



One of the key aspects of integrating the ELP with work in the classroom is without doubt the realisation that it is not enough to incorporate specific activities from the ELP; the whole of the teaching-learning process has to be imbued with the essence of the Portfolio. This is why it is important to go beyond the activities in themselves and study the way(s) of working with from a more global perspective which allows us to the same final aim for everybody but with possibility of working in ways that vary according to the type of learner. We are not talking about a new methodology because this approach is already present in primary school. This is why it is important that you first analyse what you already do that corresponds to a methodology that promotes autonomy.

As we see in the replies to the question 'What does the ELP contribute?', it is only an instrument in the service of an active methodology that seeks to promote learner autonomy, by which we understand the raising of awareness as a language learner and speaker as well as the opening of paths more suited to each individual to learn more and learn better.

We have grouped the questions in a single block because they all have something in common: the methodology that is most suitable for the incorporation of the ELP and whether this leads to more and better learning. Let's take things one at a time. To begin with we want to establish some very important premises that are not taken from nowhere but derive from the results of the piloting that we have carried out:

- a) There is no magic prescription because working with the ELP is flexible enough to allow every teacher to adapt it to her way of working and her context.
- b) Work with the ELP cannot be seen as something 'added on'; it doesn't make sense unless it is integrated and interrelated with the classroom activities. As we have said, we consider it an instrument in a methodology that promotes autonomy and as such it is a tool just like the textbook or the teacher's pedagogical approach. The piloting has shown us that if it is incorporated in a way coherent with the classroom dynamics, then it in no way takes time away from other things. Problems arise if it is used within a highly teacher-centred methodology since this is an instrument that promotes a type of learning where, as we have seen, the pupil is the active agent.

Once this has been said, we can now look at the reply to the question: 'Do we have to change



everything?’ To do this we will outline the main features of learner-centred methodologies, that is those that promote autonomy, in order to present examples of specific ways of applying these methods in the classroom. An exhaustive description of the process that has led to the construction of a methodology that helps us to work with the ELP will help us to see what each teacher has to restructure or add in order to be able to apply it. Don’t think for a moment, however, that you have to start from scratch.

The learner as the active agent in the learning

When we speak of active learners, we mustn’t think only of playful aspects of learning (although there must be some of these) but rather in ‘cognitively active’ learners. We understand by this learners who, when faced with the various learning activities and tasks, activate all their strategic competences (cognitively speaking) in order to carry them out in a conscious, planned way. We are talking about learners who accept to share responsibility for their learning in the sense that they gradually take over control of the process, always with the guidance of the teacher.

The ideas in this section are based on van Lier’s proposals (2003: 120-123) regarding the best ways to develop a methodology that promotes linguistic and learning awareness (the base, as we have seen, for autonomy). This allows the learners to really become the active agents in their learning – which is precisely what the ELP advocates.

According to van Lier, there are some essential general conditions:

1. The pupils’ actions are central, specifically their participation in linguistically meaningful activities. This means language activities that do not simply reproduce simple linguistic patterns but rather force the pupils to find those linguistic elements which allow them to express, initially within a restricted framework, what they really want to say on a particular topic.
2. Perception forms an integral part of learning: the pupils have to learn, from the language that is offered by the teacher, the textbook or other sources, what is most suitable for them to express what they want to say. They must ‘take the initiative in the sense of using their imagination with the language even if the word doesn’t exist’, for example through paraphrasing, using comparisons or even inventing a word from the knowledge they already have of the target language. This is what van Lier



understands by 'perception'.

