



Advancing language education in the context of developing the European Language Portfolio in Finland

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The chapter traces briefly the processes of developing foreign language education and the European Language Portfolio (ELP) within the Council of Europe, Strasbourg.¹ The ELP developments in Finland are examined as part of the Council's innovative work on foreign language teaching aimed at promoting socially responsible learner autonomy and self-assessment in language education, spanning thirty years (from the early 1980s to 2014). The Finnish ELP-oriented research and development work was conducted in several intensive collaborative projects that involved university departments of teacher

¹ The Council was founded in 1949 with the prospect of developing a greater unity between the European parliamentary democracies through cooperation between governments, members of parliaments and experts of member states. The Council seeks to protect and develop human rights and democracy in a variety of fields. It has 47 member states. (website: www.coe.int/)

education and numerous primary and secondary school language teachers and their pupils.

Developing European language teaching towards a common theoretical framework of language education

The work leading to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR 2001) and the ELP has a long history of professional collaboration carried out under the auspices of the Council of Europe (CoE) in Strasbourg, France. The Council has consistently emphasized the need for all European citizens to learn languages for mutual understanding, personal mobility and access to information in multilingual and multicultural Europe. To promote these far-reaching goals, the CoE has coordinated several long-term research and development projects in language education involving collaboration between experts in the member states, to conceptualize the emerging pedagogical needs and facilitate the challenging developments.

In the early 1980s, the innovative work was launched with an extensive long-term project called **Project 12 (1982–87): Learning and teaching modern languages for communication**. The project involved a large number of expert visits to other member states, resulting in a rich professional network throughout Europe. The project brought up the idea of a common European approach in language teaching aimed at supporting learner autonomy and self-directed language learning, including self-assessment. (Girard & Trim 1988; Trim 1988).

The developments were pursued further in the next long-term project **Language Learning for European Citizenship** (1989–96), which emphasised the new types of communicative needs in education and work life due to increased international mobility. The

emerging goals entailed the notions of multilingual and multicultural language teaching aimed at supporting intercultural communicative competence and self-directed learning and self-assessment (Trim 1988; Kaikkonen 1994; 2001; 2002; in this volume; Byram 2003). It was realised that teacher education has a central role in carrying out the necessary pedagogical innovations in schools.

To increase transparency in assessment, a common theoretical framework, based on the same criteria in the member states, was considered necessary for tracing continuing language learning. The role of evaluation in communicative language teaching was discussed intensively in several working groups and symposiums organised by the Council of Europe between the mid-1980s–1990s. Criterion-referenced self-assessment was considered essential for aiming at self-directed language learning as part of citizenship education in multilingual and multicultural Europe (Kohonen 1988; 1992a; Kohonen & Lehtovaara 1988; Trim 1988; 1992).

To establish the principles for a coherent and transparent framework for assessing and reporting language proficiency, the Council of Europe organised an important symposium in Rüschtikon, Switzerland, in November 1991 (North 1992). The symposium worked out a proposal for the European Language Portfolio (ELP), associated with the then forthcoming *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR).

The structure of the ELP was outlined by Rolf Schärer, based on careful preparatory work in a small expert group (Schärer 1992). According to the proposal, pupils could organise their achievements, plans, reflections, observations and work samples in *a language portfolio*, defined as a “purposeful collection of learner work that exhibits their efforts, progress and achievements” (Kohonen 1992b, 84). The ELP consists of the following three obligatory components:

- *a language passport*, which summarizes the owner’s linguistic identity by briefly recording the second/foreign languages learned, formal language qualifications achieved, significant

experiences of L2 use, and the owner's assessment of his/her current proficiency in the languages he/she knows;

- *a language biography*, which is used to set language learning targets, monitor progress, and record and reflect on important language learning and intercultural experiences;
- *a dossier*, which can serve both a process and a display function, being used to store work in progress but also to present a selection of work that in the owner's judgement best represents his/her L2 proficiency. (Little et al. 2011, 7.)

While the **CEFR** was intended to provide tools for the development of language curricula, programmes of teaching and learning, textbooks and assessment instruments, the **ELP** was designed to mediate to learners, teachers and schools, and other stakeholders, the ethos that underpins the CEFR: respect for linguistic and cultural diversity, mutual understanding beyond national, institutional and social boundaries, the promotion of plurilingual and intercultural education, and the development of the autonomy of the individual citizen. (Little et al. 2011, 5.)

In an experiential, reflective learning framework (Kolb 1984; Kohonen 1992a, b; 2001), language teaching was seen as *language education* supporting reflective self-directed learning. Reflection and interaction were considered essential for building intercultural communicative competence, which entails a pedagogical emphasis on cooperative learning in small groups. (Kolb 1984; Kohonen 1988; 1989; 1992c; 2001; 2002a, b; Little 1991; 1999; 2001; Jaatinen 2001; Kaikkonen 2001; Lehtovaara 2001; Edge 2002; Kohonen & Lehtovaara 1988.) The current format of the ELP and the pedagogy for socially responsible learner autonomy evolved gradually in the course of an intensive research and development agenda that was conducted in the member states. The outcomes of the work were discussed at several

joint symposiums, resulting in a number of reports published by the CoE. (Trim 1988; 1992; 1997a, b; North 1992; Schärer 2000; 2008; Little et al. 2011.)

