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Establishing language portfolios in primary education: The importance of practical experiences of pupils and teachers.

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1. Introduction

A large number of different languages are spoken in Europe. Because of increasing mobility in Europe, old language borders are disappearing and new language borders are arising. Europeans often speak languages other than their mother tongue at home or in the street. Language learning not only occurs at school. Therefore, it is important to have a good insight into the way in which people learn languages, within a European context. Moreover, it is important to know what levels of language skills are achieved when people learn languages in formal as well as in informal contexts.

In order to get a grip on the European language (learning) situation, the project *Language Learning for European Citizenship* was carried out between 1989 and 1997 under the auspices of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg (see, for example, Council of Europe 1996, 2000, 2001; Coste et al., 1998; Christ, 1999). In this project, two instruments were developed:

- (1) A Common European Framework of Reference covering six language proficiency levels. This language scale can be used to compare language skills and certificates. For example, a pupil who studied French in high school can, when applying for an apprenticeship in France, give a potential employer a good idea of what such a diploma in French means.
- (2) A European Language Portfolio: a comprehensive document that not only covers a series of formal certificates but can also document other language experiences, such as growing up in a multilingual home situation.

The first part of this contribution is a description of the two instruments that have been proposed by the Council of Europe. The second part of this contribution goes into language portfolios for primary schools in the Netherlands. A description is given of two language portfolios that have been developed: a portfolio for children and a portfolio for teachers.

2. A European language scale

An important aspect of the Common European Framework of Reference (henceforth: CEFR) is the elaboration of a European scale for language proficiency (Council of Europe 2001; Trim, 1997). This language scale (see Appendix 1) is based on the following aspects of language proficiency:

- Understanding: listening
- Understanding: reading
- Speaking: spoken interaction
- Speaking: spoken production
- Writing.

For each aspect of language proficiency, the language user's level is indicated by one of the following six levels:

- Level A1: basic user (breakthrough)
- Level A2: basic user (way stage)
- Level B1: independent user (threshold)
- Level B2: independent user (vantage)
- Level C1: proficient user (effective proficiency)
- Level C2: proficient user (mastery)

The CEFR formulates so-called general descriptors of these language proficiency levels for each of the five language proficiency aspects. For example, the general descriptor for the language understanding proficiency of *basic breakthrough* (or level A1) is formulated as follows:

I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family, and my immediate concrete surroundings, when people speak slowly and clearly.

Below is an example of the general descriptor used for the language reading proficiency of a *proficient mastery* language user (or level C2):

I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles, and literary works.

With the aid of general descriptors such as these, anyone, the teacher, the curriculum developer, but also the employer, the personnel officer, or the policy maker can easily attain information on an individual's language proficiency. In terms of European and international affairs, this assessment of language proficiency levels may have great relevance.

The CEFR also consists of specific descriptors that provide detailed information and insight. Some examples of specific descriptors for the language understanding proficiency of the *basic breakthrough* language user (or level A1) are the following:

I can understand simple directions for how to get from X to Y, on foot or by public transport.

I can understand numbers, prices, and times.

More detailed information on general and specific descriptors can be found in the studies of North & Schneider (1998) and North (2000). The CEFR provides a measuring instrument that makes it possible to compare the language proficiencies of individuals/groups from the member states of the European Union. But its objectives go further than this. The CEFR indicates how a language is acquired, taught, and learnt. Promoting consciousness of and reflection on the use of language are two other important objectives. The CEFR is meant to be a transparent, flexible, and open instrument directed towards different forms of language use and language learning in formal or informal contexts (Trim 1999). The CEFR can provide a basis for the acknowledgement of the language qualifications that are used in the different European countries. Moreover, the implementation of the CEFR also implies the

acknowledgement of the potential of the non-formal language knowledge of those Europeans who grow up in multilingual home situations.

