

Intercultural Encounters and the European Language Portfolio (ELP): some thoughts on the development of the intercultural dimension of the LOLIPOP-ELP and its potential role in language teaching and learning.

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The European Language Portfolio (ELP) is a language learning tool developed by the Council of Europe (CoE) and intended to support the development of both linguistic skills and intercultural competence in the user. It has to date, however, been used primarily in the development of linguistic abilities¹.

This paper presents an online ELP, the LOLIPOP-ELP², which contains an enhanced intercultural dimension. It also discusses ways in which this ELP could be used to develop intercultural competence in the language classroom. The first section of this paper outlines the background to the ELP Initiative and goes on to describe the portfolio itself and its constituent elements. The second section presents the German version of the LOLIPOP-ELP with a particular focus on its intercultural dimension. Finally, the paper concludes with some remarks regarding the use of the LOLIPOP-ELP in developing intercultural competence in the language undergraduate.

The European Language Portfolio Initiative

In 1998, the Council of Europe recommended to member states that a document to be known as the European Language Portfolio (ELP) be introduced to learners in all educational sectors as a tool designed to help Europeans become plurilingual and interculturally competent citizens. In particular, the aims the European Language Portfolio seeks to promote are as follows:

- The deepening of mutual understanding and respect among citizens in Europe,

¹ Jennifer Bruen, Juliette Pechénart and Veronica Crosbie: Have Portfolio, Will Travel: the intercultural dimension of the European Language Portfolio. In: Aileen Pearson-Evans and Angela Leahy (ed.s): Intercultural Spaces: Language, Culture, Identity, Proceedings of the Annual Symposium of the Royal Irish Academy. New York: Peter Lang, 2007, p. 115-126.

² The LOLIPOP-ELP was developed as part of the Language Online Portfolio Project (LOLIPOP) 2004-7, which was funded by the Council of Europe (Lingua 2).

- The protection and promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity,
- The development of learner responsibility and learner autonomy,
- The promotion of life-long language and intercultural learning,
- The clear and transparent description of competences and qualifications to facilitate mobility and personal growth.³

The ELP is made up of three elements: a PASSPORT, a BIOGRAPHY and a DOSSIER. The PASSPORT contains an identity profile of its bearer relating to experiences and abilities in different languages and intercultural contexts. In this component of the ELP, 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)⁴.

The CEFR contains a global scale containing descriptors from A1 (beginner) to C2 (proficient) in addition to a series of five individual scales ranging from A1 to C2 for listening, reading, writing, spoken production and spoken interaction. In the LOLIPOP-ELP, an additional sixth scale designed to measure intercultural competence is added.

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. For example, the learner can run through a checklist of performative statements such as ‘I can describe myself, my family and other people’ in a spoken context, or ‘I can write about events and real or fictional experiences in a detailed and easily readable way’, or perhaps ‘I can understand fairly long demanding texts and summarise them orally’. The learner then indicates whether they can do these tasks and also asks themselves whether such a task is relevant to

³ Council of Europe website <http://culture2.coe.int/portfolio/>

⁴ Council of Europe: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

their needs. This enables the learner to focus on their language learning priorities in a more concrete manner and to select discrete areas/skills on which to concentrate. The learner is also encouraged to describe the most significant intercultural experiences that have influenced them, experiences which may have led them to a deeper appreciation of another way of life.

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 reflect on his/her progress and can also be used to demonstrate capabilities to others, such as prospective employers or directors of academic courses. Sample work might include examples of good written language, audio or video recordings involving the learner, or descriptions and results of project work.

The LOLIPOP-ELP

The LOLIPOP-ELP is based on the structure proposed by the Council of Europe and described above. However, it incorporates a number of significant innovations. Firstly, the LOLIPOP-ELP is presented online in English, French, German, Norwegian, Polish, Latvian and Spanish and is available as freeware⁵.

Secondly, one of the key aims in the development of this ELP is the enhancement of its intercultural dimension. This enhancement takes several forms. For example, when the user first enters the LOLIPOP-ELP, they are directed to the BIOGRAPHY homepage. Here they are provided with the opportunity to *self-assess*, *report* and *plan*:

Self-assessment: The Intercultural Dimension

When the learner enters the *self-assessment* section (Figure 1), they are directed to assess both their linguistic and their intercultural competence with intercultural competence appearing as the sixth skill.

