

Classroom reports to be added to Case study / Rose Oehler / Austria

Classroom-report ELP-WSU / Fifth-year learners

In Austria fifth-year learners (usually) are at A1-level in English.

This reports about **how I introduced fifth-year learners to the ELP last school year**. I have so far introduced the ELP several times in year five, and I found that variations of the procedure are easy to adapt to the changing contexts of classrooms. I always bear in mind that there is no need to rush learners: **Each part of the ELP I 'open' to learners needs to be reflected, integrated into learning and teaching, and then to be used constantly**, which of course does mean a considerable amount of time. Within two years (year five + year six), however, all the learners are able to use all parts of the ELP confidently and independently.

At the beginning of the school year in September 2009 we introduced the WSU-ELP project in an all-learner conference. At this conference the seventh- and eighth-year learners shared their ELPs with sixth- and fifth-year learners. At the end of the meeting the 'newcomers' to the ELP were given their ELPs by their buddies from year eight, but only to put the folders on a shelf, as everything else at the school was new for them.



Whole-school conference



Learners share their ELPs



Fifth-year learners get their ELPs

However, this did not mean that nothing was done to prepare the use of the ELP:

1 Preparatory steps:

In September all the **parents were informed** about the project in a parents' evening, and the school asked for their consent, which was given (also for the publication of pupils' works and photographs).

See app. 1 + 3: Letter of info to parents / consent of parents // Examples from PP presentations used in whole-school meeting

After their first few weeks of learning English, the **students reflected on their language learning habits** and filled in a reflection sheet which later was used in the evaluation of the project. (The questionnaire was a little different for fifth-year learners as they had not been using an ELP at that time. The same sheet was used at the end of the school year again.)

See app. 4: Reflection sheet for all learners

In morning assemblies on Mondays learners with more than one language told about their languages / gave mini-presentations in their first languages / shared prayers / songs / poems

For feedback of written work I used these **symbols for teacher assessment:**

✓✓ / ✓ / ! , which later learners were to discover in the ELP-checklists for self-assessment.

We discussed, tried out and reflected on **how a learner learns best**, we shared experience and gave tips for

- reading different kinds of texts
- extracting information from written and spoken texts
- communicating with others when speaking English
- practising dialogues
- drafting, organising and editing short texts
- acquiring new lexis
- applying simple rules for grammar

Learners edited their individual texts, shared them with classmates and kept them in their folders until the Dossier of the ELP was introduced in December.

After first weeks of learning and using English I **introduced detailed checklists for all skills in A1**; This meant 'formal' self-assessment for the first time: Learners were able to use the symbols ✓✓ / ✓ / ! (*~I can do this very well, I can do it, I need to make this a next step in my learning*) in quite a confident way, because they had direct feedback from tasks they had done / could do to check. (These checklists are not the checklists of the ELP, which are more general.)

See app. 6: Detailed checklists after first period of learning English (ca. 6 weeks)

In December I introduced a work schedule to help learners **review independently for their first progress test with descriptors for all skills + lexis + grammar**. (Such schedules are given to our learners before all their progress tests by all the teachers.)

See app. 7: Checklists for revision before progress test

2 Introducing the ELP step by step:

Step 1: 'My languages at home'

At the beginning of December learners finally 'took possession' of their ELPs: They were guided to understand what '**language biography**' means and reflected, filled in and shared their language learning / their plans for the future. I had planned a team-teaching unit with my colleague from German; we used 'Krumm-figures' ('Ines from Mallorca, who speaks Spanish, Mallorquin, English and a little German ...') / (Krumm, Hans-Jürgen, Jenkins, Eva-Maria, Kinder und ihre Sprachen, - lebendige Mehrsprachigkeit) to sensitize learners for plurilingualism. Those (few) learners whose first language is other than German, or who speak a second language other than English could stand in the lime light☺.