3. A language portfolio in Europe

The second instrument developed by the Council of Europe is a European language portfolio. It was developed and piloted by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, from 1998 until 2000. It was launched on a pan-European level during the European Year of Languages (2001) as a tool to support the development of plurilingualism. In most European countries language portfolios with country-specific characteristics are implemented (see Schneider & Lenz, 2001; Little & Perclová 2001, Schärer 2001). A language portfolio is a personal tool to evoke processes and outcomes of language learning and language planning. *The Principles and Guidelines* approved by the Council of Europe (2000) recommend that three parts be identified in a language portfolio:

1. *Language Passport*: in this part, language users document their own language background, other languages that have been learnt at school or outside school, and an overview of official diplomas (such as exam documents, language course certificates).
2. *Language Biography*: this part consists of statements on language use, through which the language user can reflect on the proficiency in a specific language. The list of statements is related to the CEFR.
3. *Language File*: this part is a combination of documents consisting of, for example, the certified documents showing the reports and studies the language user has in the course of his studies, the studies he made during a student exchange programme, if attended; and documents concerning a particular language used during his studies for the projects and presentations he has participated in.

For some years now, the Netherlands has been gaining experience in developing a language portfolio for education. The Dutch project was carried out under the auspices of the National Bureau of Modern Foreign Languages in collaboration with the European Platform for Dutch Education. The objectives of these projects were:

- (1) To stimulate public support for the language portfolio within the framework of the Dutch education system concerning languages;
- (2) To establish an appropriate format of a language portfolio,
- (3) To investigate the effect of the use of the language portfolio on teachers and students.

The language portfolio projects in the Netherlands focused on different target groups. Primary education as well as secondary and vocational education were taken into consideration when the use of a portfolio was being examined. Moreover the practical experiences of children as well as teachers were taken into account. In the following section the focus is on two language portfolios that have been developed for primary education: a portfolio for children and a portfolio for teachers. These language portfolios were put into practice by Babylon, the Research Centre for Studies of Multilingualism in the Multicultural Society at Tilburg University.

4. A language portfolio for pupils in primary education

One language portfolio project applied in the Netherlands was specifically carried out in multilingual classes in primary schools. This project aimed at acquiring more information on the form and function of a language portfolio for pupils in multilingual classes. In this project two phases can be distinguished:

- Phase 1: Piloting and implementation (1998/1999 and 1999/2000)
- Phase 2: Dissemination and validation (2000/2001 and 2001/2002)

Piloting and implementation (1998/1999 and 1999/2000)

For two years, 524 primary school children (grades 7 and 8, ages 10-12) in two cities (Tilburg and Maastricht) worked with a language portfolio. On the basis of the experiences of these children and their teachers, the pilot version of the language portfolio was improved. One finding of the piloting stage was that the pupils generally evaluated working with the language portfolio positively. The multilingual pupils in particular took a positive attitude towards the language portfolio. Through the language portfolio, these pupils can profile themselves in a positive way because their language knowledge is considered to be an asset rather than a source of problems (which is how teachers often look at these pupils' first languages). Working with the language portfolio allows teachers to get an increasingly better understanding of the multilingual and multicultural classroom. The first phase of the project underlined the importance of the pedagogical function and the importance of embedding the use of the language portfolio in the school curriculum. A detailed description of the first phase in developing a language portfolio for primary education is presented by Broeder (2001a and 2001b).

Dissemination and validation (2000/2001 and 2001/2002)

The aim of the second phase in the developing process of the language portfolio was twofold. The first aim was to validate the language portfolio according to standardized criteria specified by a national Dutch committee and an international European committee (see <http://culture.coe.int/portfolio>). The second aim was to disseminate on a larger scale the language portfolio in Dutch primary education. A detailed description of the second phase in developing a language portfolio for primary education is presented by Aarts & Broeder (2004).

4.1 Aims of a language portfolio for primary school pupils

The language portfolio for primary school children can be useful during different stages of their language learning career. During formal education, when being transferred to another school, the pupils' language portfolio is very important. Through it, the new school management is informed about the kinds of language courses the pupil has taken and what level of proficiency he has acquired. An interesting aspect of the language portfolio is that it not only gives information about what the pupil has learnt at school, but also documents the kinds of (home) language activities the child has engaged in outside school and what he has learnt there. Later on, when it is time for the pupil to leave school and start working, this language portfolio can be used as a separate document along with official certificates. It is also possible to submit a language portfolio when applying for an (international) job.

In the construction of the language portfolio for primary school children, a number of linguistic and didactic considerations played a role. These considerations influenced the characteristics of the language portfolio which was eventually validated by the Council of Europe (Aarts & Broeder 2003a and 2003b, Acc. Nr. 33.2003).

The upper grades

The language portfolio can be used in the upper grades of primary education. When working with the language portfolio, pupils have to reflect on their language knowledge and their learning of a language. They are also expected to formulate the goals and plans of their language learning processes. This can be expected from pupils in the upper grades of primary education (nine-year-olds and up), but not from younger pupils.