⁵ The LOLIPOP-ELP is available as freeware at the following address: <http://www.lolipop-portfolio.eu>

Figure 1: Self-Assessment

http://polya.computing.dcu.ie/tmoodle/mod/elp/SelfAssessment/SelfAssessment.php?id=6

Sie sind angemeldet als **Jenny Bruen (Logout)**

LOLIPOP

Moodle ► LOLIPOP ► Sprachenbiographie ► Selbsteinschätzung

Selbsteinschätzung: Kann-Beschreibungen Zielsprache **Deutsch**

Klicken Sie auf ein Kästchen, um Ihre sprachliche und interkulturelle Kompetenz selbst einzuschätzen. Dann scrollen Sie zum Seitenende, um die einzelnen Kann-Beschreibungen durchzusehen und um zu entscheiden, ob Sie sie bereits beherrschen oder sich diese als Ziel setzen möchten.

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Verstehendes Hören - A2

Ich kann einzelne Sätze und die gebräuchlichsten Wörter verstehen, wenn es um für mich wichtige Dinge geht (z. B. sehr einfache Informationen zur ...)

The six levels of intercultural competence developed for the LOLIPOP-ELP are as follows (Figure 1):

Table 1: Global scales for the six levels of intercultural competence in the LOLIPOP-ELP

A1	I can show that I have some basic knowledge of the other culture, and would like to know more about that culture and what the people are like.
A2	I can understand basic cultural differences, and although I do not always understand all of them, I do respect these differences and can learn from them.
B1	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.
B2	I can handle situations where I need to step outside my own cultural background to explore other possible ways of thinking and doing things, accepting the possibility of different ways of thinking and behaving.
C1	I can feel comfortable and can behave more or less naturally when meeting, working or living with people from a different culture. I have the ability to identify and use alternative ways of viewing the world and to modify my behaviour to make it appropriate to other cultures. I feel I am able to mediate between different cultures.
C2	I can interpret and evaluate people's behaviour based on many different cultural theories I have encountered and experiences I have gained and can reconcile sometimes conflicting world views. I often seek out the role of an impartial intercultural mediator.

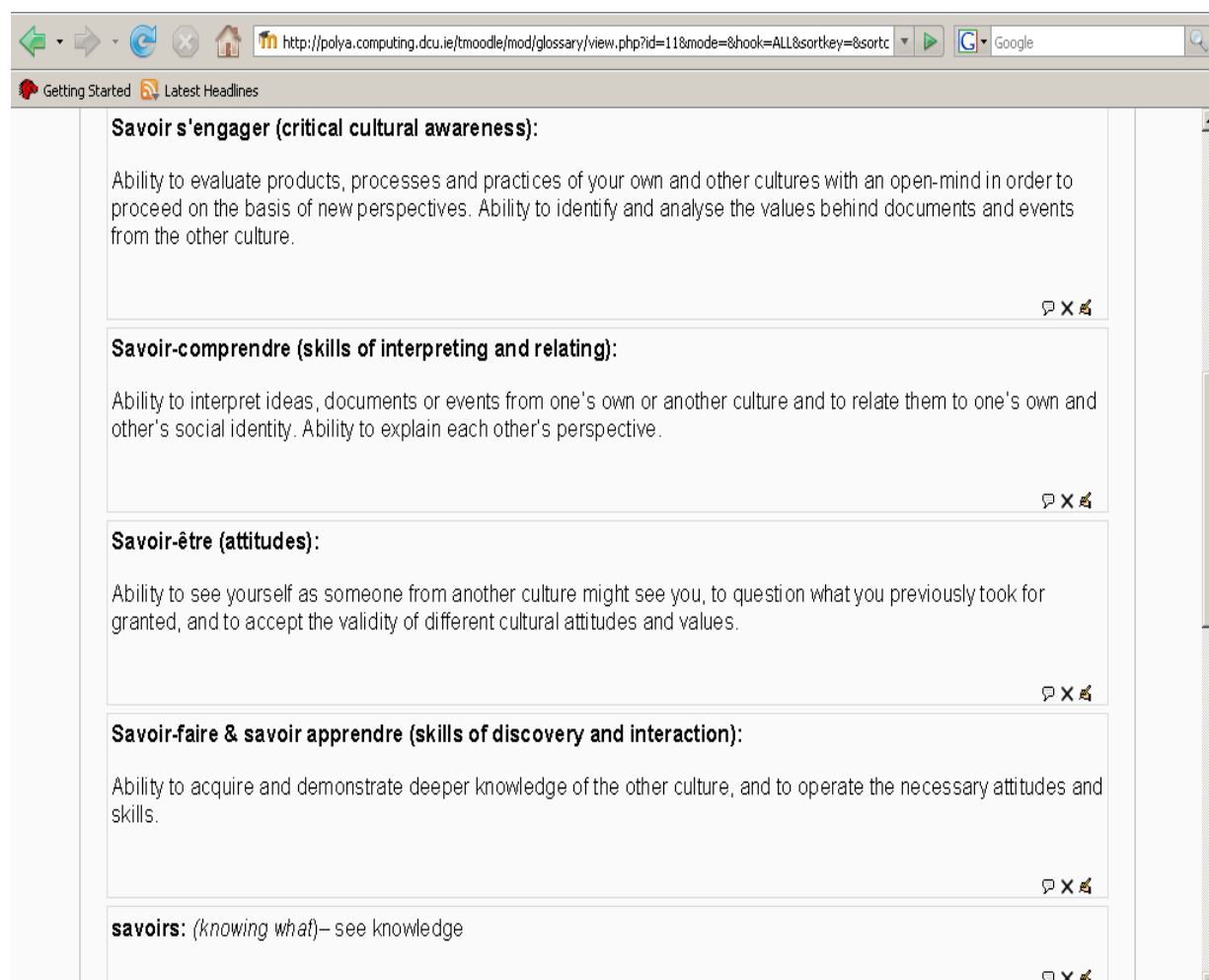
These descriptors appear to the LOLIPOP user when they click on the self-assessment grid. The descriptors, together with the “can do” statements which accompany them, were developed using first and foremost Byram’s framework of Intercultural Communicative Competence (developed from Byram and Zarate’s model of intercultural communicative competence and put forward in the ‘Common European Framework of Reference for Languages’⁶). In this model Intercultural Communicative Competence comprises four elements, also known as *savoirs*: a) knowledge (*savoirs*); b) skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir-apprendre/faire*) and skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir-comprendre*); c) attitudes (*savoir-être*); and d) critical cultural awareness (*savoir s’engager*). Thus, Intercultural Communicative Competence is defined in the LOLIPOP-ELP as the ‘ability to acquire and demonstrate the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for a person to interact effectively with people from different cultures.’⁷