Step 2: Intercultural learning and reflection

Within a cross-curriculum project before Christmas (with different contents for all learners of the school) fifth-year learners met guests from the Czech Republic, from the USA, from a remote valley nearby, they learnt traditional songs from other cultures, we went to an exhibition about European traditions around Christmas and the New Year, and learners reflected on these intercultural experiences with reflection sheets from the ELP. On Parents' Day some of the fifth-year learners presented poems / texts in French, English, Turkish, Czech and German. They saw older learners acting in a play and giving poster presentations of research projects about traditions around Christmas and the New Year.



English

Learners interview a guest from the USA – they are proud to be able communicate in



A guest tells about Christmas traditions at her former home



Step 3: The dossier

In January I introduced the dossier of the ELP. We discussed what learners can put into their dossiers, how to list their 'works'; and as they had collected their edited texts until then, these were the first things they put into their dossiers. Proudly they shared with classmates and parents. And they got stickers with their names for their portfolios from year six-learners who had mastered this skill in their IT lessons.

What can you put into your dossier?

Name tags for the ELPs from their colleagues in year 6



Step 4: Planning next learning steps individually

The next step – in February - was to introduce 'language competences' (listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, writing) and the section in the ELP where learners plan their individual learning. The learners planned what they wanted to do, asked for materials or advice, and after some days presented, handed in or simply shared what they had done.

Some examples: Katharina gave a mini-presentation about her family, Sabrina and Elena had a dialogue about sports they like doing, Fabiola wrote about her plans for the weekend, Miriam did a mindmap on 'winter-words', Anna and Gina printed out the e-mails they had written to each other, Celine told the class she had done listening tasks on the English CDrom that goes with the course book and listened to stories in French, her second language. After sharing with their classmates and me, they assessed what they had done in the ELP, and I gave them my teacher-assessment if applicable.

This 'easy-going' cycle of planning – doing – presenting - assessing is highly motivating, individualized learning, learners observe with interest what classmates are doing, they get feedback on their self-assessment, and they invent creative ways of using language. Of course learners could plan these kinds of learning activities individually all the time, but in order to fit it into a scheduled structure, we planned such times together – roughly every six weeks.

Step 5: Reading workshops / extensive reading

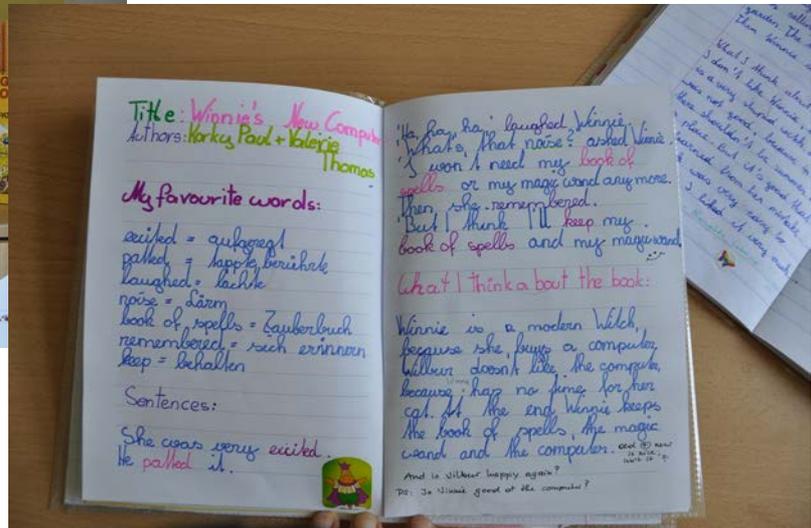
In March I introduced reading workshops: Learners choose books, read and write a reading log – not a summary of the content, but focussing on their thoughts and responses. They also start using dictionaries for 'interesting or important' words (including on-line dictionaries), and include short lists of their new words plus the sentence from the book for context. (All the English teachers share a similar approach.) In year five readers choose from children's books with pictures, later they read simplified books on levels A2 and B1, and the most prolific readers progress to reading young adult literature in original editions. In order to make reading a less 'solitary venture', from time to time we have reading conferences, where some learners recommend books, where all the learners share their reading logs and write a letter of comment to a classmate. To give reading a pleasurable notion learners also can wish for 'D.E.A.R.' (= 'Drop everything and read'): This means we all (= including me, as a teacher + reader) take the English book we are currently reading, settle down and read, write in our reading logs or illustrate our logs, with nice background music, for half an hour. As I believe that reading has high value in learning (foreign languages), I don't hesitate to give it a considered amount of class time. In year five reading logs are not assessed (they are valued through appraisal and stickers), in year six to eight reading books is part of the assessed areas of

