

Using an e-portfolio to facilitate the self-assessment of both language and intercultural learning in higher education: a case-study approach.

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Abstract:

The focus of this paper is twofold: first, on the development of an electronic version of a European Language Portfolio (ELP), known as the LOLIPOP (Language On-line Portfolio Project) ELP, and, second on its integration into an undergraduate module on Intercultural Communication in an institute of higher education in Ireland.

The paper begins by looking at the European Language Portfolio in the wider context of portfolios in education. It then describes the development and key features of the LOLIPOP ELP in particular the self-assessment of both linguistic and intercultural elements. It continues by explaining how the LOLIPOP ELP was integrated into the module in question. Finally, the paper presents the output from the participants in this study focussing on their perceptions of the self-assessment process.

1 Introduction

Increased social and professional mobility and the expansion of world economic markets has led to a stronger focus on both linguistic and intercultural competence in an environment where “workers from many different cultures work together, regardless of their location” (Deardorff 2009: xi, Sercu 2010: 17). This is also true in the context of higher education as it is inevitable that students will come into “contact with people who are different, but, like themselves, have multiple identities and their own individuality” (Byram, Gribkova, Starkey 2002: 5). Inclusion of an intercultural dimension in language teaching fosters communicative competence in multicultural environments, while also allowing learners to reflect on their own personal and cultural identity and develop their linguistic skills. Traditional language teaching tended to focus on a given culture as a monocultural, static unit, presenting a largely unchanging bank of knowledge to be acquired in order to be able to function in that culture. Thus, tools are required which will assist the language learner in developing both their linguistic and intercultural skills and in addition their ability to self-assess their competence in these areas. The portfolio is such a tool.

This paper begins by looking at learning portfolios in education in general. Against this backdrop the development of the European Language Portfolio is discussed. The focus then moves to a particular electronic version of the ELP known as the LOLIPOP ELP.

In the second section of the paper, the focus is on the integration of the LOLIPOP ELP into an undergraduate module on Intercultural Communication in an institute of higher education in Ireland, Waterford Institute of Technology. The paper concludes with some recommendations and implications for the language and intercultural classroom.

2 Learning portfolios

Portfolios have been used in education in a variety of disciplines (e.g. art, architecture, languages, teacher education) with different purposes and outcomes. In education portfolios can be used for three main purposes:

1. To support the learning process;
2. To showcase learning;
3. For purpose of formative or summative assessment (Abrami 2005, Barrett 2010)

A portfolio can be designed to centre round the *process* of individual learning, or as a *product*, to demonstrate what learners have achieved: the *showcase* or *assessment* portfolio. The process portfolio gives learners a means to manage their learning over time through embedded structures and strategies (Abrami 2005), and through on-going reflection to form a better understanding of their own learning processes (Greenberg 2004). Showcase portfolios are designed to demonstrate learner achievement in one or more areas, possibly for the purpose of employment (Barrett 2010; Abrami 2005). These portfolios are organised after the work has been created, allowing the learner to decide what aspects of their work they want to showcase, for whom and for what purpose. This should not be a mere collection of artefacts, but should be supported by reflection (Greenberg 2004).

A portfolio can also be used in both formative and summative assessment, although Abrami (2005) suggests that its use in high-stake summative assessment is problematic. A *structured portfolio* could be designed with clearly stated requirements that focus learners' time and attention on specific pre-defined tasks (Greenberg 2004). This can be linked to learning outcomes of a course, and facilitates review and evaluation of work done. Formative assessment or assessment *for* learning requires deep involvement of the learner for self-regulation of learning processes, e.g. learning goals, strategies used to achieve goals, management of resources, effort, reaction to feedback and the products produced (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick 2006). While summative assessment (*of* learning) limits the time for production of work and requires extrinsic motivation, formative assessment (*for* learning) is ongoing, time is more flexible and fosters intrinsic motivation (Barrett 2005).

Given the variety of possible uses, Barrett (2007: 2) recommends that portfolios be given a modifier to describe their purpose. LOLIPOP is described as a learning and self-assessment portfolio that supports the development of learner autonomy, as well as the processes of self-assessment and reflection on language and intercultural learning in a Higher Education context (LOLIPOP website).