Descriptors and language levels

Not all the descriptors of the CEFR are included in the language portfolio for primary education. Pupils in this age group might well be discouraged if they have to read and decide on about ten descriptors for each level in order to assess their language abilities. Moreover, a number of descriptors of the CEFR are not relevant or recognizable for children of this age. For these reasons, the language portfolio for primary education includes only three descriptors – relevant to this age group – for each level of competence. It was also decided to include only levels A and B from the CEFR. Level C is rarely reached by pupils in primary education.

Self-assessment

Because a language portfolio is a document made by and belonging to the pupils themselves, self-assessment plays a prominent role. The teacher also assesses the language proficiency of the pupil in the language portfolio, but this assessment plays a less prominent role.

Languages taught at school - languages spoken at home

No distinction is made between the languages that are taught at school and the languages that are not. In the language portfolio, the languages that are learnt inside school or outside school are treated in the same manner and thus are appreciated equally.

Instructive language tasks

It was decided to include some examples of instructive language tasks in the portfolio. Teachers and students can find more language tasks on the internet, where they can choose from the tasks on offer (see www.taalportfolio.com). Thus, the portfolio remains a specific document for each pupil, including only those parts and tasks that are important for the pupil himself.

Relation to the language portfolio for secondary education

In order to accommodate the processes of continuous learning, the language portfolio for primary education is related as much as possible to the language portfolio for secondary education (see SLO, 2002a and 2002b). These portfolios consist of the same parts, contain the same levels, and require the same working method. Because the portfolio is adapted to the age level of the children, however, there are also differences between the portfolios. First of all, not all of the descriptors of the CEFR are incorporated in the portfolio for primary education. Furthermore, the descriptions of the situations (explanation of the descriptors) are different in the portfolios, because these situations are attuned to the specific age group. In spite of these differences between the portfolios, there is a clear main line. Therefore, at the transition to secondary school, the portfolio of the pupil in primary education is comparable with, and can be translated into, the one for secondary education.

4.2 Content of the language portfolio for primary school pupils

Introduction for the pupil

The first page of the language portfolio is entitled *This language portfolio belongs to* Here, the pupil can fill in personal information, such as name, address, date of birth, and place of birth. The pupil can also paste in a picture or make a drawing of him/herself. Next, there is a general introduction, followed by a table of contents. The language portfolio consists of three parts: the language passport, the language biography, and the file part with language tasks.

Part 1: The Language Passport

In the language passport, a summary of the language skills of the pupil is given. It consists of an overview of the learning experiences of the pupil with other languages and other cultures. The language passport starts with an explanation for the pupil titled *How to work with the Language Passport*. The language passport consists of three pages, with the following headings:

- *What have I learnt?*
- *What does my teacher say?*
- *My experiences with languages*

The pupil can fill in the *What have I learnt?* page after having completed the forms in the language biography, which is the second part of the language portfolio. By filling in the results of the self-evaluation, the portfolio user gets an overview of his language proficiency. An example of how this can be done for one language at three moments in time, is given in Table 1.

Language:	Date:				Date:				Date:			
Listening	A1	A2	B1	B2	A1	A2	B1	B2	A1	A2	B1	B2
Reading	A1	A2	B1	B2	A1	A2	B1	B2	A1	A2	B1	B2
Talking to others	A1	A2	B1	B2	A1	A2	B1	B2	A1	A2	B1	B2
Speaking	A1	A2	B1	B2	A1	A2	B1	B2	A1	A2	B1	B2
Writing	A1	A2	B1	B2	A1	A2	B1	B2	A1	A2	B1	B2
Remarks:												

Table 1: Part of the 'What have I learnt' sheet from the language passport in the language portfolio for primary school children.

The *What does my teacher say?* page is filled in by the teacher. This page has a similar structure as the one presented in Table 1. The goal is to get an overview of the pupil's level of proficiency in the languages that he learnt at school. On the following page, *My experiences with languages*, the pupil can write down where and when he came in contact with different languages and cultures.

Part 2: The Language Biography

In the language biography, the pupil can register the state of his language knowledge. In addition, the pupil can report what he would like to learn and how he would like to learn it. In this way, the pupil can plan the further development of his language knowledge, and monitor its progress. This concerns all the language knowledge of the pupil, hence both the languages taught at school and the languages learnt outside the school context. The Language Biography starts with an explanation for the pupils, which is entitled *How to work with the Language Biography*. The Language Biography consists of three sets of sheets: language sheets, work sheets, and a planning sheet.