the curriculum. Of course, reading-logs can be put into the dossier. (As our learners use notebooks for their R-logs, they keep them separate.)



First 'real' books in English

R-logs show competence in reading and writing



Until June no other part of the ELP was introduced. The learners used their dossiers, edited texts, shared their dossiers with classmates; some learners documented other languages than English as well, e.g. Czech as a first, French as a second language – in 'parallel' texts to English texts. We had several of the planning – doing – presenting – assessing - cycles, we used the self-assessment checklists of the course book and checklists before progress tests.

Step 6: Introducing ELP-checklists

At the beginning of June 'ELP Fun-fair' was scheduled. This is an established event at our school, where 28 learners of year eight work with 28 learners of year five at 'fun-fair stalls', in all 16 desks in several rooms. The aim of the fun-fair is to introduce the ELP checklists. The learners work in pairs, and they do tasks in listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing on A1 level (some on A2). The older learners are tutors (their instruction and a rehearsal takes place on the previous day), who explain the tasks, who monitor and give their assessment (based on points) – after the fifth-year learners have assessed themselves. The most important aspect is that each task goes with one of the descriptors of the ELP checklists, which is on the printed worksheet.

See app. 8: Example of task-sheet on ELP-funfair for learners and tutors

When the learners have 'shopped till they dropped' (for about two hours), the pairs have 'collected' up to sixteen task sheets, with descriptors, plus assessment from themselves and their tutors. As the timetable is suspended for three lessons, there are lots of teachers around who treat themselves to some English, photographs are taken (which can later be seen on the school homepage), there is a lot of fun-fair atmosphere in classrooms and the corridor. Eight-year learners remember their own fun-fair day three years previous, they love to 'teach', they praise the eager young learners – some even had sweets and stickers for their 'customers' this year ☺!

For detailed description of ELP-fun-fair see

http://www.oesz.at/sub_main.php?page=bereich.php?bereich=1-tree=3 →
Project_ESP_day

In the following English lesson we started work with the ELP checklists: I started with telling them about the CEFR and what the levels A1 – C2 mean, and I explained in what way these checklists are different from the checklists in our course book or the ones they get from me. Then I told the learners to take the four worksheets of the listening tasks they had done at the ELP-funfair the day before, to read the descriptors and to look for the identical descriptors in the ELP checklists. I explained that they could simply transfer their self-assessment and the assessment of their tutors, and that they should think of other listening tasks we had done in lessons together, in progress tests or individually at home: Thus we discussed listening competence on A1 + A2 level, and learners understood that it needs a lot of successful exposure to listening before you can really assess yourself with ✓✓.

Similarly we worked through the other competences (within three lessons), giving examples with speaking tasks, referring to texts they had read or written.