Whatever the intended purpose of the portfolio, what is common to most is the idea of a workspace to include selected evidence of learning and reflection (Barrett, 2007; Abrami and Barrett 2005; Zubizaretta 2009). Many authors (e.g. Barrett 2005; Landone, Vrasidas, Christodoulou and Retalis 2004) emphasise the fact that reflection is a crucial characteristic of a portfolio. This includes not only reflection on selected pieces of work included in the portfolio, or the so-called artefacts, but also an overall reflection on the story that the portfolio tells (Barrett 2005: 2). Reflection takes place at all stages of portfolio development and allows students to "evaluate their own growth over time as well as discover any gaps in their development" (Abrami and Barrett 2005).

Portfolios can take many forms with the initial versions being paper-based. More recently and with advances in technology, electronic versions have begun to appear in many fields including those of language and intercultural learning. An electronic portfolio uses text, graphics, sound and video to create, manipulate, process, and manage media in a way that is affordable, easy to use and without the limitations of physical space, and can be updated and revised (Greenberg 2004). Barrett identifies five stages in paper-based portfolios as collecting, selecting, reflecting, projecting and celebrating. Use of technology enhances each of these processes through archiving, linking/thinking, storytelling, collaborating and publishing (Barrett 2005), making it a dynamic process, whereby the portfolio can be

updated, reorganised, and presented in different ways for different purposes or audiences (Greenberg 2004). Electronic portfolios also facilitate interactivity, collaboration and autonomous learning.

3 The European Language Portfolio (ELP)

The European Language Portfolio project was launched by the Council of Europe in the 1990s. According to the Council of Europe (<http://www.coe.int/portfolio/>),

The European Language Portfolio is a document in which those who are learning or have learned a language - whether at school or outside school - can record and reflect on their language learning and cultural experiences.

One of the principal aims of the ELP is to assist language learners in becoming autonomous. This goal is emphasised throughout the ELP by encouraging learners to take charge of their own learning by setting their own objectives, monitoring learning and engaging in self-assessment. The ELP is also described as “a tool to promote plurilingualism and pluriculturalism” (Council of Europe 2006: 9). It consists of three components: a) the *Language Passport* in which the learner can describe his or her level of linguistic competence, b) the *Language Biography* in which the learner plans and reflects on his or her learning aims and objectives and assesses his/her progress, c) the *Dossier* in which the learner includes examples of his or her work to showcase learning. In relation to the intercultural dimension of language learning, the passport “describes … intercultural learning experiences” (Council of Europe 2006: 12) in a summative manner, the biography elicits “information on … cultural experiences gained both within and outside of formal educational contexts” (Council for Cultural Cooperation 2006: 14) and in the *Dossier* the learner may illustrate his or her intercultural experiences and achievements.

Self-assessment in the ELP is based on the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* – CEFR (Council of Europe 2001), a central component of which is a global scale containing descriptors for each of six levels of competence. These range from A1 (complete beginner) to C2 (highly proficient). In addition, the CEFR contains a series of five individual scales also ranging from A1 to C2 for the following skills: listening, reading, writing, spoken production and spoken interaction. The framework does begin to address the issue of intercultural competence as an essential component of language learning, which will enable the learner to become “*plurilingual*” and to develop “*interculturality*” (Council of Europe 2001: 38). Through language learning, the learner is expected to develop “an enriched, more complex personality and an enhanced capacity for further language learning and greater openness to new cultural experiences” (Council of Europe 2001: 38). Intercultural awareness is to be promoted by “knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation (similarities and distinctive differences) between the ‘world of origin’ and the ‘world of the target community’. This should also include an awareness of how members of each culture view each other” (Council of Europe 2001: 103).

When the CEFR was in development, the discussion on intercultural competence was not at a stage where a bank of illustrative descriptors similar to that developed for the linguistic skills could be incorporated. Thus, the focus in the CEFR scales is on the five skills listed above. The LOLIPOP ELP aims to progress discussion in this area by including a sixth scale designed for self-assessment of intercultural competence. This is discussed in more detail in the following section.

4 The Language On Line Portfolio Project (LOLIPOP)

The LOLIPOP project created an on-line, interactive ELP in many languages (English, French, German, Latvian, Norwegian, Polish and Spanish to begin with). The LOLIPOP ELP has an enhanced intercultural dimension and is designed to assist the development of learner autonomy, as well as to aid self-assessment and reflection on language and intercultural learning in the context of higher education.

The LOLIPOP project itself represented a pan-European partnership of twelve higher education institutions from eight countries and was funded by the Socrates (Lingua 2) programme (2004-2007). The LOLIPOP ELP is currently available in its seven languages as freeware at <http://www.lolipop-portfolio.eu>. The central element of the LOLIPOP ELP is the Biography (cf. Figure 1).

