

**Report on a Workshop for ELP Developers and Decision Makers
and a National ELP Conference held in Latvia (Riga)
on 25 and 26 November 2005 within the framework of
ECML Project C6 – Training teachers to use the European Language Portfolio
(Expert mission: David Little)**

The Latvian national context

A Latvian ELP for adults has been submitted to the Validation Committee, ELPs for primary and secondary learners are under development, and the Public Service Language Centre is a partner in a transnational Leonardo project that is developing an ELP for health professionals. Language policy in Latvia is based on the central role of Latvian as the state language, and the ELP for adults is intended to support the teaching and learning of Latvian as a second language (about 40% of the population have a first language other than Latvian).

The workshop on Friday 25 November presented an important opportunity for Latvian ELP developers to inform one another and decision makers about their work, exchange experience, and clarify certain key issues with David Little, especially as regards language in the ELP. The part of the ECML teacher training kit devoted to this topic provided one of the principal inputs of the day.

The national conference on Saturday 26 November provided an opportunity to inform language professionals from all sectors of education about the Council of Europe's work in modern languages, the development of Latvian ELPs, and some of the major issues that arise in ELP development and implementation.

Both events were organized under the auspices of the Public Service Language Centre, whose director, Silvija Karklina, attended the Project C6 central workshop in Graz in November 2004.

Workshop for ELP developers and decision makers (Friday 25 November)

There were 15 participants, from the Ministry of Education, the Public Service Language Centre, and the State Language Agency. All are involved in the development and implementation of the ELP, either as decision makers or as developers. The working hours were 9.00–11.30 and 12.30–17.00.

Latvian colleagues provided the following inputs:

- Evija Papule (Ministry of Education and Science) described the role of languages in the Latvian education system and explained that the Ministry considers the ELP to be an essential tool in developing language teaching at all levels. It has an important role to play in relation both to Latvian as a second language and to foreign languages. Sooner or later in Latvia as in other EU countries the European Language Passport will be a reality: Europass has created an important link

between the EU and the Council of Europe.

- Ieva Zaicena (Ministry of Education and Science) summarized the history of the ELP at European level, emphasizing in particular the encouraging results from the pilot projects, and briefly described the various Latvian ELP projects. She noted that the ELP Validation Committee had required revision of the original version of the Latvian ELP for adults, submitted in the spring of 2005. The Latvian developers accepted the need for revision but were surprised by the Validation Committee's suggestion that the ELP should be translated into Russian: the validated ELPs developed in Russia could perhaps be used by Russian speakers in Latvia.
- Vesma Ludriksone (Ministry of Education and Science) reported on the development of the Latvian ELP for secondary schools. The project began in 2003 by closely examining validated ELPs from other countries, and the initial development work involved schools in different parts of the country. There had been interest from teachers of Latvian as well as from foreign language teachers. One problem that has arisen concerns the difference between the Latvian national standards and the common reference levels of the CEF.
- Silvija Karklina presented the draft ELP for health professionals, which is being developed by a Leonardo project with members in Spain, Italy, Latvia, Finland and the United Kingdom. A questionnaire was used to elicit information about the language needs of health professionals, and descriptors are being elaborated on the basis of the data received.
- Dace Dumpe presented the Latvian ELP for young learners. The project began in May 2005, and the draft ELP is to be submitted to the State Language Agency by 30 November 2005. One question that had arisen was, Should the language passport be in Latvian or English or both. The developers had decided in favour of English, the foreign language learnt in Latvian primary schools, because children are likely to find that motivating (David Little pointed out, however, that the Validation Committee would expect key parts of the ELP to be in Latvian). Rita Kursite reported on the piloting of this model, which had involved some 60 teachers and 1,300 pupils in a variety of school types, including Russian medium schools, in different parts of the country. Pupils had received the ELP with enthusiasm. They enjoyed showing off their proficiency in languages and liked the fact that their ELP was in English. Some teachers reported that it had improved interaction between themselves and their pupils.
- Inita Vitola explained the function of the State Language Agency and the possibilities that exist for cooperation with teachers and others who want to develop and use ELPs. The Agency, which has existed for one and a half years, works under the aegis of the Ministry of Education and Science. Its main concern is Latvian as the state language. One of its tasks is to implement the ELP in Latvia as part of a more general concern for language teaching and learning. The CEF is currently being translated into Latvian and a Latvian-English glossary of key terms is being compiled. Large-scale implementation of the ELP depends on getting Latvian models validated.

David Little addressed points of principle as they arose in these presentations. Particular attention was given to the development of descriptors for different learner

groups and to the way in which self-assessment might be handled in the primary ELP. He then used the ECML teacher training kit's presentation on language in the ELP to set out the complex issues that developers must resolve in designing an ELP. This provided a framework for an extended discussion of ways in which the status of Latvian should be reflected in Latvian ELPs.

National ELP conference (Saturday 26 November)

The conference was attended by some 70 language professionals from all sectors of education. The working hours were 9.00–12.00 and 13.30–17.00.

Silvija Karklina (Public Service Language Centre) welcomed the participants, explained that the conference was supported by ECML Project C6, thanked the Latvian Language Agency and the organizing committee for their support, and invited the Minister of Education and Science, Professor Ina Druviete, to open the conference.

In her speech the Minister emphasized the importance of promoting language learning and maintaining Europe's linguistic diversity: the man who knows only his own language does not know his own language! In future the average European may well speak four or five languages. Sometimes it is suggested that there should be one language of communication in the EU, but Europe can be a common home only if our languages and cultures are preserved and protected. English is not enough; we need to know more languages. The language spectrum would become broader if we learnt not only the "large" languages but also the languages of our neighbours. It should be possible to learn each EU language in at least one university in every EU member state. EU resources should be used to support such an initiative, which could be facilitated by an exchange programme. We must ensure that we have enough qualified people to work as interpreters and mediate with speakers of "smaller" languages. Language teachers are the main actors in all of this: we can use computers and distance learning, but teachers still play an essential role. The Minister concluded by expressing her thanks to the Public Service Language Centre and the Latvian Language Agency.

Inita Vitola spoke about the work of the Latvian Language Agency, making the same points as at the workshop on the previous day.

David Little then gave two presentations:

1. A general introduction to the ELP that described its structure, purpose and origins, explained how it is related to the Council of Europe's language education policies in general and to the Common European Framework in particular, and summarized the role of ECML in supporting the current implementation phase.
2. An account of the design and implementation of the Irish ELP for primary learners of English as a second language. This model was developed by Integrate Ireland Language and Training as the central pedagogical support in the teaching of English as a second language at primary levels. Some 5,000 copies are distributed each year (this ELP can be downloaded from www.iilt.ie). This theme was particularly relevant to the Latvian context because there are many Latvian children attending Irish primary schools.

Dace Dalbina (Ministry of Education and Science) described current developments in the assessment of proficiency in Latvian as a second language, in which both the common reference levels of the CEF and the ELP have a role to play.

David Little gave the final presentation of the day, an exploration of the implications of the CEF for language testing, the role of self-assessment in the ELP, and the possibility of developing an assessment culture that accommodates self-assessment as well as assessment by teachers and examining bodies.

The last half hour of the day was devoted to questions, comments and discussion.

Conclusion

There was a strongly positive response to both the workshop and the national conference, both of which achieved their aims. Participants were particularly appreciative of David Little's input and have already requested more events on the ELP.

David Little
Silvija Karklina