Advancing language education in Europe: the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and the European Language Portfolio (ELP)

The CEFR (2001) assumes a clear emphasis on interactive learning in foreign language education, presenting an action-oriented view of communication. It proposes the notions of learner autonomy, plurilingualism and pluriculturalism as goals of foreign language teaching for democratic citizenship education in multicultural Europe. The language user is seen as a person and a social actor, as a human being, whose identity is constructed in complex social interaction. (Trim 1992; 1997a; Little 1999.) Language teaching is thus aimed at developing working methods that will strengthen “independence of thought, judgement and action, combined with social skills and responsibility” (CEFR 2001, 2–4; Trim 1997 a, b; Little 1999; 2001).

According to the classic definition by David Little, *learner autonomy* essentially involves a “capacity – for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making and independent action”, whereby pupils need to develop a responsible, self-directed orientation to their learning (Little 1991, 4). Little puts forward three essential principles for advancing autonomy: (1) The principle of learner engagement entails that pupils are brought to assume an explicit acceptance that they are responsible for their own learning. They need to be taught how to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning. (2) The principle of learner reflection suggests that behind such processing abilities is the pupils’ capacity for detachment and reflection on their learning. (3)

The principle of appropriate target language use involves a maximal use of the target language in the course of learning, whereby pupils develop a genuine language user's proficiency in spontaneous language use. (Little 1991; 1999; 2001.)

Based on the CEFR, the *European Language Portfolio* (ELP) provides the central concepts and practical tools for translating the educational paradigm into pedagogical action. The goals of the CEFR manifest in the principles of the ELP, whereby the ELP: 1) is a tool to promote plurilingualism and pluriculturalism; 2) is the property of the learner; 3) values the full range of language and intercultural competence and experience; 4) is a tool to promote learner autonomy; 5) has the pedagogic and reporting functions; 6) is based on the Common Reference Levels, and 7) encourages learner self-assessment and the recording of assessment by the teachers and other experts. (Little 1999; 2001; 2004.)

Consequently, the ELP is a resource for developing, and a format for documenting, the language users' progress towards the communicative goals of the CEFR. These goals are summarized in the above principles that constitute the common European core of the ELP (Principles 2001/2011). In this educative process, responsibility is shifted progressively to pupils, as appropriate to their age and proficiency in the target language. (CEFR 2001; Kohonen 1999; 2001; 2002a; Little 2001; 2004, 22–3.)

The ELP makes the goals of the CEFR more concrete and accessible to the language users in terms of what they are able to do with the target language in meaningful, authentic communication. For this purpose, the CEFR introduces a great number of criterion-referenced *descriptors* for the different skills, defined as clear, transparent and positively formulated communicative acts that are needed for performing tasks. In self-assessment, pupils consider and assess the level, quality and range of their foreign language proficiency using the “I can” descriptors in the Self-assessment Lists (Checklists), based on the Common Reference Levels (A1, A2; B1, B2; and C1, C2), as provided in the CEFR. (CEFR 2001, 24–30.)

The ELP has two educational functions: (1) the pedagogic function, to support pupils in the ongoing process of language learning, and (2) the reporting function, to record proficiency in different languages in the Language Passport. The distinction between these functions is vital for understanding the potential of the ELP to enhance foreign language education. The functions are strongly interdependent: “The ELP will not easily fulfil its reporting function if it has not been central to the individual’s language learning experience; on the other hand, the ELP’s pedagogical function depends on the fact that it provides the learner with the means to record key features and events in his/her experience of learning and using languages” (Principles 2000/2011, 5). Moving towards socially responsible learner autonomy entails a new kind of professional identity for the teacher as a language educator. (Kohonen 1992b, c; 1999; 2001; 2002a, b; Little 1999; 2001; 2004; Hildén 2002.)

The notion of *language education* involves the following guidelines for language teaching: 1. The pupils’ own goals and autonomy; 2. Personal engagement in learning; 3. Pupil initiative and responsibility; 4. Meaningful learning as a whole person approach; 5. Emphasis on reflection, interaction and self-/peer-assessment; and 6. Integration of social and affective learning with cognitive goals. The principles pose new challenges for teacher education and teachers’ professional growth as a reflective approach. They also entail an experiential, cooperative learning culture, encouraging the participants’ contextual understanding of the educational processes. (Kohonen & Lehtovaara 1988; Kohonen 1989; 1992c; 2001; Jaatinen 2001; Kaikkonen 2001; Lehtovaara 2001; Edge 2002; Sahlberg & Sharan 2002.)

In the course of the ELP research and development work, it became evident that the targeted pedagogical changes would also require innovations in teacher education towards collegial collaboration (Kohonen 2005). To promote ELP implementation through teacher education, the Council of Europe set up a small expert team, led by David Little, to develop the professional learning framework

and design a kit of ELP-oriented teacher education material for the joint pedagogical enterprise. To mediate this material to language teachers, the Council facilitated the organisation of a large number of teacher training events in the member states. This work was carried out within the three-year **Project C6**: “Training teachers to use the European Language Portfolio”, conducted under the auspices of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in Graz, Austria between 2004–07 (Little et al. 2007).