Figure 1: Biography homepage. (© 2007, LOLIPOP. Used with permission.).

The screenshot shows the LOLIPOP Biography homepage. At the top, there is a banner for the Socrates Lingua Education and Culture program. Below the banner, the navigation path is Moodle > LOLIPOP > BIOGRAPHY. The main title is 'BIOGRAPHY HOMEPAGE' with a sub-instruction: 'Follow the links below in order to report on, self-assess or plan your language and intercultural experiences'. There are three main sections: 'I want to Self-Assess' (with a 'SELF-ASSESS' button), 'I want to report on my language and intercultural learning and transferable skills' (with a 'REPORT' button), and 'I want to plan my future language and intercultural learning' (with a 'PLAN' button). Each section features a small owl icon. At the bottom, there is a navigation bar with tabs: BIOGRAPHY (highlighted in yellow), PASSPORT, DOSSIER, and RESOURCES.

It contains three sections designed to help learners self-assess, report and plan, with self-assessment of both linguistic and intercultural competence dealt with in more detail below.

The LOLIPOP ELP is designed to aid the self-assessment process. For example, if the learner clicks on *self-assess*, a *Profile of Language Skills* appears. This takes the form of an interactive table with the skills down one side and the CEFR levels across the top (cf. Figure 2). The process of self-assessment is further aided 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 the “can-do” statements (cf. Figure 2).

Figure 2: Profile of language skills with statements and examples. (© 2007, LOLIPOP. Used with permission.).

The figure shows a screenshot of the LOLIPOP ELP software. At the top is a grid of icons representing various language skills, each with a corresponding row of six boxes (A1 to C2) for self-assessment. Below this is a detailed view of the 'Listening - B1' section. This section includes a statement about understanding main points of speech and programmes, a 'Examples' section with three small icons, and a row of three circular icons (orange, green, grey) with checkmarks indicating progress or achievement.

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2

Listening - B1

 	<p>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.</p>	Examples
 	<p>I can understand the main points of conversations on familiar matters regularly encountered at work, school, provided people do not use too many 'special'</p>	

As discussed in the previous section, an innovative feature of the LOLIPOP ELP is the inclusion of a sixth skill, that of intercultural competence. While many validated ELPs do refer to intercultural experiences, they focus mainly on their reporting function. In their analysis of the intercultural dimension of validated ELPs, Little and Simpson (2003: 3) note that in the passport “no provision is made for self-assessment that focuses on non-linguistic socio-cultural practices”. They also state that learners are asked to “write reflectively” in the biography, however no focus is provided as to how to approach the task (Little and Simpson 2003: 3). This is what the LOLIPOP portfolio has tried to redress. If the ELP is genuinely to promote ‘plurilingualism *and* pluriculturalism’ (Council of Europe 2006: 10, emphasis added), it is desirable that self-assessment of intercultural competence be developed and incorporated into the ELP.

Fantini (2009) states that the intercultural field is still evolving for language educators. Fundamental issues, such as the abilities needed for successful intercultural interaction, still need to be resolved, before the focus of assessment can be decided. Sercu (2010) also underlines the importance of defining the construct of intercultural competence. While there are no holistic means of measuring learners as “intercultural beings” (p. 24), Sercu does suggest developing an instrument for assessment and self-assessment, using “can-do” statements similar to those proposed by the Council of Europe (2001). Against this background, the LOLIPOP ELP is designed to give teachers:

something to hold on to when planning practice activities and designing learning paths fit to promote individuals’ or groups’ learning, sharing with learners what specific goals they should achieve and what criteria will be used to assess to what extent these goals will be met (Council of Europe 2001: 25)

In the development of a graded scale of “can-do” statements for intercultural communicative competence (figure 3), the LOLIPOP project relied for its conceptual model on Byram’s model of knowledge, skills and attitudes, described in terms of five *savoirs* (Byram 1997), and to a lesser extent, on Bennett’s (1998) DMIS scale of intercultural sensitivity.

These “can-do” statements allow the learner to assess to what extent they have acquired the **knowledge** (*savoirs*) of the other culture, not just knowledge of the visible elements (the products), but also of one’s own and other’s social practices and processes of interaction (Byram 1997: 35). This is an open-ended process because of the dynamic nature of culture, making it suitable for development over time as part of an ELP.

