

**TNP 2 WORKSHOP ON NEW LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
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Minutes of the presentation by **Brigitte Forster Vosicki** (Université de Lausanne):

**TRANSPARENCY AND INTERNATIONAL COMPARABILITY IN LANGUAGES:
THE ROLE THAT THE COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK FOR LANGUAGES
(CEF) AND EUROPEAN PORTFOLIO (ELP) CAN PLAY**

It has been generally acknowledged that in order to achieve better results in the field of languages, cooperation among European higher education institutions needs a common basis and coherent, recognized standards for all those involved in the processes of learning, teaching and assessment, and management of languages.

At present, in many institutions of higher education it is difficult to ascertain students' real language levels since these are often ill-defined in vague terms with no accurate description of the level, objectives and content of the courses followed, or levels, content and evaluation criteria of the examinations passed or of other language achievements gained in different learning contexts. All of this precludes comparison and hinders, if not prevents, academic and professional recognition from one country to another or even one institution to another.

The Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages provides a global reference system applicable to all languages, which can introduce greater transparency and coherence between different institutions and sectors of education and has great potential for encouraging a new approach to teaching and learning. Its objectives are:

- to promote standards comparable all over Europe which give a common language to all the persons active in the field of languages in order to help them to reflect on their current practice;
- to foster a pedagogical approach that bases language teaching and learning on the learner's needs, motivations, characteristics and resources, on the analysis of the learning situation and on the definition of realistic and explicit learning objectives from the perspectives of the language in use and the development of plurilingualism, learner autonomy and lifelong language learning.
- to provide a language- and institution-independent description of six reference levels for describing learners' proficiency related to language in use in that they describe what a learner can do at a given level, e.g.:

B1: "Can give straightforward descriptions on a variety of familiar subjects related to her/his own fields of interest or study."

C2: "Can present a complex topic confidently and articulately to an audience unfamiliar with it, structuring and adapting the talk flexibly to meet the audience's needs."

Consequently, higher education institutions should describe their programmes, teaching materials, attestations, examinations and other qualifications according to the Council of Europe's common reference levels and descriptions, thus clearly stating objectives, contents, procedures and criteria.

Integration of the Common European Framework (CEF) into higher education introduces common standards for examination/qualification levels, objectives, contents, methods and procedures, as well as evaluation criteria.

Thus, competences will become not only transferable from one system to another, but also clear and understandable for all learners, teachers, institutions and employers. The implementation of the CEF

in higher education will be of great significance in promoting European mobility, lifelong learning, plurilingualism and learner autonomy.

In this context the **European Language Portfolio**, a practical application of the CEF, plays an important role by, ideally, acquainting every single language learner in Europe with the ideas and standards of the CEF.

The **European Language Portfolio** (ELP) is a personal document for the use of the learner, an instrument that facilitates the recording, planning and validation of lifelong language learning both within and beyond the educational context.

It is at the same time an information tool (the reporting function) and a companion to language learning (the pedagogic function) because it allows all language proficiency – whether acquired within or outside of formal education settings – and intercultural experience to be presented in a comprehensible, complete and internationally comparable way. It also contains help for thinking about one's own language learning and for planning further learning.

A version for higher education has to take into account, in addition to general language, the specific fields of language learning and usage in higher education and beyond, which is to say language for academic and professional purposes to enhance mobility.

The European Language Portfolio exists in numerous versions in various countries and languages. There are ELP versions for a variety of target groups and contexts. Nevertheless, every ELP has the same structure and pursues the same objectives. It consists of three parts:

- Language Passport
- Language Biography
- Dossier

The **Language Passport** is a record of language skills, qualifications and experiences. It lists the languages that the holder has competence in and shows at a glance the person's current level of language proficiency and intercultural experience.

In the passport there are different forms and worksheets to fill in:

- Self-assessment grid;
- Self-assessment checklists from A1 to C2;
- Overview of language and intercultural experience in the context of higher education studies;
- List of attestations for language and intercultural experiences;
- Attestation form: Language learning experiences and language use in the region where the language is spoken;
- Attestation form: Language learning experiences and use in the region where the language is not spoken;
- Global Scale – calibration of certificates and qualifications to Common European Framework levels;
- Examination description.

