Using a European Language Portfolio for Self-Assessment, Goal-Setting and Reflection

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This paper describes the implementation of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) in university English speaking classes and suggests ways for teachers to adapt and introduce the ELP in their own context. The purpose of the ELP is to implement the learning stage outline, self-assessment, goal-setting, and reflection procedures of a learning cycle that surround the learning stages (or chapters) of a textbook. The writer outlines the procedures of one learning stage, demonstrating how can do statements and related assessment are used to connect all elements of the learning cycle. It is felt these practices can facilitate progress toward quantifiable and realistic language-learning goals. If learners record learning and see progress in the short term, this may contribute to learner motivation and autonomy.

本論文は、大学での英語スピーキングクラスにおいて欧州言語ポートフォリオ　（ELP）を実践することを論じ、各教員の必要に応じてELPを導入する方法を提案する。ELPの目的は各学習段階の概略、自己評価、目標設定、そしてテキストにおける学習段階（または章）に関連した学習サイクルの内省の手順を実践することにある。著者はある１つの学習手順を説明し、能力記述や関連する評価について、学習サイクルの全要素とつながるような利用方法を示す。このような実践により、現実的で数値で示された言語学習目標へ容易に進むことができるであろ。学習者が学習を記録して、短期的に自己の進歩がわかるならば、これは学習者の動機づけや自律的な学習の助けになるだろう。

The European Language Portfolio (ELP) aims to motivate learners to take responsibility for their own learning by facilitating self-evaluation and the setting of clear goals for language learning. It was conceived along with, and is closely linked to, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001). The CEFR has been put to several pedagogical uses in Japan (Nagai, 2010; Schmidt, Naganuma, O'Dwyer, Imig & Sakai, 2010); it is designed to be an extensive, coherent, and transparent reference system to describe communicative language competencies. It provides an empirically validated scale of six levels of language proficiency for language learning on five skills (spoken interaction, spoken production, listening, reading, writing); A1 and A2 levels refer to the basic user, B1 and B2 levels represent the independent user, and C1 and C2 levels refer to the proficient user.

The CEFR reference grid (COE, 2001, p. 23) describes the level of each skill through a descriptor (e.g., the A2 spoken interaction descriptor is I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself). This grid, among other things, can be used for initial self-assessment of language proficiency.

Each skill is further broken into the Goal-setting and Self-assessment Checklists of can do statements or tasks for each level and skill. These can be used when the first-time user is unsure of his or her level during self-assessment and later to identify learning targets, select learning activities and materials, monitor learning progress, and evaluate learning outcomes (formative self-assessment).

Users are encouraged to modify the checklists to suit specific contexts; they can be found in the appendix of the ELP. The ELP is designed to be a reflective implementation tool of the CEFR, and for language learning in general. The pedagogical functions of the ELP are

related to fostering learner autonomy – to promote reflective learning and learner responsibility. See Little (2010) for a general introduction to the pedagogical implementation of the ELP. It is felt that the effective implementation of the ELP makes clear to stakeholders the how, what, and why of the language learning curriculum.

The guiding principles of the ELP are: it is the property of the learner; it values competence in a positive way; it promotes learning inside and outside the classroom; it takes a lifelong perspective on the learning of languages; and it is based on the CEFR. The ELP allows teachers and learners to plan for, reflect on, and record progress in learning activities.

The ELP consists of three parts:

1. The Language Passport: The main goal of the Language Passport is to help students assess, according to the CEFR, their competencies in the language(s) being learned as well as the growth in these competencies. Learners may also record learning and intercultural experiences here.

2. The Language Biography: The Language Biography is used to set learning targets and regularly assess progress in order to develop the learner's sense of responsibility for the learning process.

3. The Dossier: This is used to store samples of work to provide evidence of language learning competencies and progress to the learner, teachers or others.