Learners can also assess their **skills** of interpreting and relating to their own and other social identity as evident from ideas, documents or events (*savoir comprendre*) (Byram 1997: 37). “Can-do” statements related to *savoir apprendre/faire* allow learners to assess the skills of acquiring and effectively using new knowledge relating to the artefacts of a culture and to the beliefs, values and norms dominant in their own and the other culture. “Can-do” statements based on *savoir s’engager* (critical cultural awareness) invite the learner to compare and critically evaluate elements of their own and the other’s culture..

The most difficult component of intercultural communicative competence, both in terms of acquisition and measurement is **Attitude** (*savoir être*). Through self-assessment of attitudes towards his or her own and the other culture, the learner is encouraged to reflect on the importance of the attitudinal component of intercultural competence. He/she can measure attitudes of curiosity, tolerance and the ability to “decentre” (Kramsch 1993), to stand outside his or her own culture and view it and the other culture objectively. This is both affective (capacity to relinquish ethnocentric attitudes towards others) and cognitive (ability to establish and maintain a relationship between the own and target culture (Byram and Zarate 1994).

Figure 3: Self-assessment of intercultural competence, level B1 (© 2007, LOLIPOP. Used with permission).

The screenshot shows a Mozilla Firefox browser window with the title "CF101: Lollipop ELP - Mozilla Firefox". The address bar shows the URL: "http://polya.computing.dcu.ie/tmoodle/mod/elp/view.php?id=6&select=74". The main content area displays a self-assessment form titled "Intercultural". The form consists of a table with several rows. Each row contains a statement and a set of checkboxes for self-assessment. Some rows have a green background, while others have an orange background. The columns are labeled "Statement" and "Examples". There are also "Estimated Completion Date" fields for some rows. The bottom of the browser window shows the Windows taskbar with various icons.

Intercultural - B1			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I can understand the underlying beliefs and values that make me and members of the other culture behave the way they do, and I can also see that they have views on how my culture functions. This makes me more critically aware of my own and the other culture	Examples
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I can describe in general terms how my culture is perceived by the other culture. (savoirs)	<input type="button" value="File"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I can understand the reasons for the different values, beliefs and practices of the other culture, although I sometimes feel that my own perspective is more natural. (savoir être)	<input type="button" value="File"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I want to be able to understand some of the underlying meaning of the other language and images used in film, literature, the media and advertising from the other culture. I would like to increase this understanding. (savoir comprendre)	Estimated Completion Date: 11 May
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I can obtain and analyse information about cultural beliefs, values and behaviour. (savoir apprendre/faire)	<input type="button" value="File"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I want to be able to behave in accordance with the expectations of the other culture in most everyday situations both private and professional, even though it might sometimes require effort on my part. (savoir apprendre/faire)	Estimated Completion Date: 13 June
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	I can see how my judgements are influenced by my own culture and want to learn to be more open to the ways of other cultures. (savoir s’engager)	<input type="button" value="File"/>

The levels A1 – C2 provide a progression from acquisition of facts and figures to the quite sophisticated intercultural speaker (Byram, Nichols and Stevens 2001: 5) or mediator, who can operate at a high and often complex level of intercultural interaction. This progression is not always or necessarily related to the progression of L2 acquisition, as it is possible to have these skills without a high level of language knowledge. However, these skills are more likely to be developed in language learners than in others, who do not interact with speakers of another language. It is also possible for the learner to have a high level of any one of the components of intercultural competence, without having a similar level on another component, e.g. a learner might have a high level of knowledge (*savoirs*) of the other culture, without having a similar level on any of the other *savoirs*. Or the learner might achieve C1 or C2 on any of the skills and attitudes, because of life experience, while having a low level A1 or A2 on the knowledge of products and practices of the culture in question.

Once the learner has selected his/her linguistic and intercultural levels for each of the languages in which he/she has some competence, this information is exported to the Passport and used to generate the *Profile of Language Skills*. For example, a native English speaker who selects a B2 level knowledge of written and spoken German (interaction and production) and a C1 in reading and listening skills together with a C1 in intercultural competence would, on saving the self-assessment section of the Biography, generate the following table in his/her Passport (cf. Figure 4):

Figure 4: The Passport: Profile of language skills. (© 2007, LOLIPOP. Used with permission.).