The learners can document different achievements. They can relate the certificates they have obtained to the Framework and make their achievement level transparent. For example, a certificate from the University of Lausanne is supposed to correspond Level B2. If a student intends to apply to another institution, he/she may supply more detailed information for more transparency.

The **Language Biography** helps learners to document and reflect on previous language learning, intercultural experience and learning processes, and to assess their own language skills, set learning goals and plan future learning activities.

The Language Biography is meant for the learner development and contains worksheets with awareness-raising questions related to the learner's personal experience:

- My language learning biography;
- My significant intercultural experiences;
- Self-assessment checklists A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2 with specific descriptors for the field of higher education;
- My objectives;
- Language learning journal;
- My mobility stay.

These tools give the learners cognitive means they need to improve their ability of autonomous language learning.

The **Dossier** illustrates the development and current level of the learner's language proficiency and intercultural experience through examples of personal work. It contains:

- a working dossier of the learner's language development,
- a dossier for presentation.

The document comprises a list of pieces of work included in the Dossier for Presentation.

The advantages of using the European Language Portfolio are many-sided:

- for higher educational institutions – it contributes to quality development, enhances the pedagogical potential, improves the work of languages centres and self-study centres, facilitates the work of admission officers as well as organisers of mobility programmes;
- for learners – who can clearly define their proficiency level;
- for employers – who can better describe job requirements, organise in-service training.

When entries are made responsibly and transparently, the Portfolio can be the basis for mutual recognition of language achievements and its use may trigger and support changes in learning and teaching practice.

The presentation was followed by a **discussion**:

W.Mackiewicz:

In Bologna process the issue of primary importance is comparability of degrees and levels. In the area of languages we are quite fortunate. A benchmark for languages related to the European framework has been proposed at the European Council of Languages. In other subjects there are still lots of discussions about the contents.

In Berlin we are defining the learning outputs concerning B degree.

We have to recognise the value of the scales. There is currently proliferation of descriptors. It is difficult to define generic descriptors, so more specific descriptors have to be worked out.

Finland and the Netherlands have already worked out an objective assessment scale, Germany has started doing that, as well as France.

The problem is to set the indicators – but how can we make sure people are there? We need to develop awareness.

Another question is – how do we apply the system, which ensures transparency and comparability?

A.Rasanen:

A question to the speaker: How do you use the Portfolio?

B.ForsterVosicki:

The Portfolio materials can be used either from time to time or you could base your whole organisation, teaching and assessment methods on it and this way introduce new forms of language

learning. Initial training and ongoing reflection is necessary in order to integrate the Portfolio in a useful way.

The approach is quite new, so it is difficult for the teachers to integrate the Portfolio in the learning process. It is a long process for the teachers to learn all the requirements and ways of application. Students also need some introduction, but they are convinced about the usefulness of the Portfolio for future life.

W.Mackiewicz:

First of all, the Portfolio is a perfect instrument for encouraging people to reflect upon their language learning. It promotes the concept of multilingualism. Grading is done on the basis of 'being perfect', but you may arrive at completely different grading. We say: you have three years – what are you going to achieve with these descriptors?

A.Mendez:

In our practice, introducing the Portfolio was not a great success, students perceived that there was too much work there.

B.Forster Vosicki:

The reason may have been that there was no training for piloting. It has to be a permanent process, it has to be integrated and it needs teacher training. It is hard the first time, later it is easier and it helps the learner.

B.Richardson:

How widely is it used?

B.Forster Vosicki:

In Switzerland it is used in a large number of secondary schools in all the cantons. In France they have started introducing it in primary schools, in Finland – in secondary education.

W.Mackiewicz:

In France everybody received it, but teachers were not prepared. Unless teachers and institutions are prepared, it won't work. In some regions of Italy it has worked well.

A.Rasanen:

In Finland an extensive teacher training programme has started and the portfolio will be used extensively. The School Leaving Matriculation Board is going to base the requirements on the Portfolio.

A.Corda:

In the Netherlands the final level of competence in secondary education is related to the scale of the Portfolio. In tertiary level experts are asked to relate the requirements to the scale. All the universities have agreed to have level C as the final level to be reached.

M.Kelly:

In the UK there are a lot of workshops about the Portfolio, primary education and vocational education portfolios are being introduced, there may be changes in the degree programmes.