The Project C6 team designed an extensive medium-term research and development programme to enhance language teacher education in the member states. The team pooled together the comprehensive amount of pedagogical material resulting from numerous national ELP training events conducted as part of the project, reviewed it and designed additional materials in response to the specific needs arising in different national contexts. All of the material was also made available on a CD-ROM that was included in the Project C6 report “Preparing teachers to use the European Language Portfolio” (Little et al. 2007).

The Council of Europe thus had an important role in coordinating the developments in ELP-oriented language education through a network of national contact persons and other experts nominated by the member states. The work also involved a large number of professional visits, task groups, workshops and symposiums in the member states, and disseminating the reports that resulted from the extensive research and development work. For this purpose, the Council has established the ELP website as a free resource for language teachers and educational materials developers (www.coe.int/portfolio/).

Developing the FinELP as an instrument for experiential language education through university-school partnerships

The Finnish version of the European Language Portfolio (FinELP) for compulsory education was developed in connection with the Council of Europe's work aimed at supporting socially responsible pupil autonomy. This work was accomplished as an outcome of five consecutive action research projects spanning twenty years:

- (1) The OK School Development Project (1994–98)
- (2) The Finnish ELP Pilot Project (1998–01)
- (3) From piloting to implementation: the ELP Mentor Project (2001–04)
- (4) The OSKU project (2006–09)
- (5) The KISA Project (2010–12).

These projects are discussed next from the perspective of advancing foreign language education through the teachers' collaborative professional growth.

(1) The OK School Development Project (1994–98) was led by Pauli Kaikkonen and Viljo Kohonen. Some 40 teachers from six schools in the vicinity of Tampere participated in the project. The joint project planning work resulted in the following pedagogical principles, which evolved gradually during the initial year of the project (1994–95): 1. Site-based curriculum design, whereby the schools assume ownership of their pedagogical development work; 2. Collegial collaboration, establishing site-based teacher teams in each school; 3. Networking of the schools (primary; lower/upper secondary); 4. Openness of action, sharing information in the schools, and 5. Experiential learning orientation, encouraging teachers to see themselves as researchers of their work through reflective participation. (Kaikkonen & Kohonen 1996; Kohonen & Kaikkonen 1996; Kaikkonen & Kohonen 1998.)

The OK project was aimed at fostering the teachers' professional growth in an experiential learning approach (Kolb 1984; Kohonen 1989). This involved active collaboration with an emphasis on reflective, autonomous learning and intercultural education (Kaikkonen & Kohonen 1998; Kohonen et al. 2001; Kohonen & Kaikkonen 2002; Sahlberg & Sharan 2002). To facilitate the participants in developing cooperative pedagogy in their classes, regular in-service workshops were organised during the project, lasting half a working day or a full day. The design of these workshops encouraged a collegial professional culture through extensive reflection and sharing of personal experiences in small groups.

The teachers were further guided in clarifying their educational goals and interests by providing several sessions on reflective learning and qualitative research as the theoretical underpinning of the project. The project leaders also introduced the idea of the language *teacher's portfolio* as a tool for supporting professional reflection and growth. Based on their portfolio material, the teachers were invited to write a personal developmental essay at the end of each school year to submit to the researchers. The essays helped them make sense of their classroom experiences while also providing authentic qualitative research data for tracing the pedagogical classroom developments in the course of the project. (Kaikkonen & Kohonen 1998.)

In connection with the workshops, the teachers also agreed on syllabus-based pedagogical tasks to teach in their classes and to report their experiences at the following workshop. The discussions promoted the spirit of open collaboration, shared responsibility and mutual learning. The OK project thus provided a common forum for the participants to discuss, conceptualise and evaluate their pedagogical experiences, and plan further work together. (Kohonen & Kaikkonen 2002.)

The findings indicated that an educational change is not just an intellectual and rational matter of learning the factual information. It is also very much a question of undertaking the necessary emotional

work inherent in any major changes. For many teachers, the personal discoveries were accompanied by feelings of increased professional competence, being energised by the collegial collaboration. For some, the new practices also posed a threat to their current educational beliefs, entailing the need to modify their understandings. Collegial support and sharing were helpful for all. (Kaikkonen & Kohonen 1996; Kaikkonen & Kohonen 1998; Kohonen & Kaikkonen 2002.)²

(2) **The ELP Pilot Project of the Council of Europe** (1998–2000) was carried out in 15 national project groups working under the auspices of the Council of Europe, with a total of some 31,000 pupils in the projects of the participating member states. The principles and guidelines of the ELP resulted from the intensive work conducted at many joint seminars in the member states. According to the project report (Schärer 2000), a central finding was that the ELPs were generally well received and worked satisfactorily in the various national settings. There was an agreement that the ELP should basically consist of three parts: the language passport, the language biography and the dossier. Such a common core was seen as an essential European dimension for the pedagogical research and development work. It was also considered a pre-requisite for the international reporting role of the ELP to become feasible.

The report drew the following general conclusions based on the data from the participating countries: (1) The ELP as a learning tool is feasible from a pedagogic point of view; (2) It addresses key educational issues in Europe; (3) It fosters the declared aims of the Council of Europe. The report consequently recommended a wide implementation of the ELP throughout the member states, to

² The OK Project (1994–98) was conducted in close collaboration between Pauli Kaikkonen and Viljo Kohonen. We were jointly responsible for the evolving design of the theoretical project framework, the qualitative data collection, as well as co-teaching at the project workshops, evaluating and planning the ongoing action and co-editing the joint publications. In addition to this shared responsibility, Pauli Kaikkonen investigated the pupils' experiences of intercultural learning and their identity building (Kaikkonen, in this volume), while Viljo Kohonen focused on the teachers' professional growth during the course of the OK project.

maintain and support linguistic and cultural diversity. (Schärer 2000, 12–15.)