Deutsch	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2

[Update](#)

Deutsch	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2

[Update](#)

[Top of the page](#)

Links are also provided to on-line language and intercultural learning resources. These can be accessed directly using the on-line resources section.

Other key pages include the reflections on learning (reporting) (cf. Figure 5) in which the learner describes and then analyses an experience associated with their language learning. In designing the LOLIPOP ELP, specific questions in relation to both language and intercultural learning were included. Thus, this page facilitates the learner in identifying the type of intercultural experience currently being reflected upon, for example, meeting someone from another culture or watching a film or reading a book in their target language. They are encouraged to describe the experience and are given instructions on how to reflect using a three step process. According to this process, they describe, analyse and then reflect on what they have gained from a particular experience. Finally, the yes/no questions assist them in analysing the experience further.

Figure 5: Reflections on learning. (© 2007, LOLIPOP. Used with permission.).

The LOLIPOP ELP, once developed, was tested in a number of institutions in a variety of pilot projects (see for example Bruen, Péchenart and Crosbie 2010). The case study below provides an additional example.

5 Case study: Self-assessment of language and intercultural learning in the Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT), Ireland

The case study was carried out as an integral part of a module in intercultural communication which is delivered in the third semester of a four year BA in Languages and Marketing at Waterford Institute of Technology in Ireland. A total of forty three students participated in this module between 2007 and 2009. These students included full-time students (Irish students and one student from each of the following countries: Croatia, France, Japan, Lithuania, and Nigeria) as well as visiting ERASMUS students from Austria, France, Germany, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden.

The aims of the module outlined in the module descriptor include the following:

1. To allow the learner to develop an appreciation of his own and other cultural identities, an attitude of tolerance towards cultural difference, and the skills to overcome difficulties in intercultural encounters.
2. To provide the learner with a framework within which he/she can investigate the beliefs, values and norms of another culture while improving his/her practical language skills.

These aims were to be achieved through a combination of seminars and classroom activities to introduce and explore theories of intercultural communication, completion of designated tasks in the LOLIPOP ELP and tandem language learning exchange. In line with Byram's "locations of learning" in his model of intercultural communicative competence, this combination allowed for classroom, fieldwork and independent learning (Byram 2009: 323). LOLIPOP served to bring together all the elements of the course, by providing a space for recording language and intercultural experiences and reflecting on these experiences in relation to theories discussed and the experience of tandem language learning.

The LOLIPOP ELP was introduced to the students at the start of the module, when each student registered and entered personal details to set up their own ELP. They were given a list of tasks to complete their ELP by the end of the module. Most of this work was carried out in a computer laboratory during one of the three weekly class contact hours, which allowed the lecturer to address any problems or questions as they arose. The following is a summary of the tasks:

- a) Self-assessment of language and intercultural skills for at least one foreign language (at start and end of course);
- b) Reporting on language courses taken in the past (in the Biography);
- c) Reflection on language and intercultural experiences (a minimum of 3 reflections, selected from the drop down menu and using the guidelines in the Reflection page);
- d) Reflection on changes in their level of intercultural competence over the course of the module.
- e) Completion of the student feedback questionnaire, available in LOLIPOP (see Appendix).
- f) Uploading of final tandem language report and completed questionnaire to the Dossier.

These tasks encouraged students to i) reflect on the course content and relate it to their own experience and to the tandem exercise, and ii) to self-assess their own linguistic and intercultural learning.

All of the tandem language learning took place outside the classroom, in accordance with written guidelines uploaded on moodle. These guidelines included the principles of tandem language learning, and the requirements to find a partner for reciprocal language and intercultural exchange, with whom they would agree time, location and topics for a minimum of five tandem meetings. While students could select topics in agreement with their partner, they were advised to reflect on topics introduced during the module. As an example, many students discussed the similarities and differences they had observed between their own and their partner's attitude to time, and tried to find out possible reasons behind any differences. (For further information on tandem language and intercultural exchange see Kennedy and Furlong (forthcoming))

Final assessment was based on the production of a written tandem learning report, completion of tasks in LOLIPOP and a written class test.