⁶ Michael Byram: *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1997; Michael Byram and Genevieve Zarate: *Definitions, Objectives and assessment of Socio-cultural competence*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1994; Council of Europe, *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

⁷ Self-assessment page of the on-line LOLIPOP-ELP located at: <http://www.lolipop-portfolio.eu>

To a lesser extent, the intercultural descriptors are also based on Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)⁸. The DMIS is a framework put forward to explain different reactions people have when confronted with cultural difference. These reactions range from ethnocentric (described as denial, defence and minimisation) to ethnorelative (acceptance, adaptation and integration) and are categorised along a progressive scale. Such key intercultural concepts developed by Byram and Bennett (e.g. *savoirs*) are used throughout the LOLIPOP-ELP and, in order to avoid confusion on the part of students, a glossary (Figure 2) is also provided in which the terms likely to be unfamiliar to students are explained.

Figure 2: Intercultural glossary



⁸ Milton Bennett: A developmental approach to training for intercultural sensitivity. In: International Journal of Intercultural Relations 10/2 (1986), p. 179-95; and Milton Bennett: Towards ethno relativism: a developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. In Michael Paige (ed): Education for the Intercultural Experience, Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural, 1993, p. 21-71.

In Byram's view, language learners should become 'intercultural speakers', i.e. learners who acquire not only linguistic competence in a foreign language, but also the above-mentioned *savoirs*, thus becoming intercultural mediators. The incorporation of intercultural descriptors into the *self-assessment* grid aims to help the learner: a) to become aware of the vital role intercultural competence plays in foreign language learning; and b) to work towards becoming an intercultural speaker by engaging in reflection and setting clear objectives.

It has been already mentioned that six "can-do" statements were also developed to accompany each of the six levels of intercultural competence. For example, if the learner (as indicated in Figure 1) selects level A1 in intercultural competence, the individual can-do statements for this level appear below (Figure 3) and the learner can then decide if each statement represents something they are already capable of or something that they would like to be able to do. This process assists them in determining if they are indeed of level A1 in terms of competence. For example, if they find that they can already do all of the tasks listed, then it is likely that they are of a higher level of intercultural competence already and should proceed to level A2 and repeat the process once again. It also assists them in the process of goal-setting as it helps to clarify for them what they should be able to do in order to further develop their intercultural competence.