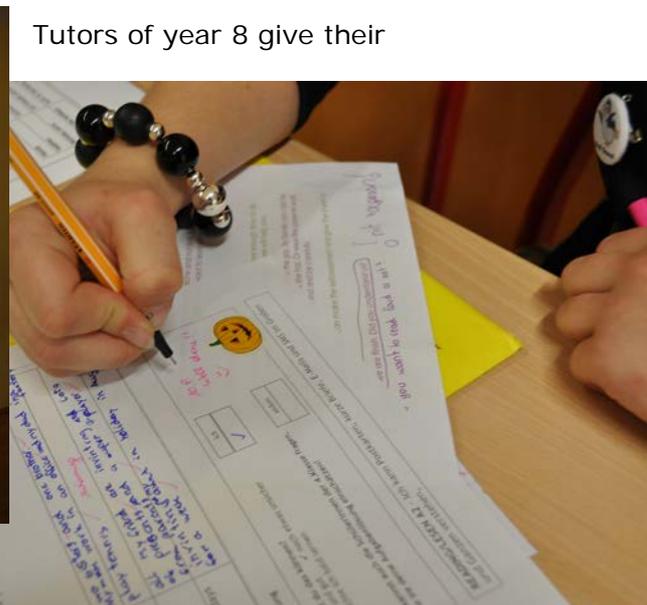
Finally I told learners that we were going to use the checklists in the three following years, (and that they would use these checklists in Italian and French if they chose to learn these languages).

(See Barbara's report on her sixth-year class below for how checklists are used in class from year six upwards.)



assessment

Information for learners and some photographs from last year's fun-fair



Tutors of year 8 give their



At work at the 'stalls' 😊

Step 7: Reflection and evaluation

The introduction of checklists provided an opportunity to look back and discuss what we had done in English, what intercultural encounters during the school year learners remembered, what kinds of intercultural experiences could turn up in their holidays, and finally to reflect on the ELP and language learning. For this we used the same reflection sheet as the other learners at our school. (*see app.* 4: Reflection sheet for all learners)

Results of survey:

- Most learners engage themselves with their languages outside school (ca. 45% 1-2 times a week, ca. 45% 2-4 times a week, 6% rarely or never).
- All learners use learning tips and strategies (43% sometimes, 57% very often)
- Most learners set themselves goals (ca. 20% every 2-3 weeks, ca. 40% every 6-8 weeks, 32% sometimes – some also say they never do =().
- Self-assessment is done regularly by almost all learners (7% 2-4 times a week, 32% 1-2 times a week, 50% always before tests, 11% rarely or never)
- Many students inform themselves about their own and other cultures (3% more often than 4 times a week, 22% 2-4 times a week, 54% 1-2 times a week, 25% rarely or never).
- All learners (so far) use the checklists of the ELP only in lessons.
- All learners put their best works into the dossier (14% every week, 25% every 2-3 weeks, 20% every 6-8 weeks, ca. 20% sometimes – mostly in English only)
- All learners reflect on their progress in language competences (ca. 36% every week, 14% every 2-3 weeks, 45% sometimes).
- Self-assessment of their progress in language learning (in English): 89% 'good or very good' 😊

The areas of highest interest in language learning are (in this ranking):
experiences with other cultures and languages
reading in all my languages
cross-curriculum projects
study skills
all my languages at home
using new media in language learning
reflecting about language learning

39% of the learners are willing to present their languages 'publicly' (e.g. on parents'day)
32% of the learners want to 'publish their works (e.g. on school notice boards)
94% want to use the ELP also in their next school.

Some comments (many similar repetitions):

I like the dossier and my texts.

I loved working with the girls from year eight. Their English is very good.

I learned a lot with it (the ELP), and it's interesting.

I think the checklists are very helpful. I can show my mum what I can.

I liked the stickers, and this was a nice idea from the girls in year six.

I like making my texts beautiful, and then looking at them.

I like everything with English except tests. But the checklists help before the test.

3 My comment:

Since I started using the ELP with my classes, I have always been convinced of the benefits of the ELP. I find it easy to integrate the ELP into my teaching. The start in year five is a bit time consuming, but this pays back with learners' growing competences in reflecting, planning, and general motivation to make headway. Learners' interest in other cultures is raised, and learners with a migration-background have a stage where they are listened to with respect.

What I find desirable to make preparing classes less time consuming:

Course books that offer materials / tasks clearly related to ELP-descriptors and CEFR-levels

Course books with a good balance of all skills

'Pools of tasks' for learners at all levels for self-access (in all languages taught): These tasks should be adaptable to fit to the descriptors of the ELP so that learners can work autonomously.