Based on the findings, the Education Committee of the Council of Europe accepted the jointly prepared document *Principles and Guidelines* of the ELP in 2000 (revised in *Principles* 2011). It emphasised the quality and credibility of the ELP as a pedagogic and reporting tool in the European context (*Principles* 2000). In their meeting in Cracow (in October 2000), the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education of the Council of Europe member states adopted the following Resolution on the European Language Portfolio: “the Governments of the member states, in harmony with their education policies, implement or create conditions favourable for the implementation and wide use of the ELP according to the *Principles and Guidelines* laid down by the Education Committee.” (Resolution 2000.)

The **Finnish ELP pilot project (1998–2001)** was conducted as a three-year project and was part of this large European project, led by Viljo Kohonen and Ulla Pajukanta. The project made it possible to trace the progress of the same pupils for the entire three-year cycle of schooling (in primary and secondary education). It took place in eight schools, with a total of 360 pupils and 22 language teachers (Kohonen & Pajukanta 2003; Kohonen 2004). The project undertook the challenge of creating a Finnish version of the ELP, in line with the then forthcoming Finnish National Framework Curriculum (2004). The decisions concerning the project implementation were made together at monthly seminars, which also provided ample time for teachers to discuss in collegial small groups, sharing and considering their pedagogical experiences in the classes and doing further planning.

To introduce the reflective orientation to their pupils, the teachers assisted them in reflecting on their language learning experiences, and how they saw their roles as language learners. Beginning the project work with the pedagogic function of the ELP (working on

the Language Biography and the Dossier) provided easier access to reflective work than using the CEFR's self-assessment grid (and the checklists) right away. The teachers used simple questions to facilitate the pupils' reflection. (e.g., "How do you see your role as a language learner?", "What aspects of foreign language learning are easy/difficult for you?").

The teachers facilitated independent work by guiding their pupils to undertake syllabus-based learning tasks that were open enough to leave space for real choices, appropriate to their age, learning skills and the level of proficiency in the given target language (e.g. preparing a report/presentation on topics like "My family/home town/hobbies" and considering their views on such topics as traveling, environment, future expectations in life). Having options entailed personal choices about how to set the aims, draw up action plans, carry out and monitor the work and evaluate it in small groups. The plans specified the time frame for the work to be done: agreeing on the deadlines for consulting and returning the reports, and what to include in the report. The plans could also specify (minimum) requirements for acceptable work in terms of the report length and topics to be dealt with, also including a short reflection.

The principles, structure and pedagogy of the Finnish version of the ELP (FinELP) emerged gradually in the monthly seminars at the university, integrating the Council of Europe's principles and guidelines (2000) with the Finnish site-based syllabuses. The seminars and the joint planning created a spirit of collegial sharing and negotiated learning among the teachers. The interactive process also encouraged them to use similar work processes in their own classes. (Kohonen 2002a.)

In accordance with the reflective FL learning approach, the participants developed the notion of ELP-oriented language learning, referring to the negotiated teaching-learning process whereby the pupils gradually took increasing responsibility for their learning. To encourage more independent work, the teachers gave them

open-ended learning tasks associated with the textbook chapters. Negotiating the personal project aims, contents and processes with the teacher helped them take more responsibility for their learning. Having options entailed individual choices about how to set the aims and make action plans, and how to monitor and evaluate their own learning during the course of the work. (Kohonen 2002a, 84–91; Kohonen & Pajukanta 2003.)

The findings indicated that the pupils were in the middle of a major educational change in their foreign language learning, with their beliefs being divided between the old and new cultures in language teaching/learning. While traditional language teaching had an ethos of working mainly alone under teacher supervision and control, the emerging new culture of socially responsible language education assumed an emphasis on cooperative learning in small groups involving reflection and self- and peer-assessment. (Kohonen 2004; Kohonen & Pajukanta 2003.)

The project leaders also encouraged the teachers to record their observations, thoughts and insights in their personal diaries and collect their teaching materials in their teacher portfolios. Based on such personal material, the leaders invited teachers to submit open-ended professional development essays at the end of each school year, reflecting on their pedagogical experiences and findings during the past school year. The teachers also developed the notion of jointly planned *bridging tasks*, which involved small teaching projects in their classes. They discussed their experiences of these tasks in small groups at the subsequent seminar. In this way the findings from the classrooms fed into the discussions and conclusions at the seminar, to be brought back to the classrooms for further exploratory work. (Kohonen & Pajukanta 2003.)

The Council of Europe’s Project ”From piloting to implementation” (2001–03). The ELP was officially published and its implementation project was designed at the Coimbra symposium in Portugal (in June 2001). The large pan-European follow-up project

was then carried out in 45 member states. According to the project report (Schärer 2008), the ELP (1) contributed significantly to the dissemination of European goals, values, concepts and principles; (2) made a difference in educational practice, and (3) was an effective catalyst for change on the European, national and local levels. The curriculum reforms and learning materials in many national contexts were informed by the ELP research and development work. Its basic principles challenged traditional learning and teaching practices, implying the need for a major pedagogical change. In a number of national contexts the ELP reportedly functioned as an effective catalyst for such changes.