This paper describes how the ELP has been implemented in university English speaking classes and suggests how teachers could adapt and introduce the ELP in their own context. Classes take place once a week for 90 minutes over two 14-week semesters. A task-based textbook (Benevides & Valvona, 2008) is used throughout this course. This six-stage textbook involves learner groups simulating employees in a company as they participate in a variety of connected discussions, interviews, market research, and presentation tasks (see Table 1 for a description of the stages of the textbook). The purpose of the ELP in

the class is to implement the learning stage outline, self-assessment, goal-setting, and reflection procedures of a learning cycle (O'Dwyer, 2010) that surround the learning stages (or chapters) of the textbook; these procedures account for 20 percent of total class time. This paper, which focuses on the first semester, briefly describes some steps in introducing the ELP into classes before focusing on the procedures of one learning cycle. The bilingual (English/Japanese) Language Portfolio for Japanese University (LP) (FLP SIG, 2009) is used in this case. The text and format of the LP is the same as that of an ELP used in the European university context, with the addition of Japanese translations (Appendix A). The LP is available for download at <http://tinyurl.com/LP4JU>.

Step-by-Step Implementation of the Portfolio

Weeks 1-2: Introduction of the ELP, Self-assessment and the Beginning of the Course

These weeks mainly involve administration and pair discussion leading to self-assessment. Self-assessment leads to goal-setting for the year (mastering the relevant CEFR level). Reflection involves summarizing language learning experiences (p. 9 of the LP) and completing and discussing what students expect of the course, the teacher and themselves ('This Course' sheet, p. 18 of the LP).

Weeks 3-5: Completion of Stage 1 Activities

Stage 1, designed to help students create a sense of context and to ease them into the task-based format of the course, is a simulation of a situation where students have just been hired and are now attending their employee orientation. Focus in class is on the content of the textbook and the learning cycle is not implemented until Stage 2 has begun (brainstorming and discussing product ideas, with the main task of completing a product proposal form).

Week 6: Stage 2: Goal-setting/My Next Language Learning Target Sheet; Begin Stage 2 Content

Weeks 7-9: Completion of Stage 2

Weeks 10-13: Completion of Stage 3

At this point, the procedures of a learning cycle which surround one learning stage, Stage 3 (an explanation of this learning stage is found below), are explained. Week 10 begins with the learning stage outline procedure (this can be conducted by the teacher in lesson planning stage or also in conjunction with the learners). The purpose of the learning stage outline is to facilitate understanding of the content of the learning stage and its aims. The content (1) and the important skills (2) associated with the learning stage are defined, and expressed through a can do statement (3). These details are used to plan the learning stage and are integrated into the learning cycle procedures that follow.

Brief descriptions which contribute to the learning stage outline procedure for Stage 3 are provided below:

(1) Definition of what the learning stage involves: Think, discuss and present the pros and cons of product ideas (from other teams) providing relevant explanations and arguments. Discuss and decide in groups the best idea – remember to disagree politely. Prepare a poster presentation with all relevant information and arguments.

(2) The important skills associated with the learning stage: If I successfully complete this learning stage I will be able to give relevant, clear, and easy to understand explanations with sufficient explanations and reasoning.

(3) A can do statement that summarises this learning stage: I can say and present about what I like and dislike, agree or disagree with people, and make comparisons (Adapted from the Spoken Interaction skill, level A2 Goal-setting and Self-assessment Checklists of the LP).

Learners self-assess for the can do statement by considering How well can you say and present about what you like and dislike, agree or disagree with people, and make comparisons: *reasonably well, **well or ***very well? This self-assessment procedure becomes the base for goal-setting procedure. For example, if the learner thinks they can say what they like and dislike, etc. reasonably well (*) the goal is to progress to be able to say what they like and dislike, etc. well (**). Information from the learning stage outline procedure is incorporated into the goal-setting procedure using the My Next Language Learning Target (Appendix A, in particular the text that corresponds to (1), (2), and (3) above). Establishing such quantifiable goals is designed to appeal to learner motivation. The rest of class time is dedicated to the content of Stage 3 (discussion and selection of the best product ideas leading to a poster presentation). The end of week 13 includes reflection on performance of the Stage 3 task (poster presentation).