Figure 3: Intercultural level A1 with global descriptor and can-do statements

The screenshot shows a Moodle self-assessment page for German A1. At the top, there is a grid of icons representing different skills and progress bars. The main content area is titled "Verstehendes Hören - A1" and contains a table with the following structure:

		Ich kann vertraute Wörter und ganz einfache Sätze verstehen, die sich auf mich selbst, meine Familie oder auf konkrete Dinge um mich herum beziehen, vorausgesetzt es wird langsam und deutlich gesprochen.	Examples
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Ich kann verstehen, wenn langsam und deutlich über mir vertraute Themen gesprochen wird, z.B. über Familie und Freunde, mein Studium / meine Arbeit.	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Ich kann kurzen, einfachen Anweisungen folgen, wenn sie deutlich und langsam gegeben werden und ich Zeit zum Nachdenken habe.	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Ich kann einfache Fragen über alltägliche Situationen verstehen.	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Ich kann einfache Begrüßungen und häufig gebrauchte Sätze in alltäglichen Situationen verstehen.	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Ich kann mir bekannte Wörter und Sätze aus Filmen und Liedern (z.B. im Radio, auf CD) heraushören.	

Below the table, there is a "Speichern" button and a navigation bar with the following items: [Sprachenbiographie](#), [Sprachenpass](#), [Dossier](#), and [Ressourcen](#).

In order to further assist the self-assessment process, examples are provided for each of the can-do statements (Figure 3). For example, for intercultural competence, level A1, can-do statement 1, “I can give some examples of facts about the other country (geography, climate etc.)” the following examples are provided:

- I know what climate the other country has, what its geographical location is and what the name of its capital is.
- I know whether it’s a democracy, republic or monarchy.
- I know something about the most popular festivals celebrated there.

Those provided for level C2, can-do statement 5 “I can analyse different points of view, products or practices found in other cultures and can bring a new perspective into this analysis, based on my intercultural experience”, are:

- a) I don't label different points of view, products or practices found in other cultures as either good or bad, correct or incorrect, etc. but instead I try to get a deeper understanding of them,
- b) When analysing different points of view, products or practices found in other cultures, I refer to my own intercultural experiences which I gained from interacting with members of various cultures.

The information entered by the learner into the self-assessment section of the Biography is stored in summary form in the Passport and can be viewed and/or printed out at any time. For example, a native English speaker with B2 level knowledge of written and spoken German (interaction and production) and C1 reading and listening skills together with a C1 in intercultural competence would, on completing the self-assessment section of the Biography, generate the following table in their Passport (Figure 4):

Figure 4: The Passport: Profile of Language Skills

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the following content:

Browser address bar: [http://polya.computing.dcu.ie/.../Passport/Passport.php?id=6](http://polya.computing.dcu.ie/...)

Two rows of icons (emojis) representing language skills, each followed by a grid of seven greyed-out cells.

[Bearbeiten](#)

Deutsch	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2

[Bearbeiten](#)

[Seitenanfang](#)

Zusammenfassung des Sprachenlernens

Sprache:	English				Deutsch			
Erlernen und Verwendung der Sprache in einem Land / einer Region in der die Sprache nicht	→ 1	→ 3	→ 5	5 →	→ 1	→ 3	→ 5	5 →

Reporting: The Intercultural Dimension

When the learner enters the *reporting* section of the portfolio (Figure 5), they are encouraged to report on courses, diplomas and examinations they have taken, transferable skills they have developed through their language learning and thirdly, and most relevant to this paper, their linguistic and intercultural experiences. As discussed above, samples of work including written essays and oral/aural recordings which provide evidence for the reported competences can be uploaded by the learner at this point and are stored in the DOSSIER which can be shown, for example, to future employers. Furthermore, a link is provided at the end of each page in the *reporting* section to the *self-assessment* section and the learner is asked whether they would like to up-date their *self-assessment*. Engaging in the process of *reporting* may

also make the learner aware of gaps in their knowledge which may in turn assist them in the *planning* process.

Specifically, with regard to reporting on intercultural experiences, the following page encourages the learner to describe and analyse an intercultural experience such as, for example, meeting someone from another culture, participating in a tandem language exchange, working in a multicultural group, a short trip abroad, a longer stay abroad, reading a book or watching a film. The page then provides the learner with a series of nine statements regarding how the experience may have helped them to become more interculturally competent to which they answer either “yes” or “no” including, for example: This experience has increased my knowledge of the target culture (e.g. people and how they behave, history, geography, institutions) (*savoirs*), This experience has encouraged me to learn more about the target culture, and to apply this knowledge in intercultural situations. (*savoir apprendre/faire*), This experience has created a more positive attitude in me towards the target culture, and a deeper understanding of the behaviours, values or practices of that culture. (*savoir être*), This experience has made me reflect on my own values and how they can influence my way of perceiving the target culture. (*savoir s'engager*). It is hoped that describing and reflecting in this way will assist the learner in adapting to different cultural contexts. Help files are also provided (see for example Figure 6).