As part of the ELP implementation project, Finland carried out the **(3) ELP Mentor project** (2001–04) in Tampere, led by Viljo Kohonen. The project participants were teacher educators from four universities (Tampere, Joensuu, Jyväskylä and Helsinki), with three didactics lecturers from each department of teacher education. Each of the universities conducted their own ELP implementation projects in local schools, led by the teacher education lecturers. The projects involved regular planning seminars with the participating teachers at the universities.

The participants in the Finnish ELP Mentor project seminars in Tampere were thus all mentors in charge of leading their own three-year implementation projects, working with the school teachers. This local research and development work was supported at the joint seminars at the University of Tampere through lectures, duplicated research handouts and intensive planning and discussions in small groups. The groups provided a safe forum for the mentors to explore their ideas, discoveries and concerns together. The group findings and conclusions were elaborated further at the seminars, in an environment of shared responsibility. (Kohonen 2005.)

In the two long-term projects, the ELP emerged as a significant pedagogical resource for enhancing foreign language education. The interactive pedagogical process enabled teachers to get to know their

pupils better as individuals. Encountering them on a more personal basis in an open consultation was a rewarding experience for many teachers. However, guiding the work took a considerable amount of time in designing the guidelines for the work, negotiating the ground rules and deadlines, answering questions, and reading the reports thoughtfully for specific, encouraging feedback. The pupils found the teacher's comments and support very motivating for their continued learning efforts. (Kohonen & Korhonen 2007.)

New solutions evolved in the project seminars in Tampere, helping teachers develop ELP-oriented pedagogy in their own classrooms. The teachers were encouraged to see themselves as learners of their profession, collaborating with each other for common benefit. Attempts were also made to involve several teachers from the same school, including the head teachers (where possible), aiming at sustainable site-based engagement. The teachers found it useful to discuss the theoretical principles and practical ways of organising their pupils' work, and how to teach the essential concepts: socially responsible autonomy, reflection and self-assessment. When comparing their experiences and discoveries at subsequent seminars and sharing their findings and uncertainties, significant professional learning developed through mutual interaction and trust. Similarly, sharing the moments of insight and success in the classes strengthened the spirit of collegial professional growth. (Kohonen 2005; Kohonen & Korhonen 2007.)

By way of consolidating the ELP implementation in Finland, a further forum for disseminating the research-based information about the ELP pedagogy was also provided by the so-called *ViKiPeda seminars* (1999–2013, an acronym for “*Foreign Language Pedagogy*” in Finnish). The seminars were coordinated by Pauli Kaikkonen and Viljo Kohonen to support the national sharing and evaluation of experiences, and develop the work further. They were organised biannually at each of the seven departments of teacher education in the Finnish universities, moving from one university to the next

after two years (see also Kaikkonen, in this volume).³ The seminars were also open to local language teachers at each location, taking place during the weekends. The local organisers undertook to edit a collection of the papers given at each seminar, which was published in the university's series of publications. From 2002 onwards, these reports were written either in English or German, making it also possible to disseminate the findings internationally.

To sum up briefly, the Finnish language teachers' ELP journey in these projects progressed through the following major steps: 1. Clarifying the teachers' educational orientation, their pedagogical beliefs and conceptions of language learning; 2. Clarifying the pupils' views and beliefs of themselves as language learners and language users; 3. Working towards a supportive environment of cooperative learning in language education; 4. Encouraging and teaching reflection on the individual and social learning processes; 5. Guiding the pupils to undertake a number of portfolio tasks and write reports on them, also reflecting on their developments as language learners and users; and 6. Guiding them to assess their language proficiency using the self-assessment lists in the target language, as far as possible. (Kohonen 2007; 2009; 2010; 2011.)

(4) The OSKU ELP development project (2006–09). The Finnish work on developing ELP pedagogy in compulsory language education as collegial collaboration was pursued further in the OSKU project, led by Raili Hildén at the University of Helsinki. The project group consisted of seven project locations that involved language classes both in the university teacher training schools and in local municipal schools. The local projects were led by the researchers at the departments of teacher education, with a total of some 30 teachers and

³ The ViKiPeda seminars were organised and led by the language teacher educators at the respective seven departments of teacher education, funded by the Ministry of Education. They were arranged at the different universities as follows: University of Jyväskylä 1999, University of Tampere 2001, University of Oulu 2003, University of Turku 2005, University of Helsinki 2007, University of Joensuu 2009, Åbo Akademi University in Vasa 2011, and again Jyväskylä 2013.

700 pupils. The teachers guided their pupils to learn life-skills through a participatory approach that involved them both experientially and emotionally. The project leaders attended joint seminars twice a year at the University of Helsinki to consider current theoretical issues and discuss the progress reports in the different locations. The local reports were also publicized on the project website at the University of Helsinki for the OSKU participants.

The findings emphasized the importance of collegial teacher collaboration aimed at enhancing socially responsible pupil autonomy in language education. Professional knowledge was seen as an emancipatory medium for reaching out on the zone of proximal development, being empowered by improved pedagogical action. As the teachers' confidence increased, they were able to give more responsibility to pupils, trusting that it was not necessary for them to see, hear and control everything. This supported their pupils' self-direction and responsibility for learning. The teachers found the following topics problematic: oral skills teaching, autonomy education, and assessment using the CEFR's Common Reference Level descriptors, as well as evaluating their pupils' cultural identities. (Hildén & Salo 2011, 236–40.)