There are two language sheets:

- *Which languages do I speak with whom?*
- *Learning languages*

The *Which languages do I speak with whom?* sheet focuses on the languages the pupil speaks. The pupil can fill in which language or languages he speaks with father, mother, brothers and sisters, grandparents, and best friends. If a dialect is spoken at home, this can also be filled in. The *Learning languages* sheet is concerned with the languages the pupil has learnt. The pupil can fill in the languages he knows and where he learnt these languages. Once again, this concerns all the language knowledge of the pupil, hence both the languages taught at school and the languages learnt outside the school context (within the family, on holidays, on the streets and so forth).

Next there are five work sheets, entitled

- *Listening*
- *Reading*
- *Talking to others*
- *Speaking*
- *Writing*

These forms can be filled in for different languages at different points in time. An example of a work sheet for the domain of listening (level A1) is given in Table 2.

<i>Listening, A1</i>		I can do that			I want to learn
<i>What I can do?</i>	<i>Explanation</i>	<i>not at all</i>	<i>a little bit</i>	<i>very well</i>	
I can understand simple conversations at home or at school	father and mother talk about the family, the teacher tells you what to do				
I can understand what is said to me in a shop	for instance, <i>can I help you, anything else, that's 3 euros</i>				
I can understand a few things in television programmes or messages	you understand familiar names, places, and dates or times				

Table 2: Part of a work sheet from the language biography in the language portfolio for primary school children.

On the work sheets, there are three statements for each proficiency level (A1 through B2) in the form, *I can* These statements are based on the CEFR. Each statement is followed by a short explanation. The pupil has to read the statement and the explanation, after which he can fill in what applies to him. The choices are *I cannot do that at all*, *I can do that a little bit*, *I can do that very well*. When a pupil has filled in that he *cannot do that at all*, or *a little bit*, the pupil may indicate in the last column (*I want to learn*) that he would like to learn to do it. If a pupil indicates for three statements that he can do them very well, he has mastered this level and he can fill in the next level. If the pupil has indicated at the statements of a level that he cannot do it at all, or just a little bit, he has not yet mastered this level. In this way, pupils can fill in the five forms. After having filled in the forms, the results can be recorded on the *What have I learnt?* page in the language passport (see Table 1).

Finally there is the planning sheet *Getting better*. On this sheet the pupil can write down how he wants to get better in the specific language. Some examples of ways to learn more in a language are mentioned (by reading books, by watching television, going on holiday, e-mailing, etc.), but the pupil can also come up with other ways to expand his knowledge of languages. If, at a later time, the pupil fills in the forms again, the planning sheet can be updated also. This provides an overview of the pupil's goals with regard to language learning, the means he uses to achieve these goals, and the progress.

Part 3: File

In the third part, the file, pieces of evidence of the pupil's knowledge of languages can be collected. The pupil can insert examples of his own work in a certain language/languages here. The pupil can collect documents related to languages learnt outside school (for example, letters in the language spoken at home, a postcard from a holiday friend or a pen-friend), documents that are related to the languages taught at school (for example, a working paper, essay, lecture), and language tasks (examples of language tasks are given on the internet: www.taalportfolio.com).

5 A language portfolio for teachers in primary education

The development of a language portfolio for teachers started in January 2002. Six language portfolios for six different target group of teachers were developed and piloted:

- primary school teachers
- secondary school teachers
- teachers in service training
- teachers of vocational adult training
- bilingual primary and secondary schools
- teachers in charge of international programs at secondary schools.

For the development of each of the six teacher portfolios a team of experts was formed. An overview of the six language portfolios for teachers which have been developed is given by SLO (2003) and De Graaff et al. (2003).

In the developing process of the language portfolio for primary school teachers (Aarts & Broeder 2003c) two phases can be distinguished: construction and implementation.

The construction phase

The construction team that was in charge of the portfolio for primary education was based at Tilburg University and consisted of eight 'experts'. In addition to the three researchers from Tilburg University, the construction team consisted of teachers and staff who are confronted with the task of language teaching in primary schools on a daily basis: one teacher who teaches English lessons, one teacher who teaches Dutch as a second language, one headmaster of a school with a multilingual population, a teacher of Turkish as a first language, and a teacher of Arabic as a first language.