3. Creativity becomes the backbone of the learning activities that seek to promote linguistic and learning awareness. Creativity is understood as something that goes beyond a playful view of learning. Although it is true that a playful aspect is what helps most with activities of linguistic and learning awareness, we must bear in mind that creativity really promotes learning if it makes the learners deal with cognitive challenges and forces them to 'investigate the functions of language'. This is what is meant by a 'language game': activating the ability to infer and deduce in order to search out the most suitable ways to express what you want to say. Thus the learners adopt the expert's role (which is normally reserved for the teacher) and are not provided with the language that they need to carry out the task but rather – with the help of the teacher and of other learners – they look for it themselves, trying it out and rectifying it if necessary.
4. Reflection on language is closely related to creativity and perception, so that if the learners become 'language researchers', the language takes shape naturally. However, we must remember not go in for long metalinguistic explanations in specific terms that are too complex for the pupils. A lot of research on this topic (especially with regard to the mother tongue) shows what happens in creative language activities where the pupils, working in groups, have to prepare their own text out of the whole range of available language elements: there are intense metalinguistic discussions though these do not necessarily involve very specific terms. When they create texts that are appropriate for their age and interests, (a poster, a school magazine, etc.), we have to give them room to 'fantasise' with the language they are learning. Then they can invent new words and explain how they have created them, they can imitate what is useful for their productions; in a word, they can play with the language.
5. Another essential aspect is self-assessment of their own productions. This provides a context where the children see themselves as 'potential experts and take on the role of language researchers'. The assessment, then, is not restricted to the teacher, but involves the whole class or small groups. This critical view of their own productions is, together with creativity, a key aspect in the development of linguistic and learning awareness.



The teacher's role

So far we have dealt with the general features of the methodology that is more suitable for the incorporation of the ELP or other mediating instruments. As for the actions of the teachers who want to incorporate a methodology that is learner-centred (i.e. promoting autonomy), it is important that they understand their role as facilitators of learning. We hold that the concept of 'facilitation' is essential not only for teachers to understand what this type of methodology implies for them, but also to understand the purpose of the ELP.

To be specific, van Lier as well as other authors (Esteve, 2002; Cots & Nussbaum, 2003) maintain that these methodologies are best realised through projects or [learning sequences](#).

However, we also have to think of the teachers' role when they work with learning sequences.

This is what we are now going to deal with: how to construct learning sequences that favour the incorporation of activities to raise the learners' awareness of their learning process and thus favour the incorporation of work on the ELP. We will focus on two points:

- a) The learning sequence: what it is and how to construct it
- b) What teachers have to bear in mind to construct them (here we are speaking of the teacher as 'facilitator').

The learning sequence: what it is and how to construct it

A [learning sequence](#) derives from a task-based approach and has the following characteristics:

- The aim is communicative (not grammatical) and this is expressed in the form of a task that is part of a project. This task must give rise to small problems or cognitive challenges, that is to say it must make the pupils think (which is linked to



creativity, mentioned above). This means that the level of difficulty has to be a little higher than the pupils' current level. The reason for this is precisely that this drives them to search and be creative, to play with the language and become, as we have seen, 'minor language researchers'.

- There is an overall activity, which integrates and interrelates the different kinds of tasks and sub-activities in order to achieve the communicative aim. Some of these activities must be specifically designed to lead to a 'reflection on language and communication' in a way that is adapted to the pupils' level. These are activities that force the pupils to 'investigate the language and their learning', to experiment with the language and to discuss the results of this small experiment.
- Plan phases of individual, class and group work. Each phase has to have clear timing. It is important to remember that not everything has to be done as a class; in this sort of work it is essential to leave time for minor research and individual reflection. The reasons are:
 - o Each child can see for her-/himself what s/he can contribute to the group
 - o The teacher can predict what each pupil can do on her/his own
- Allow for planning by the pupils themselves in the phases with group work. This means that, before starting this phase, the pupils have to prepare a small work plan showing what they will do to carry out the task in question. This serves to gradually transfer responsibility for the task to the pupils, which means that they take charge of it.
- Plan phases of individual and group assessment of the different stages and the way they are carried out. Joint assessment, as we make clear in the section on shared assessment, is one of the most important aspects of the ELP.
- Plan a final assessment of the process and the product; this has a very important formative component in that it provides feedback on the process in order to improve the product.



The most important aspects of the organisation of learning sequences are that they make the pupils:

1. Constantly activate their previous knowledge and the strategies to carry out the task.
2. Think through the aim of the task and work out which abilities will help to improve the achievement of the aim and how this will be done.
3. Reflect on the difficulty of the task facing them using a 'verbalisation of the internal voice', which we often do intuitively when we meet learning tasks: 'What is this like?', 'I don't see how to begin. Ah, now I see!'
4. Reflect on what their needs are in relation to the task and what these necessarily imply.