For the purpose of this paper, the student feedback questionnaires were analysed with a view to determining participant's attitudes towards the self-assessment process, both linguistic and intercultural. A content analysis approach was employed with the objective being to identify the principle themes emerging from the participants' responses. A number of themes emerged from the data and are presented below (Table 1):

Table 1: Feedback from students

Emerging Themes	Direct quotations from student participants
Uncertainty over lack of familiarity with self-assessment.	<p>When I do my self-assessment, at the beginning, I do not feel comfortable because I have not usually the opportunity to do this. As I am not used to self-assessment, it was rather difficult for me to do that at the beginning.</p> <p>It was a bit weird trying to figure out what you could and could not do when put on the spot like that.</p>
Concerns over objectivity of self-assessment	<p>After few questions, it was ok, I tried to be objective. I think that it is really a good thing to do a self-assessment</p> <p>I am not sure whether (sic) or not I assessed my skills correctly, because my level of these skills was not tested.</p> <p>I felt good doing it, I felt that I could be honest and reasonable in my self/assessment.</p> <p>I think I was generally right in what I put down if I was not sure if I could do something or not then I said I couldn't just to be on the safe side. I think that we will always play down what we can do to be safe.</p> <p>I was a bit afraid of my own judgement. I don't really feel comfortable since I don't really know my true skills I'm always thinking that I'm not as good as people say!</p> <p>The most difficult aspect was to be honest to yourself. To admit to yourself that you have been too lazy in the past and with a little more work many things would be better now.</p>
Increased awareness of competence level	<p>There was probably a few from A1 and A2 german that I was not sure of but that I did actually tick yes for I think that is maybe from embarrassment and I now realise I should work on these areas.</p>

	<p>I think that it is very useful as you have in black and white how your language is and how it could and should be. It shows where you need improvement but you can also see your strong points.</p> <p>I find it a lot easier to understand, read and listen than to compose and I need to work on the other areas. I think that by keeping in contact with my tandem partner maybe by e-tandem I will improve as I did improve a good deal over the semester with my tandem meetings and I gained confidence.</p> <p>It was a differentiated feeling in fact. On the one hand I was a little surprised, how far my knowledge and skills had developed. On the other hand it shocked me extremely when I saw how my knowledge e.g. in Italian had degenerated.</p>
Preference for assessment by others	<p>I think assessment by an objective and skilled third person is more useful. But I also think that self-assessment is useful to some extend.</p> <p>I prefer to make an assessment in a kind of exam to find out which level I am.</p> <p>it's really hard to give notes to your own abilities. I would prefer that you do such a test and others correct it afterwards, maybe it also would make more sense because when doing it on your own the results might be too subjective.</p>
Self-assessment of intercultural skills	<p>When I read those, they made me reflect about my intercultural skills and the examples were good.</p> <p>The second intercultural self-assessment was easier to fulfil than the first one since thanks to intercultural communication classes and as I am here since a longer time I become more open-minded concerning differences from a culture to another one.</p>
Self-assessment of intercultural skills compared to self-assessment of linguistic skills	<p>I had never evaluated my intercultural skills before so it was really useful. It is easy to evaluate your oral and written skills. However I think [the intercultural] is more difficult to answer.</p>

	<p>I think the intercultural self assessment was easier than the language one as it is less concrete in terms of what you should know.</p> <p>It was indeed far more difficult.....Your intercultural skills aren't as easy to imagine as your more concrete language knowledge.</p>
	<p>I would say it was just different. It was not about the same issue actually since it dealt with open-mindedness and capacity of perspective towards other cultures. But I would say it was more difficult to assess this part.</p>

The students' responses indicate that they had not previously engaged in self-assessment of their language or intercultural levels. Possibly, as a result, they felt uncomfortable and did not trust their own judgement, at least to begin with. Many reported that they were more inclined to under-rate their levels in their attempts to be objective although it was also possible to observe a phenomenon whereby students over-rated their competence indicating the level they felt they should be at as opposed to their actual level. Interestingly, these students appeared to be aware of what they were doing in both cases.

Not surprisingly, given their lack of experience of self-assessment, some students expressed a preference for assessment by teachers or an "objective" other. Others, however, did see the usefulness of self-assessment as a supplement to formal assessment. As an exercise in raising students' awareness, self-assessment seems to work in that it allows the students to engage actively with their own learning, by setting learning goals and strategies for improvement (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick 2006), by reacting to their achievements, and by managing resources available to them (in this case, a tandem partnership).

Students involved have been given an opportunity to "evaluate their own growth over time as well as discover any gaps in their development" (Abrami and Barrett 2005). They express "surprise", "embarrassment", "shock" on the one hand, but also recognise their achievements: "improvement", "development", "strong points". While they find it difficult to be "honest" with themselves, they are in a position to recognise the value of this process. There is increased intrinsic motivation (Section 2) and sense of autonomy, "I should work on ..." / "I need to work on".