(5) The KISA project (2010–12), completing and publishing the FinELPS. As an outcome of the long-term research and development work outlined above briefly, the Finnish versions of the ELPs for the comprehensive school were completed in the KISA project as a national resource for compulsory language education. The project was coordinated by the University of Tampere, in collaboration with a number of researchers and language teachers from the Universities of Eastern Finland (Joensuu campus), Helsinki, and Jyväskylä. The collaborative educational approach encouraged the pupils'

socially responsible autonomy and supported their plurilingual and pluricultural competence, learning skills and self-assessment.⁴

The work also involved the joint design of a large amount of pedagogical teaching materials, produced in line with the new National Core Curriculum for foreign languages (POPS 2016). The long-term Finnish ELP project was completed in 2014, after some editing work (by Viljo Kohonen) of the material that was produced by the KISA participants. As a result of the collaborative work by a large number of Finnish language educators, the national FinELP website was established under the auspice of the National Board of Education. All of the material is now freely available on the website <http://kielisalkku.edu.fi/>.

The Finnish versions of the ELP for compulsory education were registered by the Council of Europe in 2014 in compliance with the Council's *Principles and Guidelines* (2011, www.coe.int/portfolio/). They are designed as a pedagogical resource for foreign language education in the comprehensive school in Finland (grades 1–3; 4–6; 7–9, pupils aged 7–15 years). However, the pedagogical ideas and practices are naturally applicable at any level of language education, and can also be modified for different contexts and needs (e.g., teaching Finnish as a host or a foreign language).

The three FinELP models are available on the website in two sets, in the two domestic languages plus English: Finnish-English and Swedish-English. The Self-assessment Lists (Checklists) are provided in English, Finnish, French, German, Russian, Spanish and Swedish.

⁴ The KISA project team consisted of a coordination group (Riitta Jaatinen, Pauli Kaikkonen and Viljo Kohonen); an advising group (Riikka Alanen, Raili Hildén, Riitta Jaatinen, Pauli Kaikkonen, Kati Kajander, Ritva Kantelinen, Viljo Kohonen and Pirkko Pollari) from the four participating universities; and an action group of language teachers from the four cities (Merja Auvinen, Tuija Dalmo, Anne-Marie Grahn-Saarinen, Mari Kalaja, Hannele Kara, Arja Kujansivu, Eila Kuokkanen, Kaija Kähkönen, Kaija Perho, Eeva Regan, Olli-Pekka Salo and Ursula Viita-Leskelä), each having extensive experience in using and developing the ELP in language education in compulsory Finnish education. The FinELP website was designed by Sisältötoimisto Kolome Company in Helsinki, in consultation with Anna-Kaisa Mustaparta, Counsellor of Education at the National Board of Education and the KISA Advising group.

The purpose of the seven parallel lists is to encourage users to develop their plurilingual and pluricultural competences in the languages that they study or wish to learn on their own, as proposed in the CEFR (2001) and in the ELP *Principles and Guidelines* (2011). In line with the reflective learning-to-learn approach, the Language Biography provides a great deal of reflective work for the language users to consider their intercultural learning experiences and observations. Further, the Dossier consists of two parts: a Learning Dossier (building up a personal learning history over years with samples of work); and a Reporting Dossier (choosing certain work samples to report individual progress).

The reflective work in the Language Biography, combined with the dual function of the Dossier, provides an interface between learning, teaching and assessment. The approach thus involves (formative) assessment of learning, enhancing learning through reflection and interaction, and (summative) assessment of learning, assessing communicative proficiency using the Common Reference Levels of the CEFR (2001; Little 2009). The models and pedagogical materials are downloadable from the above website for local work on the user's computer, to be printed out as needed.

In the FinELP projects discussed above, the teachers assumed an active role in developing collegial collaboration as an inherent element of professional growth. They found it helpful to discuss their emerging understandings and classroom work in collegial groups, using their teacher portfolios for reflecting on their experiences as language educators. They were thus developing their professionalism as collective knowledge creation, transforming the pedagogical knowledge-in-theory into their personal knowledge-in-action in the collegial process.

ELP-oriented language teaching and research cultivated an interesting observation: the developments of the teacher and pupil seem to proceed in a parallel process. As the teachers were able to integrate the principles of the CEFR and the ELP with their site-based

language syllabuses and design learning tasks to foster interactive classroom work, their feelings of professional competence were enhanced. Similarly, as the pupils gained increased understanding of their participatory roles in the groups, reflecting on their work and experiencing positive communicative progress, they were able to assume more responsibility. There was thus a cyclic interplay between teacher and pupil engagement: the teacher's professional confidence increased pupil motivation and effort, and the pupils' positive responses, in turn, fostered teacher commitment (the "virtuous cycle" noted in Kohonen 2002; 2009; 2010; 2011; Perclová 2006; Sisamakís 2006; Kara 2007; Hildén & Salo 2011).