The implementation phase

In the school year 2002/2003 the first version of the teacher portfolio for primary education was used and evaluated by a selective representative group of 13 primary school teachers and headmasters: 6 teachers of Turkish, 1 teacher of Arabic, and 4 group teachers of grades 7 and 8, and finally 2 headmasters. In general the use of the language portfolio is evaluated positively, in particular the opportunity to bring to the surface insights in one's own language/professional proficiencies. The respondents anticipate that a particular teacher portfolio might have much potential in maintaining, planning, and documenting one's own proficiency levels. The respondents are more or less pessimistic with respect to the relevance and feasibility of making the achieved proficiency explicit to others in for example job interviews or job evaluations (see Aarts & Broeder, 2004, for a more detailed account). On the basis of this first evaluation improvements to the teacher portfolio have been made.

5.1 Aims of a language portfolio for primary school teachers

A language portfolio for teachers aims at the professionalisation of (language) teachers. It helps teachers to become more aware of how they perceive and fulfill their tasks. Awareness should result in insights into professionalisation needs and possibilities, and ultimately awareness should result in more professional teachers with better teaching abilities. In the language portfolio for primary school teachers professionalisation is a central point. The language portfolios can be used in quality care and in professional training for teachers who

deal with the teaching of languages. For planning, keeping track of and documenting professionalisation activities, a portfolio seems to be a perfect instrument. The aim of a language portfolio for teachers is to help teachers

- document their actual abilities, for themselves as well as for others;
- direct their professionalisation activities;
- make the effect of their professionalisation activities visible.

A teacher can use the language portfolio for his own purposes in directing his professionalisation process. The professionalisation process is aimed at both the maintenance of already acquired abilities as well as the learning of new abilities. In addition the language portfolio for teachers can function in intervision (i.e., peer review and observation in the classroom), in job evaluation with superiors and as a tool in career orientation, and in job interviews. In the teacher portfolio so-called learning activities are also specified. The learning activities are formulated as suggestions which the teacher can use in order to raise his abilities to a higher level. Finally, the language portfolio for teachers provides suggestions for documentation. This implies the ways in which the teacher can illustrate and document the activities actually undertaken in the process of continuing professionalisation.

5.2 Content of the language portfolio for primary school teachers

The structure of the teacher language portfolio is highly compatible with the structure of the children's language portfolio. The teacher portfolio also consists of three parts: the language passport, the language biography, and the file part.

Part 1: The Language Passport

In the language passport part the teacher can record personal background details and provide information on schooling and working experiences. The passport part of the teacher portfolio also consists of overview sheets through which the teacher can document the abilities at different moments in time. By doing so the teacher gets an overview of the development of his abilities. The following three domains of teacher professionalism are distinguished:

- (1) *language proficiency, i.e.,*
 - *Listening*
 - *Reading*
 - *Spoken interaction*
 - *Spoken production*
 - *Writing*

- (2) *didactic proficiency, i.e.,*
 - *Establishing the starting level (of the class)*
 - *Establishing learning goals*
 - *Selection of content material*
 - *Teaching of content material*
 - *Control, evaluation and assessment*
 - *Pedagogical climate*
 - *Dealing with differences (in the multilingual and multicultural classroom)*
 - *Evaluation and professionalisation*

(3) cultural knowledge and experience, i.e.,

- *Geography*
- *History*
- *Population*
- *Religion*
- *Cultural expressions: books, music*
- *Cultural affairs: economy, politics*
- *Situation of the language and its speakers in the Netherlands*

For each of the three domains proficiency levels can be given at specific moments in time. An example from the domain of didactic proficiency is given in Table 3.

Task/language:.....									
	Date:			Date:			Date:		
Establishing starting level	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Establishing learning goals	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Selection of content material	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3

Table 3: Part of an overview sheet from the language passport for the domain of didactic proficiency in the language portfolio for teachers.

Part 2: The Language Biography

In the second part of the teacher portfolio for each of the three proficiency domains a set of descriptors is specified. The descriptors constitute the framework through which the teacher can document proficiency levels in a specific domain. The descriptors for the language proficiency domain are identical to the general descriptors in the CEFR (see Appendix 1). For the other two domains (i.e., the didactic domain and the domain of cultural knowledge and experience) the specification of descriptors and levels are the results of extensive study and discussions by the construction team at Tilburg University.