After this year of the project 'ELP-WSU', this is what I want to say:

- If learners use the ELP in all language classes + for intercultural reflection in many subjects, they have a good instrument to reflect, understand, plan and improve their learning. The 'philosophy' of the ELP is easier to convey to learners, it's easier for learners to see convergence in their language learning.
- For learners who get 'familiarized' with the ELP in English (= the foreign language that is taught earliest in the Austrian curriculum – except for the learners whose first language is not German) it is no problem to apply the ELP to other languages, on the contrary, this is a logical further step and makes learners aware of plurilingual competences.
- When the ELP is used by all learners at a school, language learning and teaching is necessarily based on the CEFR. Teaching and learning English is aimed at reaching the national 'Bildungsstandards' in year eight. This helps teachers to plan their teaching along the required lines of the national Austrian curriculum.
- Using the ELP helps learners to organize their language learning autonomously. For this it is highly desirable for learners (and teachers) that materials are available which provide tasks for all language competences in all languages taught at a school according to CEFR-levels.
- Reflecting on intercultural experiences helps learners and teachers of all subjects to become aware – even in remote rural areas – that we are living in a society where learning about 'otherness' in a respectful and considerate way is essential for a beneficial development.

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Classroom-report ELP-WSU / Sixth-year learners

This is what we did in year six this year. The learners were introduced to the ELP-checklists at the end of the previous year. After the traditional "ELP-Fun-Fair" the girls worked with the checklists in the ELP and dossier.

This school year

At the end of each semester the learners had time to update their dossiers. I found that some girls also update quite independently throughout the year. I was in the practical position to teach the students in IT this year and therefore they had also time to write and edit texts, etc. during this time.



We practised and trained self-assessment throughout the year, firstly with the help of the coursebook and in our SDL (self-directed-learning) phases. The SDL material is designed and produced by the English team, we designed the programme in order to train independent work and at the end of each working phase the learners can reflect on their work and do self-assessment with the help of a list of descriptors that are based upon the ELP, just more detailed. They do this individually but also with partners. The girls find this more and more positive for their work as we also have training with self-assessment checklists when they study for their progress tests.

This school year we especially started focussing on extended reading. The class could choose from a good collection of picture books, simplified readers and also original literature, either from our school library or my private collection. In the course of the year I found that some students developed rather well in reading extensively. To mention the hype of the Twilight-series, one or two of the students even started reading the first book of the series! Along with reading we also started with our reading diaries. We started off with simple descriptions about the title, author and pictures, parts of the book that the students liked a lot. The focus is not on producing a summary of the content but describing feelings and ideas when reading the story. Some of the diaries are a real small piece of art as well which shows that they enjoy doing it.



Our course book has quite a few suggestions for project work. We did for example a project on "Dartmoor". The students had to prepare small presentations with the help of Internet research, they produced posters and mini-speeches in class.

Another small project with presentations was about "adverts" and here the class showed their creative side, some of the students produced short raps that we recorded and put on our homepage to listen to. We also organised a "bric-a-brac" lesson. The students brought in

their books, bracelets and games collections and opened their stalls. All the shopping was done with real English money and lots of fun.