The principles and reflective practices of ELP-oriented language education have also been introduced to pre-service teacher education in Finland. Reflective professionalism has thus been established as a central goal in pre-service teacher education. Riitta Jaatinen has conducted seminal research and development work on reflective pre-service teacher education, resulting in what she calls the student teacher's narrative portfolio. This long-term work is discussed in her contribution to several volumes (Jaatinen 2001; 2007; 2009; 2013; 2015).

A summary of ELP-related work within the Council of Europe.

In 2010, the European Validation Committee provided a summary of the added value of the ELP for teachers (Little et al. 2011, 15–16):

1. The ELP encourages pupils to take responsibility, accepting that they share responsibility for the success of the course.
2. The ELP helps the teacher to cope with heterogeneous groups, helping pupils understand their individuality and achieve personal goals in the group.
3. The ELP promotes communication within the class by providing a common pedagogical language. The CEFR's approach to describing language competence in terms that pupils can understand, and the reflective learning approach, facilitates the dialogue about learning among the pupils themselves and with the teacher.

4. The ELP helps make progress visible and increases satisfaction. As the descriptors are relatively easy for pupils to understand, they can see what they are aiming at and when they have achieved it. When pupils can see that they are making progress, they are more likely to be satisfied.
5. The ELP helps make achievement visible and comprehensible for employers, for other schools, etc. If pupils need to show their current levels of proficiency in one or more languages, the ELP does this in a clear and comprehensible way.
6. The ELP puts learning into a wider European context. For some pupils, the European recognition of the ELP and the common reference level system is important and attractive.
7. The ELP facilitates mobility: the CEFR provides a transparent and coherent system for describing communicative proficiency across Europe.

Perspectives on language teaching and teacher professionalism as experiential language education

Aspects of site-based understanding in foreign language teaching

The complexity of what goes on in classrooms has been discussed by Dick Allwright (2006) in terms of the practitioner-based understanding of classroom life. He regards the teacher's local understanding as a prerequisite for developing educational practices. He uses the notion of *exploratory practice* (EP) as the key concept for what he considers a new research paradigm for language teaching. He argues that practitioners are the most suitable people to conduct productive classroom-based research because of their site-based pedagogical knowledge. The orientation emphasizes the importance

of the teacher's professional understanding in the classroom context. Allwright also suggests that the pupils need to be included as practitioners alongside the teachers, seeking shared understandings together. (Allwright 2006, 15–16.)

Simon Gieve and Inés K. Miller also discuss professional learning as a social phenomenon, seeing language classrooms as *communities of practice* with complex social relationships. Classroom discourse is situated: the participants talk to each other in the context of a shared history of interaction involving multiple and complex identities. As members of the communities of practice, the teachers are not just teachers and the pupils not just pupils, in terms of their social roles in school. They are also authentic people who speak to each other while living their personal lives in the classroom community. There is thus an intricate interplay between the participants' personal and institutional lives in the classrooms. (Gieve & Miller 2006, 18–26; Kohonen 2009; 2010.)

Essential in the university-school partnership is that it is based on equal status, trust and respect. Julian Edge (2002) points out that the teacher's self-development needs other people: colleagues and pupils. Cooperation helps the participants understand their experiences better and thus enriches mutual interaction and understanding. In facilitating these growth processes, teacher educators create an environment of partnership with the participating teachers and schools. (Jaatinen 2001; 2007; 2009; 2015; Kaikkonen 2001; 2002, and in this volume; Kohonen 2009; 2010; 2012; 2015; Schärer 2012.)

Towards a pedagogy for autonomy in language education

To guide their pupils' progress towards socially responsible autonomy, teachers assume a firm professional stance in setting the tone of the work, negotiating the processes and expecting that the pupils observe the deadlines for completing the work agreed together. Facilitating the pupil's autonomy is thus also a question of enhancing the teacher's

professional autonomy, through collegial collaboration and reflection on pedagogical action.

Underscoring this interaction, Jiménez, Lamb and Vieira (2007, 1) propose an illuminating definition of autonomy that involves learner and teacher autonomy, defining both as the “competence to develop as a self-determined, socially responsible and critically aware participant in (and beyond) educational environments, within a vision of education as (inter)personal empowerment and social transformation.” They emphasize the pedagogy for autonomy as far more than a strict teaching method to be followed mechanically. They argue that autonomy requires a critical stance towards the constraints of teacher and learner empowerment in the given context. (Kohonen 2007; 2009; 2010; 2012; Kohonen & Korhonen 2007; Little et al. 2007; Hildén & Salo 2011.)

The educational change inherent in the pedagogy for autonomy entails that teachers develop a new kind of professional identity, seeing themselves as language educators, as facilitators of their pupils’ learning and as professional social actors, who work in collaboration with other educators and stakeholders of the school. Assuming such a goal for professional identity is not just an intellectual matter of factual information; it also means undertaking the necessary emotional work inherent in any major changes in life. Big changes may trigger a broad spectrum of feelings, posing a threat to the teacher’s professional self-understanding and educational beliefs. The transitional stage involves moving beyond the current zone of comfort in pedagogy, which may also involve feelings of discomfort, anxiety and phoney behaviour. However, teachers relate differently to such tensions. What is experienced as an anxiety situation by some teachers may be seen as an energising challenge by others. (Kalaja & Barcelos 2003; Kohonen 2009; 2011; 2012; 2015; Kohonen & Korhonen 2007.)