Figure 5: Reflecting on linguistic and intercultural experiences

http://polya.computing.dcu.ie/tmoodle/mod/elp/Reflections/Reflections.php?id=6

Sie sind angemeldet als Jenny Bruen (Logout)

LOLIPOP

Moodle ▶ LOLIPOP ▶ Sprachenbiographie ▶ Bericht ▶ Betrachtungen / Überlegungen

Betrachtungen zum Lernprozess Zielsprache: Deutsch

Tragen Sie Ihre Informationen in die unteren Kästchen ein

Erfahrungen

Begegnung mit jemandem aus einer anderen Kultur
 Tandem-Sprachaustausch
 Zusammenarbeit in einer multikulturellen Gruppe
 Email- / Brief- Austausch
 Internet-Recherche
 einen Film anschauen
 ein Buch lesen
 eine Zeitschrift oder eine Zeitung lesen
 ein fremdsprachiges Fernsehprogramm anschauen
 Radio hören
 kurzer Auslandsaufenthalt
 längerer Auslandsaufenthalt
 Sonstige

Datum: 13. November 2007

Dauer: []

Ort: []

Betrachtung der Erfahrungen

Wie hat Ihnen diese Erfahrung geholfen, linguistisch/interkulturell kompetenter zu werden? Klicken Sie bei den untenstehenden Fragen Ja oder Nein.	Yes	No
1. Diese Erfahrung hat mein Wissen über die Zielkultur vermehrt (z.B. über die Menschen und wie sie agieren, Geschichte, Geographie, Institutionen) (savoirs)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Diese Erfahrung hat mich darin bestärkt, mehr über die Zielkultur zu lernen, und dieses Wissen in interkulturellen Situationen anzuwenden (savoir apprendre/faire)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Diese Erfahrung hat in mir eine positivere Einstellung zur Zielkultur bewirkt, und auch ein tieferes Verständnis für die Verhaltensweisen, Grundwerte oder Bräuche dieser Kultur. (savoir être)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Die Erfahrung brachte mich dazu, über meine eigenen Grundwerte nachzudenken und auch darüber, wie diese meine Art der Wahrnehmung der Zielkultur beeinflussen können (savoir s'engager)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Figure 6: Reflecting on linguistic and intercultural experiences (showing help file)

The screenshot shows a Mozilla Firefox browser window. On the left, a help file is displayed with the following text:

Beschreiben und analysieren Sie in Kürze Ihre Erfahrungen. Was haben Sie aus diesen Erfahrungen gelernt? Hier einige Tipps als Hilfestellung für Ihre Betrachtungen: A) Sprache: Waren Ihre Erfahrungen hilfreich bei der Verbesserung Ihrer sprachlichen Fertigkeiten? Wenn ja, welche Kompetenz wurde am meisten verbessert (Verstehendes Lesen, Verstehendes Hören, Sprechen, Schreiben)? Haben Sie diese Erfahrungen dazu ermutigt, mehr über die Zielsprache zu lernen und dieses Wissen in der Kommunikation mit anderen Menschen anzuwenden? Glauben Sie, dass Sie jetzt eine positivere Einstellung zur Zielsprache haben? B) Kultur: Haben Sie etwas über die andere Kultur gelernt, über die Verhaltensweisen von Menschen der anderen Kultur oder woran sie glauben und welche Grundwerte sie haben? Und hinsichtlich Ihrer eigenen Kultur? Hatten Sie neue Erkenntnisse im Bezug auf das, woran Sie glauben, Ihrer Bräuche und Grundwerte? Haben Sie allgemein etwas über die kulturellen Unterschiede und Ähnlichkeiten gelernt (d.h. nicht unbedingt nur hinsichtlich Ihrer eigenen und der Zielkultur)?

On the right, a reflection form is shown. It includes a language selection dropdown set to 'Deutsch', a date field (19 November 2007), and a table with reflection questions and 'Yes/No' columns.