The use of performance-based assessment rubrics (see Appendix B for an extensive example which can also be presented in a simpler way) links the can do statements, the learning cycle procedures, and task performance. The assessment rubric, in this case, can provide focused feedback via teacher and peer of the poster presentation. The learners receive the assessment rubrics, completed by peers and teacher, to use in the reflection procedure. The role of generating the assessment rubrics in cooperation with the instructor should be emphasized for learner groups in the upper levels of B1 and above, see O'Dwyer (2010, pp. 222-223) for details.

The last section (Review of learning progress on or near my target date) of My Next Language Learning Target forms the basis of the reflection. However, the reflection can be extended by encouraging learners to think about questions such as: How well can I agree and disagree? How well can I provide explanations and reasoning? How well can I give a presentation? What am I good at? What do I need to improve? In this way, learners are encouraged to develop their meta-

linguistic knowledge to see how well they can achieve a communicative task and what they need to improve. By evaluating how well they carried out the tasks involved in terms of the can do statement they may see progress toward achieving the goal of mastering the relevant CEFR level. For example, a learner could judge that they can have gone from now agreeing, disagreeing and providing comparisons reasonably well (*) to well (**). Even if they have not fully achieved the learning stage goal, some learners do note that they have learned what it is to disagree and compare well, and will aim to do this in forthcoming interactions. An example of such reflection is "I could not disagree very well in stage 2 [which also involved discussing their own product ideas with team members]. I learned to disagree politely much more effectively in stage 3. I should use some of the forms to politely disagree suggested in the textbook (e.g., Yes, but what about…)." "I could present well but I can improve by fully explaining the relevant points. For example, I could use repetition, stress, body language, etc. to emphasize important points."

Week 14: Review and Reflection on the Semester

At this point, the end of the semester, instructors can give advice on how improvement points can be incorporated into upcoming learning stages. Learners are also advised to make personal learning goals as a result. Elements of The Ways I Learn Best sheet (p. 20 of the LP) are also used for reflection. If learners possess written or visual evidence of the competency used in the learning stage (e.g., a copy of their product idea from Stage 2, or a video of the poster presentation), they should place and/or reference this in the dossier section of the LP.

The plan for the second semester is contained in Table 1. There are other reflective elements in the ELP; for example, the Language and Intercultural Experiences sheet (p. 10 of the LP), that can be used to reflect on language learning and cultural experiences that made a big impression on learners.

Table 1

Timetable for the Language Portfolio

Class	Description
First Semester	
Week 1	Begin the first semester, introduce the ELP, learners self-assess competencies and summarize learning experiences, and complete 'This Course' sheet.
Weeks 2-5	Self-assessment and year goal-setting Weeks 3-5: Stage 1: Widgets Orientation End of week 5: Stage 2 Self-assessment
Weeks 6-9	Week 6: Stage 2 Goal-setting/My Next Language Learning Target Weeks 6-9: Stage 2: Brainstorming/talking about product ideas Week 9: Stage 2 Reflection
Weeks 10-14	Week 10: Stage 3 Self-assessment and Goal-setting/My Next Language Learning Target Weeks 10-13: Stage 3: Discuss and select the best idea/ poster presentation Week 13: Stage 3 Reflection Week 14: Review and reflection on the semester
Second Semester	
Weeks 15-19	Week 15: Begin the second semester, Stage 4 Self-assessment and Goal-setting/My Next Language Learning Target Weeks 15-19: Stage 4: Prepare and conduct market research/ presentation Week 19: Stage 4 Reflection
Weeks 20-24	Week 20: Stage 5 Self-assessment and Goal-setting/My Next Language Learning Target Weeks 20-24: Stage 5: Prepare and present an infomercial Week 24: Stage 5 Reflection
Weeks 25-27	Stage 6 (short simulated job interviews reviewing the different things they have done in the course) with reflection on Stage 6 goal at the end of week 27

Conclusion

From using the learning cycle over four academic years, using the practices encouraged by the ELP outlined above can make the language learning process quantifiable and learner-friendly in a positive way. In completing a simple questionnaire at the end of the course, four learners mentioned they appreciate that the course is part of a larger goal related to the real world (i.e., the textbook is based on practical English and the learning goals are based on can do statements of the CEFR which can be considered to be valid and quantifiable). Self-assessment and reflection can enable the learner see how quickly they are progressing toward quantifiable and realistic language-learning goals. The ELP facilitates learners in recording their learning and seeing progress in both the short- and long-term. There is also the element of learning to learn (e.g., clarifying what a language task involves, establishing what it is to compare well, etc.). If language learners see the benefit of such practices they may continue this behaviour in learning efforts outside the classroom in question. This in turn may achieve the goal of the ELP of fostering learner autonomy.