A note on the contradicting values in current schooling policies

However, the prospect of enhancing professional growth also requires taking a critical stance to certain trends in current societies and schooling policies (the prevailing *Zeitgeist*), which seem to be contradictory from an educational point of view. As I see it, the principles and practices of the neo-liberal market economy have been acquired from business life and cultivated into education far too easily without critical consideration. The now fashionable notion is competition, which is claimed to improve results of any kind. Schools are thus forced to compete for public image, pupils (“customers”) and resources. Competition is intensified through various controlling mechanisms (such as ranking of schools and teachers based on pupils’ test scores). However, if some practices seem to work in business life, it does not automatically follow that they are also valid and viable in education. Education is inherently an ethical question of nurturing human growth in all pupils by working together, aiming at an educative community (Taylor 1991; Jaatinen 2001; 2007; 2009; 2015; Lehtovaara 2001; Kohonen 2010; 2012; 2015).

While quality in education is obviously vital for teachers (and their pupils), the competitive policies bypass the specific nature of education as fostering the growth of human potential. Terry Lamb (2008) discusses of the discrepancies between educational research and schooling policies and practices in his study, based on expert reports from eight European countries. He notes that the national policies advocating democratic citizenship education, education for life and life-long learning are generally in harmony with the goals of learner autonomy. These goals have by now been integrated into the language curricula and textbooks in many countries.

Lamb’s study also revealed a number of obstacles in implementing such educative policies: top-down management of the social and educational changes; marketisation of education involving

competition between schools; test-driven instruction aimed at preparing pupils for high-stakes end-of-school examinations; traditional transmission models in teacher training; lack of adequate opportunities and support for in-service teacher education; and the general working cultures, conditions and resources prevailing in schools. (Lamb 2008, 49–53). Such controlling mechanisms clearly pose the risk that education becomes test-driven, rather than being aimed at developing the whole personality of the pupil in terms of socially responsible autonomy in a lifelong learning perspective.

Nancy Schniedewind (2012) provides an illuminating discussion of the neo-liberal policies in public education in the United States, calling the contradictory situation “the ambush of public education”. The programs are advocated by market-based federal policies, consisting of test-driven, top-down standards and accountability for all U.S. schools. The policies entail privatization of public education, whereby failing schools can be taken over by private corporations as the so-called charter schools; and private schools can also be funded through various voucher programmes. The control of public resources is thus being transferred to the private sector. This may promote financial profit over equitable social goals. In this educational marketplace, she points out, schooling as a public good is under a surprise attack (an “ambush”). (Schniedewind 2012, 4–8.)

Schniedewind argues further that the quality of schools is measured through high-stakes standardized tests focusing on pupils’ progress in terms of the AYP (Annual Yearly Progress) scores. The test scores are used at the classroom, school and district levels to assess accountability, rewarding or punishing teachers accordingly through merit pay or even firing them. Thus, educators are blamed when schools fail, disregarding attention to out-of-school factors, such as the child’s language problems, or the parents’ poverty, unemployment, or inadequate health care.

Moreover, the emphasis on the high-stakes multiple-choice testing tends to narrow the curriculum down to just those subjects

that are tested. Focusing on low-level thinking also leaves aside such important goals as critical thinking, problem-solving and social and emotional skills. Teachers are thus under pressure to teach to the tests, using pedagogies that may contradict their educational values. Schniedewind concludes that such measures do not achieve success for a wide range of diverse pupils. What does work are the following factors: adequate resources, professional development for teachers, smaller class sizes, and collaboration between schools and communities. (Schniedewind 2012, 10–22; Kohonen 2015.)

Conclusion

Focus on the teachers

To be able to cope with the contradicting tensions in the goals, policies and resources of education, and in parental expectations for their children, teachers need educational wisdom, courage and endurance. In my understanding, then, to focus on the pupils, it is necessary to focus on teacher education and the teachers' position and working conditions in schools in the first place. Language teachers have an important role in the type of journey their pupils embark on in their language education, and how they experience foreign language learning in their classes.

To work towards a supportive educational journey for all participants, teachers need to engage in professional discourse with each other. They also need to take the time to reflect and engage in collegial discussions in order to outline the roadmap for their site-based pedagogical action. Working together, teachers establish a community-based culture of teaching and experiential learning in their schools, developing their capacity to frame and reframe educational issues. Through their collective stance as language educators, and their educational discourse, they build the road of

language teaching/learning as they travel along it together with their pupils.

To help their pupils engage themselves in their journey in a life-long learning perspective, teachers need to encourage their pupils to see themselves as unique persons with their own voices and abilities for true agency, and as language users and intercultural actors. The perspectives and findings discussed in this contribution indicate that the ELP can become a valuable resource in making the pedagogical journey possible, manageable and rewarding to all participants.

To conclude the discussion, I see autonomy as part of a more general notion of values education in school. Being an autonomous person entails the respect for one's dignity as a moral actor, valuing others and relating to them with dignity. An essence in human dignity is the notion of moral agency: being morally aware of one's conduct and its consequences to others in the given context, assuming a responsible position.

I wish to argue further that commitment to educational values is a key component in the teacher's professional ethics and authenticity as an educator. Education is aimed at nurturing pupils' growth in a participatory approach that creates an educative classroom community. Fostering pupils' human growth is thus an engagement that guides the teachers' professional identity as educators.

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