Pfad:		Yes	No
Betrachtung der Erfahrungen	Wie hat Ihnen diese Erfahrung geholfen, linguistisch/interkulturell kompetenter zu werden? Klicken Sie bei den untenstehenden Fragen Ja oder Nein.		
	1. Diese Erfahrung hat mein Wissen über die Zielkultur vermehrt (z.B. über die Menschen und wie sie agieren, Geschichte, Geographie, Institutionen) (savoirs)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	2. Diese Erfahrung hat mich darin bestärkt, mehr über die Zielkultur zu lernen, und dieses Wissen in interkulturellen Situationen anzuwenden (savoir apprendre/faire)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	3. Diese Erfahrung hat in mir eine positivere Einstellung zur Zielkultur bewirkt, und		

Planning: the intercultural dimension

Finally, two elements of the *planning* section of the LOLIPOP-ELP are related to the development of intercultural competence, i.e. objectives (short-term and long-term) and planning for a stay abroad. In the short-term objectives section, generated on

completion of the self-assessment section (Figure 7), links to a series of resources designed to develop intercultural competence are highlighted. The student may also if they like indicate a date by which they would like to achieve this objective and may request an email reminder.

Figure 7: Planning section: short-term objectives

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the 'SHORT-TERM OBJECTIVES' page of the LOLIPOP: Lolipop ELP system. The page features a navigation menu at the top with 'Moodle > LOLIPOP > BIOGRAPHY > PLAN > SHORT-TERM'. Below this, a yellow header reads 'SHORT-TERM OBJECTIVES' and 'Target language: Deutsch'. A sub-header states: 'This page gives you a report of all objectives you have set on the Self-Assessment page'. A table lists various objectives and their corresponding resources:

Objectives		
	Listening	Resources
	Reading	Resources
	Spoken Interaction	Resources
	Spoken Production	Resources
	Writing	Resources
	Intercultural	Resources
B1	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. (<i>savoir comprendre</i>)	
B1	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. (<i>savoir apprendre/faire</i>)	

Below the table, there is a link: [Set objectives in Self Assessment](#). At the bottom of the page, a navigation bar contains buttons for 'BIOGRAPHY', 'PASSPORT', 'DOSSIER', and 'RESOURCES'.

The long-term objectives section is more discursive and reflective in nature and is not linked directly to any of the other sections. It contains questions such as, “What do you think you will need the language for in the future (work, study, travel etc.)? “Are there any other perhaps more personal reasons why you want to learn the

language/culture?”, “What level in the acquisition of the language/intercultural competence do you intend to achieve?”

Finally, on the page entitled “Stay Abroad” (Figure 8), the learner is prompted to plan for their stay abroad, consider how best they will prepare and begin to consider what the expected outcomes of the stay are likely to be. Once again, help files are provided for learners who would like more structured guidance when working with any of these sections/pages.

Figure 8: Planning a stay abroad

Moodle > LOLIPOP > Sprachenbiographie > Planung > Auslandsaufenthalt

Auslandsaufenthalt(e) Zielsprache Deutsch

Geben Sie Ihre Daten in das Textfeld unten ein.

Erfahrungen Austauschprogramm

Land Austauschprogramm

Name der Institution / des Arbeitgebers Praktikum

Dauer des Aufenthalts (Datum) Ferialjob

Aufenthalts Geschätzte 007

Dauer Urlaub

Sonstige

Betrachtungen zu meinem Auslandsaufenthalt

Meine Zukunftspläne

Vorbereitungen

Using the LOLIPOP-ELP to Develop Intercultural Competence in the Language Classroom: some considerations

The above gives a brief introduction to the intercultural dimension of the language learning tool that is the LOLIPOP-ELP. From this overview, it should already be clear that there are as many ways of using the LOLIPOP-ELP in the language classroom as there are learners, teachers and educational contexts.⁹

Many language learners will begin their engagement with the LOLIPOP-ELP with the *self-assessment* section. The process of self-assessment can be a difficult one for students. This results partly from the fact that many students enter university with little or no experience of having engaged in such a process. They are more used to a system in which they complete assessments, test and exams and are then informed by an external source, such as a teacher or examiner, what their level is in their different subject areas.

An additional potential difficulty with regard to the self-assessment of intercultural competence concerns the fact that the learner is often unsure as to the nature of intercultural competence itself. This is often a concept with which they are unfamiliar and they therefore need guidance in determining what intercultural competence is, how interculturally competent they themselves are and how they could become more competent in this area. The LOLIPOP-ELP provides such guidance and a framework within which the learner can develop an ability to assess their own level of intercultural competence.