In addition, comments by students on their intercultural skills show a perceived improvement by the end of the course, as well as encouraging reflection on these skills. Finally, students were divided on which skill they found easier to assess, linguistic or intercultural, some found intercultural more difficult, some easier.

6. Recommendations and implications for the language and intercultural classroom and for further research:

In recent years, there has been considerable development of theoretical frameworks of intercultural competence, suggestions for integration into educational programmes and discussion of possible approaches to assessment. A comprehensive overview of the evolution of the field is provided by intercultural experts in Deardorff (2009). The self-assessment elements of the LOLIPOP ELP may provide a possible tool to assist in this process.

In addition, as we saw in Section 4 of this paper, in their analysis of the intercultural dimension of validated ELPs, Little and Simpson (2003: 3) report that in the passport “no provision is made for self-assessment that focuses on non-linguistic socio-cultural practices”. The LOLIPOP ELP makes an initial attempt to address this issue. Thus, as a tool capable of assisting in both linguistic and intercultural self-assessment, the LOLIPOP ELP should be a step closer to one of the principle stated aims of ELPs in general of “assist[ing] language learners in becoming autonomous” (Section 3).

However, this is but a first step. With regard to the tool itself, there is clear need for further refinement and testing of the self-assessment element, in particular the intercultural scales, contained within the LOLIPOP ELP. Further research is essential in this area. Secondly, it is clear from this study that effective self-assessment is not something which can be expected automatically from a learner who has little or no experience in this area. Third level students from both Ireland and abroad do not appear to be *au fait* or comfortable with self-assessment. In this regard, the findings of this study support those of others (for example Bruen, Péchenart and Crosbie 2010) in indicating that self-assessment requires a combination of initial training in the classroom and continued guidance and support throughout the modules in which it is used.

To begin the process, self-awareness inventories such as for example the Intercultural Development Inventory, the Cross Cultural Adaptability Inventory or the Overseas Assignment Inventory (Sercu 2010: 17) can help to prepare students in advance for engagement in the self-assessment process.

In addition two forms of guidance are necessary. First, the learner needs guidance regarding the self-assessment process itself. Second, once they have engaged in the process of self-assessment, they need guidance concerning how they should approach improving their level of competence (Sercu 2010). The link to the resources section in the LOLIPOP ELP should be helpful in this regard.

Once introduced to the notion of self-assessment, however, the results of this initial pilot study do indicate that learners are more than capable of engaging in the process of self-assessment and of appreciating its value.

Furthermore, the study indicates the value of combining intercultural instruction with reflection and real experience, as suggested by the student who found the second self-assessment of intercultural competence easier because of the experience of living in Ireland while taking this module. This has allowed for the theory to move in the direction of the learner’s “reality”, and for deeper reflection on that reality. It also fulfills the conditions required for “perspective transformation” described by Korhonen (2010: 37) as a “slow, gradual transformative learning process including real-life experiences, [and] reflective observation of the experiences”. The generally positive reports of Erasmus students suggest that ELPs such as the LOLIPOP ELP could be used as integral and compulsory components of modules taken by students involved in study abroad programmes. This should also form the basis of further case study research.

Finally, in designing language modules and courses, the creation of additional options for interactivity, such as tandem learning, between teacher and students and between students appears capable of considerably enhancing the language and intercultural learning experience. This is particularly the case when combined with guided critical reflection and self-assessment using a tool such as the LOLIPOP ELP as this promotes in learners the essential skills required for self-regulated, autonomous life-long learning.

Appendix 1

Reflections on your self-assessment with LOLIPOP

1. How did you feel when doing the self-assessment? Do you feel comfortable that you could make a reasonable assessment of your level?
2. What was the most difficult aspect of doing the self-assessment?
3. Was the intercultural self-assessment more difficult / the same / easier than the language one?
4. Do you find that the "can-do" descriptors are useful for this module? Would you wish to add any more?
5. Did you look at the examples provided? How useful were they?
6. How do you think you can achieve the skills you have set as an objective? Did you set a date by which to achieve them?
7. What kind of evidence can you think of for the language and intercultural statements?
8. How useful (if at all) do you think doing such self-assessment is?
9. After doing the intercultural self-assessment, what level do you think you are at - are you at one level or spread across different levels?
10. If you are B2 in English (interculturally), do you think you'll be B2 in another language too?

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