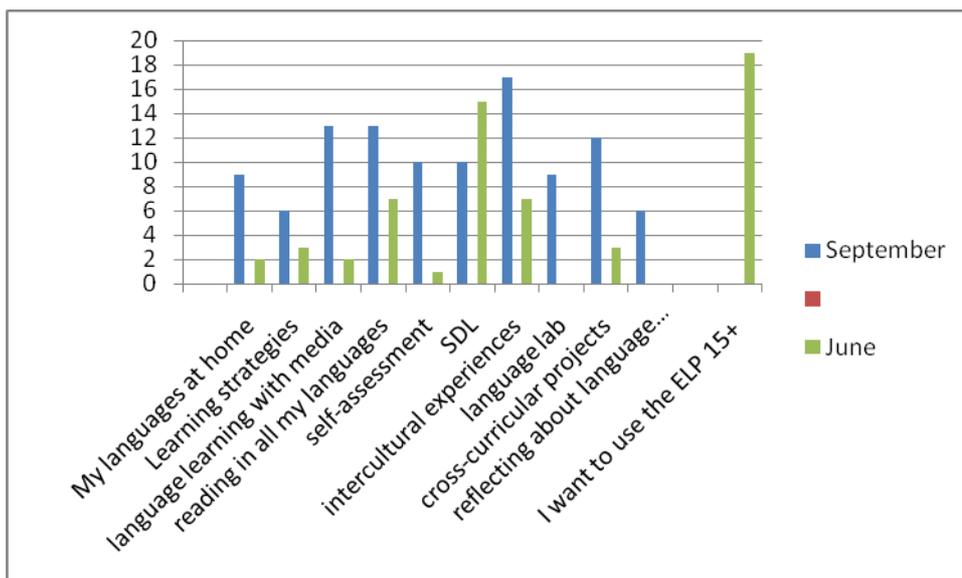


As we are in the position to have our English lesson in one separate language room we also were able to present work on our class pin walls throughout the year. There is also an ELP-corner, where we have put copies of the English checklists of the ELP. While working on different skills in the lessons we also had time to look at the various descriptors and reflect in class.



One of the highlights this school year was the intercultural contact with a Chilean guest student for three weeks at the end of the school year and the visit of an American language assistant after Christmas. After the Q&A-lesson with the language assistant the class appeared highly motivated and wished for more lessons with native speakers. Another motivating experience for the students was the Chilean guest student, who joined the class in the last three weeks of second term. She was quickly integrated and this was a perfect situation for the girls to use English as an everyday language. Here are some of the results of the questionnaire, comparing between ELP-user behaviour at the beginning and at the end of the year.

- Most of the students engage themselves 1-2 times a week with languages other than their mother tongue (outside school).
- They sometimes use learning tips and strategies.
- Setting a goal for themselves has gone up generally.
- Checking their work and reflecting on their competences is highest before they do tests.
- Most of the students inform themselves about their own or other cultures 1-2 times a week.
- Most of the students use the ELP checklists only during class time, 3 also outside class time.
- Most of the students put their best work into the dossier, mostly for the English language.
- A lot of the students reflect on their language learning sometimes. There was no big change here. Some of them do it together with their partners.
- Their self-assessment of language progress has gone down a bit, from 19 "good progress" there were 13 left at the end of the year.
- Here is a comparison to answers about several topics. The chart shows generally a decline, which I think could be because the students are able to reflect and judge better at the end of this year and have a better idea about language learning, or simply because of lack of interest according to age (12/13)??



In the short commentaries about the ESP the students mentioned following statements: Exciting, funny, fun, it's nice to look at the dossier again and again, contains my best works, memories, using English with guest student, good sum-up what I did this year, I love reading, American language assistant was great; ...

Using ESP in Italian

I have been teaching Italian as a second foreign language at our school for some years now. It is an additional lesson and the students of year 7 and 8 can choose to join the one-year course at the beginning of the school year. In this course the curriculum is mostly about basic skills in lexis and speaking. In the second term we also start reading very simple texts and writing simple descriptions of ourselves and daily routines. The "Italian" group had a short part at our Christmas celebration reciting an Italian poem. Throughout the year there always come up situations when the students themselves find similarities with other languages (English and German), so the language awareness is there on a basic level. As we were lucky to have the Chilean student at our school, I invited her to one of our last lessons. She spoke to us in Spanish and we found quite a few similarities between Italian and Spanish. At the end of each term we worked with the extended checklists of the ELP and learners reflected and assessed what they had learned in our second foreign language. The students, who have worked with the ELP already for nearly 3 years, find the checklists a good indicator for their progress in the new language. Some of them also put Italian texts and networks into the dossier.