These processes are great training since they promote monitoring (or production management on-line: during the process of production), assessment of the strategic process ('Are we doing it right here or not?' etc.) and help to initiate a constructive dialogue between the teacher and the pupils which leads to an optimisation of the gradual transfer to the latter of responsibility for the learning process, always according to the level and maturity of the pupils.

To now go into detail regarding the nature of the activities for the ELP, etc., van Lier (2003) points out that it is not enough to include brief activities of reflection on language and learning at what he calls the micro level. (This is the level of the teacher's action in the classroom, the reflection being introduced more or less spontaneously as opportunity arises, moments that every teacher knows how to exploit.) Van Lier always insists on the need for a higher level scaffolding, which we will now explain:

A useful way of promoting meaningful interaction between the teacher and the pupils that allows the activation of learning strategies is 'scaffolding', which is defined as:

"A process of 'setting up' the situation to make the child's entry easy and successful and then gradually pulling back and handing the role to the child as he becomes skilled enough to manage it." (Bruner, 1983: 60, a Van Lier, 2003: 124)



This process starts from observing what the pupils are capable of doing with regard to a particular activity (in fact, this is the basis of constructivism) in order to provide, in a gradual way and as needs arise, the specific help for each pupil. This is a procedure that is now well known in primary school. However, from the conceptual viewpoint, we feel that it is necessary to point out two key aspects of this scaffolding:

- First, we have to bear in mind that 'scaffolding' the learner does not mean simply providing help when it is needed. Rather it consists in being attentive (as expert) in order to offer help in the form of 'clues' so that the pupils work towards the solution of the task on their own, albeit supported by this specific help which necessarily derives from the more expert, but always based on what the pupil can already do. This links to the second point.
- Another thing to remember is that it is not enough to provide this scaffolding only while the pupils are engaged in the classroom activities. A structure must be set up in advance; this consists of a sequence of foreseeable events that are in fact the phases or steps that are necessary to achieve the aim. The activity is broken down into phases and sub-phases. Normally teachers are aware of this ('First we do this, and then we do that', etc.) but, in order to work from the view of awareness integrated into the activities, it is essential to ensure that each phase prepares for the next, as if we were creating a network linking all the activities, (see the examples of the learning sequences).

Why is it necessary to create this structure explicitly? Because, according to van Lier (2003: 124), it is the best way to mix known elements with new ones, a mix that is necessary in order to give meaning to everything that is done, thus creating an atmosphere of familiarity and security. (There is nothing worse than pupils not understanding the purpose of an activity, thinking that they are doing it because the teacher says so.) The most important aspect of what we have said so far is that the learning of new knowledge takes place when previous knowledge is activated, and this involves all kinds of knowledge.

To finish, we would like to insist on the fact that, in the planning of units and lessons, the pedagogical scaffolding takes place on three time scales or levels of performance:

- a) **Overall planning:** the long term, which establishes the aims of the whole course



(macro scaffolding); it is what is laid down in the curriculum.

- b) **Planning of activities**, which is the level that we have dealt with here: the detailed planning of each step within an overall activity that integrates a chain of sub-tasks. We highlight this in bold because it is the key to achieving a coherent integration of the work with the ELP, (see the examples of the learning sequences). This level is called the meso scaffolding.
- c) **Action during the activity**: finally, the interactive work while the activity is being carried out, when there are fine adjustments deriving from the needs and reactions of the pupils. This is the micro level of scaffolding.

Shared assessment

We cannot think of talking about methodologies without entering the slippery terrain of assessment, and this is in fact more complex in interactive methodologies that intend to promote learner autonomy.

In order to focus on the topic of assessment, we have to take into account that what is often forgotten is that joint responsibility for assessment is possible provided that the pupils and teachers 'are playing with the same cards'. This means that the pupils must be kept informed not only of the learning sequence and the learning aims, but above all of the way that it will be assessed, that is to say the criteria, which must be expressed specifically and concisely. These must therefore be not only global (the cycle or year), but also specific, that is related directly to the tasks that make up the learning sequence.