In attempting to self-assess their intercultural competence, the learner can, therefore, be encouraged to consider such questions as what intercultural competence is as well as what their own level of intercultural competence might be and how it might be improved. For example, by looking at the six global descriptors for intercultural competence presented above for levels A1 to C2, they can begin to assess their own level. It may occur to them that they are perhaps capable of answering in the

⁹ A website with a database of ELP documentation and information to provide support for those teaching using the ELP has been developed by the European Council for Modern Languages and is available at: <http://elp.ecml.at/>

affirmative to many of the can-do statements listed for level B2 but perhaps not so to those listed for level A1, with the latter relating more to procedural knowledge and the former to declarative knowledge. This may encourage classroom discussion around the suitability or otherwise of such a hierarchy or linear progression for the assessment of intercultural competence. This may also be a fruitful area for further research and the development of an alternative model perhaps containing four or five sub-scales related to the *savoirs* discussed above and mirroring to a greater extent the approach taken in the CEFR. Further discussion in this area is however beyond the scope of this particular paper.

In terms of further research in this field, there is also a need for in-depth piloting and testing of these intercultural descriptors and can-do statements. This has already been done using a rigorous methodology for the descriptors contained in the self-assessment grid for levels A1 to C2 for the five skills of listening, reading writing, spoken production and spoken interaction. These formulations were mathematically scaled to the CEFR levels by conducting large scale statistical analyses of ways in which they were interpreted in the assessment of large numbers of learners initially by almost 300 Swiss teachers from different language regions and educational sectors in an end of school year assessment¹⁰. Furthermore, projects by the DIALANG language assessment system which is an application for diagnostic purposes of the CEFR and which used these descriptors confirmed their quality and assisted in the creation of a bank of illustrative, validated descriptors¹¹. Similarly, the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) assisted in the development, validation and calibration of can-do statements this time using a form of statistical analysis known as Rasch modeling.¹² Such a bank of validated descriptors does not, however, currently exist for the intercultural domain. This is particularly important if ELPs such as the

¹⁰ Brian North: Developing Descriptor Scales of Language Proficiency for the CEF Common Reference Levels. Council of Europe. 2002, p. 87-105.

Brian North: A CEF-based Self-assessment Tool for University Entrance. Council of Europe 2002, p. 146-166.

Günther Schneider and Peter Lenz. European Language Portfolio. Guide for Developers. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. 2001. Website: www.coe.int/portfolio >Documentation

¹¹ The Common European Framework of Reference for Language: learning, teaching, assessment, Council of Europe, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 226-243.

¹² The Common European Framework of Reference for Language: learning, teaching, assessment, Council of Europe, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 244-257.

LOLIPOP-ELP which contain intercultural descriptors and related can-do statements are to be validated by the Council of Europe.

However, despite their limitations, the intercultural global statements and the related intercultural can-do statements can assist the learner in the goal-setting process by helping them to determine what it is they need to be able to do in order to progress to the next level of intercultural competence. Learners can engage in such a process individually, then in pairs, larger groups and finally in a classroom plenary. In this way, it may be possible to identify common goals for the coming semester and identify ways in which these goals could be achieved in the classroom or perhaps in the design of the course assessment.

In terms of reporting on intercultural experiences, the portfolio can help in three ways in particular. Firstly the process of selecting from the drop-down menu shown in Figure 4 encourages reflection on the many and varied intercultural encounters the learners have already experienced even though they may not have explicitly recognized them as such, for example working in a multicultural team on a group project for a non-language subject. They are then encouraged to engage in a more in-depth analysis of each encounter and finally to consider the impact of the encounter on their knowledge, attitudes, values, behaviour etc. as they relate to the target language culture. At any stage, the learner can return to the *self-assessment* section of the portfolio, simply by clicking on the PASSPORT button on each screen and update their assessment of their own level of intercultural competence. In many cases, this can have be particularly motivating for the learner as they can see the role played by individual activities in which they are engaged in the broader context of their language and intercultural learning.

The *planning* section of the LOLIPOP-ELP can be used to firstly revisit the goals set during the self-assessment phase and to encourage the learner to use some of the resources provided to assist them in achieving their goals. The “Reflections on a Stay Abroad” section can usefully be engaged with by a group of students preparing for example for a semester or a year to be spent in a country where their target language is spoken. Their analysis can relate to academic and/or social issues likely to be of relevance for them during their time abroad. This page is also useful for students who

are already abroad and would like to reflect in a structured manner on their experience. Business students taking language as an option can apply the same framework to, for example, a proposed work placement or business trip to a country where their target language is spoken.