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Comment of ELP-use in year seven and eight

The only new part of the ELP to be introduced in year seven is the language passport. This is done as suggested in the portfolio: According to the checklists, a language profile is made for each language that is taught. At the end of year seven or eight also Italian or French can be done, when the language course was taken, and before learners leave school, they update their language profile for English.

Throughout year seven and eight the ELP is used to update and share dossiers, reflections with checklists are done individually, but also in class with **checklists on the classroom walls**: Here we reflect on which descriptors we have worked on, which

descriptors we can / should / want to work on next, and we use the intercultural checklists and the reflection sheet to document what we get to know and experience about other cultures.

We, the team of English teachers at our school, wanted to create a 'pool of tasks' for as many of the descriptors in the checklists as possible. We did so for only a limited number, as it proved too much of a workload for our small team. Such a database would greatly help learners to plan their learning individually, and it would of course take much work off teachers' shoulders. These tasks for all competences and at relevant levels are necessary to foster learner autonomy. (Good news here: A new edition of the national Austrian ELP will soon offer a link to such a database for learners.)

This is what year-seven and year-eight learners and their teachers said about the use of the ELP after three or four years of using it:

The learners work with checklists in an assiduous way. Their self-assessment is never too far from teacher assessment. In year seven we exchange the checklists and use the English checklists, because then all learners have enough language competence to reflect and discuss their progress in English. In Austria we also can use more detailed checklists, which I use for classroom wall display. Learners can see progress easier when they have level A2 split up into A2.1 and A2.2.

What learners put into their dossier is entirely up to them. In practice they edit texts from work in the lessons or from homework, they take photographs of posters, some copy parts of progress tests. At the end of year eight some learners put their reading logs and their reading lists into the dossier (R-logs are note books where they comment books they read, answer the teachers' questions on the book, etc.). So far learners don't use new media for storage in the dossier, but this might of course come soon. Dossiers are updated in lessons, because at our school the ELPs are kept in the classrooms. A few learners take their ELPs home in between and work individually at home, most learners do some editing on their works for the dossier before updating lessons.

Responses from reflection sheets from class seven and eight:

About a third of learners use the portfolio 1-2 times a week.

More than half use tips for learning and learning strategies.

About 75% assess themselves (and a study partner) before tests and progress tests.

They all use checklists only in lessons.

The work in the dossiers is mostly in English.

Most learners say they don't reflect on their language learning, but 75% say they make good progress (!).

The most interesting areas of learning are SDL (self-directed learning) and intercultural experiences (Advent in Castle Landeck, guests in classrooms, research tasks on the internet, etc.).

About half the learners are very much interested in reading in all their languages.

75% would like to continue using an ELP in their next schools, because they see the ELP as a very good instrument to document their language learning.

To sum up my experiences with the ELP as a teacher of English:

Most learners like working with the dossier. Especially girls are proud of their works, which they often edit in artistic ways. Also we teachers like the dossier – it shows in an impressive and clearly represented way how a learner works, how well they can express themselves in written English, what they can achieve in group work, what they read, etc. What remains to be included are e.g. recorded examples of spoken English.

The checklists are a lot of work especially at the beginning. To understand what a descriptor means needs a lot of teacher input with young learners. It is also essential that the first encounters with checklists are fairly frequent, done together in class and in connection with tasks so that learners can shape their self-assessment. Teachers need to

plan regular 'space' for work with the ELP and all its parts, especially also for deciding on individual and class aims, and how to reach them.

It is crucial that learners experience that they have ownership of their ELPs. When they then are willing and even proud to share with classmates or present their ELPs to their parents and teachers, this can be very motivating for further learning.

When the ELP is introduced in a meaningful way, when 'organisational obstacles' are well handled (like where to keep folders), when the content of teaching is in accordance with the CEFR, then the ELP is a helpful instrument that helps to become a reflective learner and practitioner.

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