This must not be confused with the idea that it is enough to tell the pupils their mark for each task or test. In order for the pupils to genuinely share the criteria, the teacher has to make explicit which specific aspects are to be assessed and how, always related to 'things that are tangible for the pupils', i.e. the tasks and learning sequences. If the criteria are clearly specified for each learning sequence and made clear before or during the tasks (not afterwards), then they can be used either as a learning guide while the task is being carried out or as a guide to the assessment that pupils and teachers can share.

In order to promote this type of joint responsibility for assessment, we feel that one should work:



a) with the descriptors

b) with the dossier

We will now specify the type of work that can be carried out with these sections of the ELP in order to make progress in shared assessment.

Knowing your own level in each of the competences: working with the descriptors

In what is set out in the ELP, the scales of descriptors, (which are also found in the Biography), are designed so that the pupils can establish their level in each of the five basic competences of the foreign language (listening, reading, oral interaction, speaking and writing). The levels are in line with the reference levels established in the *Common European Frame of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment*. We recommend this type of activity because, starting from general descriptors, it allows the pupils to make a global evaluation of their abilities. At the same time it is an instrument that is useful in training the pupils in self-assessment.

However, we have to bear in mind that at this level the capacity for self-assessment is not innate. This means that pupils cannot 'make an abstraction of the level achieved in the different abilities' if they have not already carried out tasks and self-assessment activities that are simpler and more closely related to suitable, practical learning activities. This is why we suggest starting with self-assessment activities related directly to tasks and learning sequences. Although this groundwork is time-consuming for the teacher, it provides a solid base for working with descriptors. It also helps the pupils to feel more secure when they have to face the complex task of self-assessment.



Continuous collection of the pupils' production: the usefulness of the Dossier

The main aim of the Dossier contained in the ELP is to make it possible for the pupil to collect all the meaningful documents that clearly show where progress has been made throughout the learning process in a course or level or stage. In the case of foreign language learning, these documents are basically their written and spoken productions. These documents have to be collected and organised in such a way that they show an advance in some specific aspect, in other words that they are evidence of progress.

Consequently, like a folder, the Dossier has two functions: first, it serves the pupils in their self-assessment and to reflect on their learning process; second, it serves as evidence of the level of competence that each pupil has attained in each of the abilities involved. It thus serves to evaluate the learning process from two perspectives, the teacher's and the pupil's, and can be very useful in the final assessment of the subject since it represents an X-ray of the pupil. From this point of view, the specific functions of the use of the Dossier are the following:

- To allow the pupils to analyse their own learning process, based on a study of all the documents in the Dossier (the pupil's own productions and those shared with others).
- To allow the pupils to reflect on the abilities and knowledge that have been acquired during the process as evidenced by the collected production (both written and oral).
- To help to establish a dialogue of assessment between the pupil and the teacher and thus to favour a symmetrical interaction in tutorial interviews. We understand by 'tutorial interview' the periodical meeting between the learner and the teacher to review aims, evaluate the learning process and the work done and to plan the work for the subsequent weeks.
- To promote self-regulating processes in the pupils based on an awareness of their own evidence (What do I do well?, What do I do badly? What do I have to improve?, What is the evidence for what I do well and for my weak points?, etc.)
- To offer a possible assessment system different from the traditional one.



For this to be possible, the Dossier has to contain the following documents:

- Work from the initial stages of learning as well as work from later stages.
- More than one document for each of the different areas (writing, listening, speaking, etc.)
- With regard to writing, not only the version that is handed in but the various drafts.
- As for speaking, a collection of audio and video recordings.
- Metacognitive questionnaires or of self-assessment, filled in by the pupil, which create a written dialogue with the teacher.
- The questions, which are handed out to the pupils in advance, that serve as a basis for tutorials.

It must be understood, however, that it is not a question of the pupil keeping a Dossier for the teacher to assess; the aim is much wider: we must recall that the ELP with all its parts belongs to the pupil and it is shared with the teacher. The teacher has to show the pupils how to use it so that together they can make a continuous assessment based on a progressive evaluation of the pupil's work, both from the teacher's point of view and the pupil's.