

**Training teachers to use the  
European Language Portfolio**

Project C6 of the ECML 2nd  
medium-term programme (ELP\_TT)

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**Learning to learn:  
a model for reflection for  
teacher trainers, teachers  
and learners**

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**Overview**

1. Why a reflective approach?
2. A definition of reflection
3. Model of reflection in FL education
4. Facilitating reflection in FL class
5. Some findings in Finnish ELP work
6. Questions for group discussion
7. References

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**1. Why reflection in (FL) learning?**

- **Experience** (linguistic/ cultural/ learning processes/ personal growth) is the *key to language learning* – but not sufficient
- Experience needs **to be processed consciously**: notice learning -> develop awareness -> take charge of learning
- **Transform observation**/ information into personal understanding and knowledge
- Learning has **to be done by the student**

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**1. Why reflection in (FL) learning?**

**Leo van Lier** (1996, 11): "To learn something new one must first *notice* it. This noticing is an awareness of its existence, obtained and enhanced by paying attention to it. Paying attention is focusing one's consciousness, or pointing one's perceptual powers in the right direction, and making mental 'energy' available for processing".

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**2. What is reflection?**

- **John Dewey** (1938, 87-88): "To reflect is to look back over what has been done so as to extract the net meanings which are the capital stock for intelligent dealing with further experiences. It is the heart of intellectual organisation and of the disciplined mind."
- Interplay between *looking ahead* (action directed by some idea) and *looking back*
- Learning as a continuous *process of reconstruction of experience*: anticipate -> act -> observe -> organise ideas for future use

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### 3. Model of reflection in FL education

**3.1 Autonomous language learning** is based on a *humanistic conception of man*, seeing the student as a *self-directed and intentional person* who can develop his/ her competences in three inter-related areas of knowledge, skills and awareness (Kohonen 2001):

- (1) **Personal awareness:** self-concept and personal identity, realistic self-esteem, self-direction and responsible autonomy.
- (2) **Process and situational awareness:** management of the learning process towards self-organized, negotiated language learning and self-assessment, including the necessary strategic and metacognitive knowledge
- (3) **Task awareness:** knowledge of language and intercultural communication: the meta-linguistic knowledge at the various levels of language description

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### 3. Model of reflection in FL education

**3.2. Learner development** needs to be consciously *linked to the teacher's professional growth* and embedded in the context of a collegial institutional culture (Kohonen 2001)

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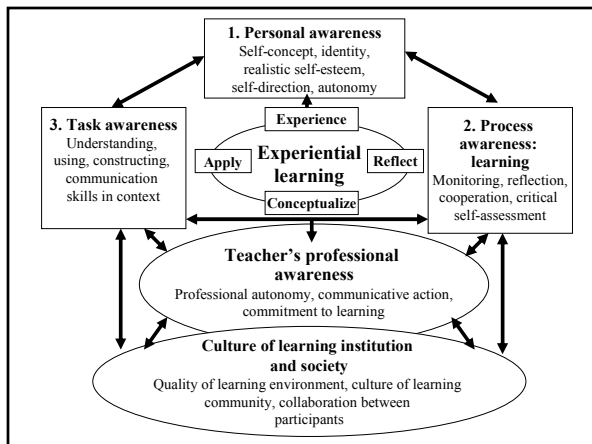
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**4. Facilitating reflection in FL class**

**1. Personal awareness:** Guiding the students to reflect on their *beliefs and assumptions of language learning*, as part of the language lessons; some examples of questions:

- What (three things) do you value in yourself? Why?
- What are your strengths as a student?
- What shortcomings do you have?
- How do you see your role as a language learner?
- What expectations do you have for the language teacher?

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**4. Facilitating reflection in FL class**

**2. Process and situational awareness:**

- What aims do you wish to set for this course (week, etc)?
- What are you going to do to reach your aims?
- How might you improve your work/ working habits?
- What is a good group member like in our language class? Why?
- How might you improve your participation in your groups?

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**4. Facilitating reflection in FL class**

**3. Task awareness:** some questions for reflection:

- Why do you wish to learn foreign languages?
- How do you understand (intercultural) communication?
- What elements and skills does language learning include?
- What aspects of language learning are easy (difficult) for you?
- What skills are you good at? What can you improve?

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**5. Some findings in Finnish ELP work**

- 1. **Teachers** need to *understand the paradoxical nature of the task* that the students are undertaking, and the reasons for using/ developing a reflective approach.
- 2. **Students** need a *great deal of specific help*, guidance and support to learn to cope with reflection/ self-assessment.
- 3. At early stages students have difficulties in assessing the extent to which they can control the accuracy dimensions of the target language. They are more likely to know *what they can do communicatively* in the target language. They are also aware of the general level of proficiency at which they can do it. The *"can do" checklists* provide an easier access to assessing language competences.

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**5. Some findings in Finnish ELP work**

- 4. Beginning with the *students themselves* as learners helps them to learn a *basic reflective orientation* by working on their experiences.
- 5. The **teacher needs to justify** the benefits of reflection to the students and explain why she is asking them to reflect on their learning and assess their communicative skills. Reflection may be a question of *educational culture* in the different national (or regional) settings
- 6. The **teacher has a significant role** in the process of fostering reflection for learning to learn. She gives personal comments on the progress of the individual students (and the class as a whole) at suitable points. Getting *specific and concrete teacher feedback* on the progress is an *important source of motivation* for the students.

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**6. Questions for group discussion**

- 1. Take a moment to jot down 1-2 points in the presentation that you found of particular relevance to you and share them with your partner.
- 2. With your partner, consider some ways of motivating your language students for reflective learning.
- 3. As a group, suggest some basic points for a teacher workshop aimed at introducing reflective language learning to FL teachers who are preparing to use the ELP. What problems can you anticipate in your context? How might you deal with the problems?

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## 7. References

- Dewey, J. 1938. *Experience and education*. New York: Macmillan/ Collier Books
- Kohonen, V. 2001a. Towards experiential foreign language education. In Kohonen, V., R. Jaatinen, P. Kaikkonen and J. Lehtovaara, *Experiential learning in foreign language education*. London: Pearson Education, 8-60.
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