In the biography part the teacher starts with worksheets on which he can make a evaluation of the proficiency level for a specific (sub)domain. An example from the domain of didactic proficiency is given in Table 4.

Language:					Date:				
Other:									
Establishing starting level		Self		Other		Aim		Action plan	
Level 1									
Level 2									
Level 3									

Table 4: Part of an overview sheet from the language biography for the domain of didactic proficiency in the language portfolio for teachers.

The teacher is asked for a self-evaluation and an evaluation by another person (mostly a fellow-teacher or the headmaster). In addition the teacher is asked to indicate the proficiency level he wants to attain and he is asked to specify an action plan.

The worksheets are filled in by making use of the descriptors, the suggestions for learning activities and the suggestions for documentation. An example of (part) of a worksheet from the domain of didactic proficiency is given in Table 5.

<i>Descriptors</i>	
Level 1	I make an estimation of the average level of the group and take that level as a starting point.
Level 2	I observe the pupils in the first lessons in order to establish their level.
Level 3	I collect background information on the pupils, and if necessary, I administer a test and observe the pupils in order to establish their level.
<i>Learning activities</i>	
<p>Make an analysis of the starting level of a pupil: collect background information, administer a test and observe the pupil in the first lessons.</p> <p>Make a report of this analysis and discuss this report with a colleague (who also knows the pupil).</p>	
<i>Documentation</i>	
<p>Report of the analysis of the starting level of the pupil (background information, observation and test).</p>	

Table 5: Part of a worksheet from the language biography for the domain of didactic proficiency in the language portfolio for teachers.

Part 3: File

In the file part of the portfolio the teacher can collect evidence of his professional knowledge and experience. These can be examples of his work such as teaching reports, observation reports, reports of exchanges and study trips, presentations of relevant projects. In doing this the teacher can make use of some of the suggestions for documentation which are given in the biography part.

6 Conclusion

The processes of developing and implementing the language portfolios for pupils and teachers in primary education clearly show that a portfolio-like language methodology can constitute an important contribution to primary education.

The language portfolio for Dutch teachers in primary education (Aarts & Broeder 2003c) has just been introduced. A first version has been developed and evaluated. The (professional) needs of teachers have to be taken into consideration in the further specification of the form and the function of a language portfolio for teachers, otherwise it will not be possible to create support within the education system.

The development of a language portfolio for pupils in Dutch primary education is in an advanced stage and validated by the Council of Europe (Aarts & Broeder 2003a and 2003b). This implies that with respect to future development of the language portfolio for pupils, the focus will be on the creation of public and educational support, and on the implementation of the instrument in daily classroom practice. Moreover special attention will be paid to the role of the language portfolio in the creation of continuous learning lines from primary education to secondary education. In particular for pupils with a multilingual background the use of a language portfolio has been evaluated positively. A portfolio enables these (ethnic minority) pupils to teach other pupils in the classroom something about their own language and culture. Through a language portfolio the richness of multilingualism is underlined in a positive way.

Currently, many studies in various European countries are being conducted on language portfolios, and in the future teachers and pupils will have the opportunity to participate in portfolio projects more and more. An important principle is that the portfolio user is the owner of his own language portfolio. The portfolio user should be able to guide his own language learning processes by indicating what he wants to learn and how he wants to learn it. Therefore a language portfolio should not only be user-friendly per se, but also of practical benefit for the user. Moreover, the portfolio framework, the overview sheets, the worksheets, etc., should be conveniently accessible for the pupils and the teachers. The implication is that at each preferred moment in time there is the opportunity to work with the language portfolio and pupils and teachers are stimulated to make the language portfolio an integral part of daily classroom practice. In this respect the as yet unexplored opportunities of cyberspace are germane. It is a reasonable conjecture that digital (language) learning environments with sufficient infrastructural support will boost the portfolio methodology as well as the underlying principle of self-awareness in independent life-long continuous learning (see for example the website www.taalportfolio.com).

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Appendix 1 “Self-assessment grid in English” (Source: http://culture2.coe.int/portfolio/documents/assessment_grid_english.doc)

		A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
U N D E R S T A N D I N G	Listening	I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided. I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
	Reading	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.
S P E A K I N G	Spoken Interaction	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	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.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
	Spoken Production	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
W R I T I N G	Writing	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select a style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.