Regardless of how the ELP is approached in the classroom, it is important for the language lecturer to be familiar with the tool before attempting to introduce it to the learner. A useful approach is to engage with the LOLIPOP-ELP from the perspective of the student in advance of introducing it in the classroom, i.e. completing the *self-assessment* section for all of the languages in which even a partial competency exists and continuing through the *reporting* and *planning* stages. Furthermore, experience gleaned during the piloting phases of the LOLIPOP project (page 1) has shown that, although there are instructions and explanations contained in help files within the LOLIPOP-ELP, it is best to introduce the notion of an ELP to the students in advance before they actively engage with the LOLIPOP-ELP. This would mean talking about the concept of a portfolio, the fact that it is a tool for self-assessment and reflection on language and intercultural learning, that it is divided into three sections (PASSPORT, BIOGRAPHY and DOSSIER) and in the case of the LOLIPOP-ELP, a fourth RESOURCES section. This is particularly the case where students are not already familiar with the ELP. The function of each component of the ELP should also be explained. Furthermore, it is important to describe the CEFR proficiency levels and, finally, demonstrate how the LOLIPOP-ELP fits into the learner's particular course of study.

There are, already discussed, a variety of ways in which the LOLIPOP-ELP and indeed ELPs in general can be integrated into particular courses and the way in which it is used will depend on the nature of the course, the needs of the students, the objectives of the teacher, the time available etc. For example, the focus of the module or course may be the ELP with the teacher introducing it in week one and the learners engaging in self-assessment and goal-setting, thereby providing a framework for the course and determining the assessment criteria and the types of language learning activities engaged with over the duration of the module or course. It may also play a complementary role with teachers and learners engaging with it for perhaps one hour per week every second week over the course of a 12 week module.

For example, it is proposed to use the LOLIPOP-ELP as follows with a group of second-year intermediate¹³ university students who are preparing to spend their third year studying at a university in a German speaking country. These students have four contact hours per week over twelve weeks and it is proposed to devote one hour per week every second week, i.e. a total of six hours to classroom work with the LOLIPOP-ELP. In the first week, these students will be introduced to the ELP initiative and, in particular, to the LOLIPOP-ELP. They will be encouraged to engage in the process of self-assessment with the emphasis on the section dealing with intercultural self-assessment (Figures 1-3). They will then be encouraged to describe, analyse and reflect on intercultural experiences they had already had (Figures 5 and 6). Emphasis in later weeks will be placed on the *planning* section with the students encouraged to reflect on likely outcomes of their stay abroad (Figures 7 and 8). These activities will provide a basis for classroom discussion and information exchange as well as for work assigned for outside of class contact hours. It is proposed to elicit feedback from the students regarding their views on the usefulness of this addition to their language course.

Early attempts at piloting preliminary versions of the LOLIPOP-ELP over the course of its development suggest that for the LOLIPOP-ELP and ELPs in general it is essential that they be integrated into the course concerned and related in some way to the assessment(s) for the course. How exactly this should be done remains a source of some debate and depends on the individual course. More extensive research is needed in this area. However, it appears that it would be useful for the ELP to be introduced to first semester students on their entry to university and for it to be referred to and integrated into all of their language modules as they progress through their degree to greater or lesser extent depending on the course. This should help students to take greater ownership of their portfolio and in turn increased responsibility for their language learning progress. It is also likely that more intensive engagement with the portfolio will be required on the part of the lecturer in the earlier semesters, i.e. years one and two. While this will be time consuming in these early years, it is hoped that

¹³ The term “intermediate” means, in this context, that these students were awarded at least an honours C3 grade in German in the Irish Leaving Certificate examination before studying German at university level.

this will be offset by increased motivation and autonomy on the part of the learner as they progress.

Finally, users of the LOLIPOP-ELP also have access to a “SHARE” function whereby users from different countries and cultures can share their ideas, intercultural experiences and experiences of working with the LOLIPOP-ELP. Again, short pilots using early versions of the LOLIPOP-ELP would seem to indicate that this exchange works best when integrated into a module with both groups of learners involved in the exchange involved in the completion of particular tasks and assignments designed to promote intercultural awareness. It is also useful if each exchange group is engaged in learning the language of the other group and perhaps preparing for a stay abroad in their country.

In conclusion, the LOLIPOP-ELP has the potential to be a useful language learning tool. It can assist the process of self-assessment, goal-setting, planning and reporting on language learning as well as the development of intercultural competence. It also provides links to valuable language learning resources. In order to realize this potential, however, it is important that the ELP be integral to a learner’s language course and ideally used throughout, for example, an undergraduate degree. Integrating an ELP and in this case the LOLIPOP-ELP into language courses can be time consuming and may meet with some resistance on the part of students. However, with creativity and persistence on the part of both teacher and learner it can also provide valuable support both for the language learning process and for the development of intercultural competence in the language learner.