation of a multilingual, on-line, interactive version of the European Language Portfolio (ELP). This online ELP, the LOLIPOP ELP will be available initially in French, German, Norwegian, Latvian, Polish and English. There is also a facility by which additional languages may be added.

THE LOLIPOP ELP: SOME KEY FEATURES

An objective of the LOLIPOP project is to harness the potential of ICT in order to enhance the concept of the ELP. Five key features of the LOLIPOP ELP, which we believe achieve this objective, are increased connectivity, improved visuals and animation, increased ease of navigation, portability, and the existence of a “share-function”:

Connectivity:

In the case of the LOLIPOP ELP, increasing its connectivity involved placing the Biography section of the ELP with its dual functions of reporting and planning at the heart of the new online layout or structure of the ELP together with self-assessment. Thus, once the language learner begins to complete the various sections on self-assessment, reporting and planning, these generate the information required to complete the Passport. Some of the information provided is also exported to the Dossier. The purpose of this approach is to encourage the language learner to view the process of self-assessment, in particular, as being at the heart of the ELP and indeed of the language learning process. By assessing their current position regarding their learning of particular languages, the language learner puts themselves in a position whereby they can both report on what they have achieved to date and set goals and objectives for the future, i.e. plan.

The increased connectivity of the LOLIPOP ELP also simplifies the self-assessment process for the learner. For example, if the learner clicks on self-assessment, they are presented with global descriptors relating to the target language they have selected (Fig.1)

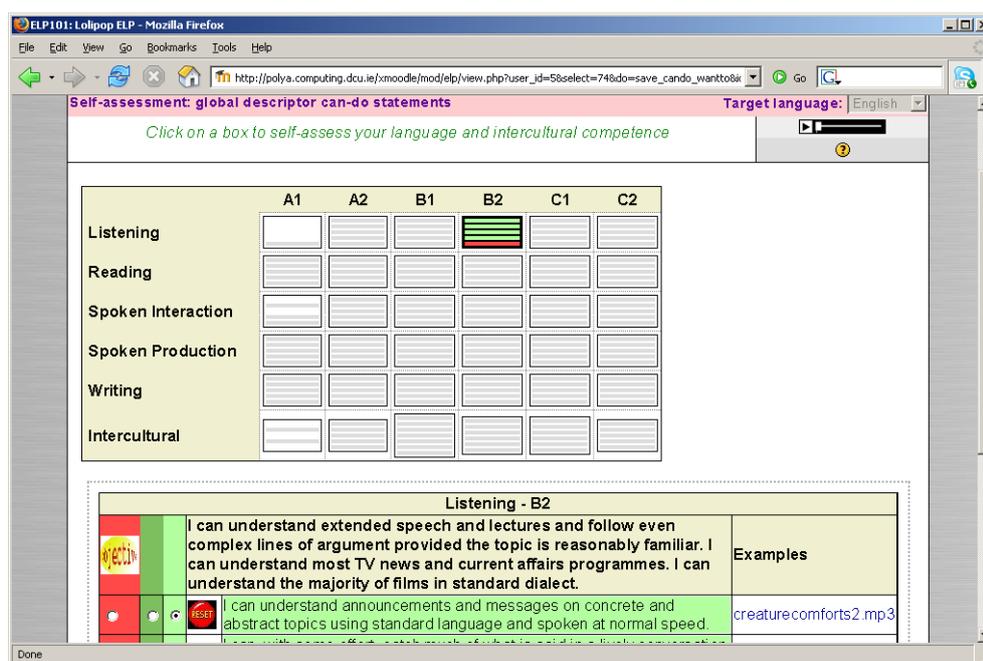


Figure 1: Screen shot of LOLIPOP 2.0 self-assessment grid

As demonstrated (Fig. 1), the process of self-assessment is further simplified for the learner by the provision of a function whereby clicking on the relevant CEFR levels causes the related descriptors and can-do statements to appear. Examples are also provided for each of the can-do statements. In the original ELPs, this information was contained in different sections and on different pages with the exception of the can-do examples which were not provided at all.

Once the learner has selected their level for each of the languages they speak and saved this information, it is automatically exported to the Passport and used to generate the *Profile of*

Language Skills within the Passport. Furthermore, links are also provided throughout the LOLIPOP ELP to suitable language learning resources.

Motivation through animation:

Furthermore, within the portfolio itself there are many examples of creative use of visuals, animation, audio help-files, flash-files etc. These are designed to motivate the language student and to make the online ELP more attractive and user-friendly.

Portability :

Their online ELP can be easily accessed by the language learner. It is also possible for them to print off pages or sections of their ELP whenever they so choose. As a result, it is something that can accompany the language learner throughout their lives permitting them to up-date and showcase their language competence at regular intervals fostering the notion that language learning is something that continues beyond the formal classroom.

Ease of navigation:

The online version of the ELP is easier to navigate than the paper version. This is partly owing to the fact that the learner can select a particular language to work with during a particular session and then does not have to trawl through many translations of the same material. The different sections of the ELP, i.e. Passport, Biography, Dossier also appear along the bottom of each page in the LOLIPOP ELP together with a button linked to resources. This helps the learner to orient themselves within the ELP.

Share-function:

In addition, the fact that the LOLIPOP ELP operates as a Moodle plug-in with learners currently able to access the tool in the twelve partner institutions via the same server, means that the capability for tandem learning is evident. Currently two partner institutions, DCU, Dublin and ENST, Brest, France, are exploring this function in a series of activities designed to enhance intercultural learning.

SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS:

There are almost as many ways to use the LOLIPOP ELP to support the language learning process as there are teachers, learners and learning contexts. A great deal of further research, in particular action and case-study research is required in order to determine how an online ELP can best support the language learning process.

One of the pedagogical principles underlying the development of this ELP is that all students studying a language should be introduced to the online ELP in their first semester. This would also require them to be introduced to the notion of self-assessment and goal-setting regarding what they would like to achieve in terms of their language proficiency and intercultural development at each stage of their college career. It is proposed to pilot such an approach in Dublin City University in the coming semesters and to monitor and assess its impact.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

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