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Author Bio

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Appendix A

My Next Language Learning Target

Here you can write down your next learning target and record your progress in achieving it. When setting learning targets, you can use the goal setting and self-assessment checklists in the appendix to formulate your learning target.

Language: English

Learning Target 学習目標
(Use the Self-assessment grid in the Language Passport and the checklists in the appendix to formulate your next language learning target as precisely as possible 言語パスポートの自己評価表と付録のチェックリストを用いて、次の目標をできるだけ詳細に立てる）
Stage 3 goal: I can say and present about what I like and dislike, agree or disagree with people, and make comparisons ｛*reasonably well → ** well｝ ｛** well → ***very well｝

How much time can I devote each day/week to achieving my target?
目標達成のために1日または1週間でどのくらいの時間を費やすことができるか？
2 to (? ?) hours a week

When shall I begin? いつから始めるか？	When do I plan to finish? いつ終えるか？
Today-May 12th	End of Stage 3/end of May

How do I intend to achieve my target? 目標達成をどのようにめざすか？	

For example, can I work alone or do I need to work with other people? 例えば、一人で学習するのか、他の人と一緒に学習するのか？
Complete stage 3 activities with my group: - Think, discuss and present about the pros and cons of product ideas (from other teams) providing relevant explanations and arguments. Discuss and decide in groups the best idea. Remember to disagree politely. Prepare a poster presentation with all relevant information and arguments.

What learning materials do I need? どのような教材が必要か？

Widgets Textbook, Language Portfolio & ---

How shall I know whether or not I have achieved my target? 目標に到達したか、あるいはしなかったかをどのように知るか？(For example, can I take a test or set and correct a test myself? Or shall I need to ask my teacher, another learner, or a native speaker to assess me? Or can I depend entirely on my own judgement? 例えば、テストを受けるのか、自分でテストを作って解答するのか？先生に聞くのか、他の学習者やネイティブに評価をしてもらうのか？完全に自分の判断に任せるのか？)

Refer to self-peer-teacher assessment of poster presentation and also think about the group discussions. If I have achieved this goal I can - give relevant, clear, and easy to understand explanations with sufficient explanations and reasoning. My own criteria:

Review of learning progress on or near my target date学習経過や直近の目標日程の振り返り

Have I achieved my target? In working toward my target have I learnt anything new about (i) the target language (ii) language learning? What am I going to do with what I have learned? 目標を達成したか？目標に向かう中で(i)目指す言語、(ii)言語学習について新しいことを学んだか？これまで学んだことを今後どういかすのか？

Appendix B

Poster Presentation Assessment

1. The poster was informative and visually impressive   1 2 3 4 5
[Is attractive, colourful, clear, and easy to see/understand; makes an impact; has essential information, but not too much information]

2. The presentation style was effective   1 2 3 4 5
[Loud and slow speech; clear, simple English; used pauses and repetition; used gestures and eye contact effectively; emphasized the important points; there was good combination between presenters]

3. The presenters provided relevant information   1 2 3 4 5
[The presenters knew the products well; they gave examples concerning the main points of the poster; they made sure the audience understood; the presentation was logical; the presentation made the products appear attractive]

4. The explanations were relevant, clear and easy to understand   1 2 3 4 5
[The presenters used simple but relevant words; the presentation supplemented the poster with detailed information; the information was summarised well; important words or phrases were emphasized; body language was used well]
The presenters can exchange opinions and present about decisions and ideas

*(reasonably well) **(well) ***(very well)

Total: /20

Comments and advice: What was done well: _____
_____
_____

What can be improved: _____
_____
_____