

Insights into the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL)

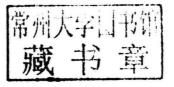
Edited by **David Newby**



Insights into the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL)

Edited by

David Newby





PUBLISHING

Insights into the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL), Edited by David Newby

This book first published 2012

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright @/2012 by David Newby and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-3503-X, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-3503-9

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section III: Implementing the EPOSTL
Chapter Eight
Chapter Nine
Chapter Ten

INTRODUCTION

The content of this book focuses on a recent publication of the Council of Europe, the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages, usually referred to under the acronym EPOSTL. While it is not necessary for readers to have detailed knowledge of the EPOSTL, it is useful to have a general idea of its aims and content. The first part of this introduction will therefore acquaint the reader with the most essential information about the EPOSTL. Following this, the aims and content of this book, Insights into the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages, will be outlined.

What is the *EPOSTL*?

The European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL) is a document intended for students undergoing their initial teacher education which encourages them to reflect on the didactic knowledge and skills necessary to teach languages, helps them to assess their own didactic competences and enables them to monitor their progress and to record their experiences of teaching during the course of their teacher education.

The EPOSTL consists of three main sections:

- a Personal Statement section, to help students at the beginning of their teacher education to reflect on general questions related to teaching
- a Self-Assessment section, which contains lists of 'can-do' descriptors relating to didactic competences
- a Dossier, in which students can document progress and record examples of work relevant to their teacher education and their future profession.

The *EPOSTL* was developed for the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe (ECML) by a team of teacher educators from five different countries (Armenia, Austria, Norway, Poland, UK). It arose from a project initiated by the ECML, "A Framework for Teacher Education", which had the overall aim of

addressing the broad question of harmonising teacher education across Europe.

The *EPOSTL* builds on existing documents already developed by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe - the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)* and the *European Language Portfolio (ELP)* - as well as the European Commission-financed project *European Profile for Language Teacher Education* – A *Frame of Reference (European Profile)*.

The main aims of the EPOSTL are:

- to encourage students to reflect on the competences a teacher strives to attain and on the underlying knowledge which feed these competences
- to help prepare students for their future profession in a variety of teaching contexts
- to promote discussion between students and between students and their teacher educators and mentors
- to facilitate self-assessment of students' competence
- to help students develop awareness of their strengths and weaknesses related to teaching
- to provide an instrument which helps chart progress

At the heart of the *EPOSTL* are the 195 descriptors of competences relating to language teaching which comprise the self-assessment section. These descriptors may be regarded as a set of core competences which language teachers should strive to attain.

The *EPOSTL* is a flexible resource which can be integrated in a variety of ways into existing teacher education courses and programmes. The *EPOSTL* is the property of the student teacher and is an instrument to promote professional growth through reflection and dialogue.

The *EPOSTL* is widely used in many European countries and beyond. It has been translated into 13 languages and a Japanese version is currently being produced.

Insights into the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages

The title of this book has been chosen by analogy with one which has similar aims: *Insights from the Common European Framework of Reference* (Morrow 2004), a collection of articles which explains the content of the CEFR and gives examples of how it is implemented in various teaching

contexts. Whereas the title of that publication contains the preposition "from", since it seeks to explain theoretical aspects of the CEFR, the preposition in the title of the present volume is "into". In this case, one of the main aims is to outline theoretical areas of knowledge which are important for those who intend to make use of the *EPOSTL* in teacher education.

This book is intended principally for two groups of readers: teacher educators involved in the training of teachers of foreign languages and student teachers. However, it will be of interest to anyone involved in language education. The book is divided into three parts:

Part I: The theoretical basis of the EPOSTL

This section focuses on theoretical insights relevant to the use of the *EPOSTL*. In chapter one, David Newby discusses some of the issues which arose in the design of the *EPOSTL* and in its implementation. The most important function of the *EPOSTL* is as a tool for reflecting on the competences which teachers strive to attain. In the second chapter Anne-Brit Fenner therefore considers the role of reflection in education, looks at different theoretical approaches to reflection and indicates the role that it plays when the *EPOSTL* is used. A further aim of the *EPOSTL* is to support an autonomous mode of learning, both on the part of student teachers and their learners. In chapter three, Hanna Komorowska discusses the concept of learner autonomy and its place in education. In the last chapter of this section, Michael Byram presents a model of culture and analyses to what extent this model is represented in the descriptors of the *EPOSTL*.

Part II: The EPOSTL and other European instruments

As stated above, the *EPOSTL* builds on insights from three other European publications, each of which is the focus of a chapter in this part. In chapter five, David Newby examines the relationship between the *EPOSTL* and the *Common European Framework of Reference*, focusing on the correspondences between their respective competence descriptors. In chapter six, Hanna Komorowska explains the rationale of the *European Language Portfolio* and examines similarities and differences between the *ELP* and the *EPOSTL*. In chapter seven, Mike Grenfell, one of the coauthors of the *European Profile for Language Teacher Education*, presents its aims and content and indicates how the two documents may be

4

used in a complementary fashion in the curriculum design of teacher education.

Part III: Implementing the EPOSTL

In the final part, three case studies are presented, illustrating how the *EPOSTL* can be used in practice. In chapter eight, in the first of these studies, Barbara Mehlmauer-Larcher describes how the *EPOSTL* is used in the training of future English teachers at the University of Vienna and also discusses theoretical aspects of her approach. The context she describes represents the 'mainstream' use of the *EPOSTL*; in the last two chapters, case studies are presented which show additional uses to which the *EPOSTL* can be put. Barry Jones describes a "bi-lateral" teacher education programme between the University of Cambridge and the Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres at Antony in France, in which the *EPOSTL* played a key role. He further discusses reactions of the English and French students to using the *EPOSTL*. In the last chapter, Rita Kupetz and Hannah Ruhm give an account of how the *EPOSTL* was used in a short training course for German exchange assistants who were about to begin a period of teaching in the United Kingdom.

Further Information on the *EPOSTL*

The *EPOSTL* can be downloaded free of charge in several languages – English, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Lithuanian, Polish, Russian and Spanish - from the following website: http://EPOSTL2.ecml.at/ (resources).

An additional publication consisting of case studies describing the use of the *EPOSTL* in eight European countries is also available from the European Centre for Modern Languages: Newby, D., Fenner, A-B., Jones, B. (Eds.) (2011) *Using the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages*. Strasbourg/Graz: Council of Europe publishing. It can be downloaded at http://EPOSTL2.ecml.at/ (publication).

Further information on the ECML and downloadable versions of its many publications are available from http://www.ecml.at/.

References

- Morrow, K. (Ed.) (2004). *Insights from the Common European Framework*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Council of Europe (2001). Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, Modern Languages Division/Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

SECTION I:

THE THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE EPOSTL



CHAPTER ONE

THE EUROPEAN PORTFOLIO FOR STUDENT TEACHERS OF LANGUAGES: BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

DAVID NEWBY

1 The Council of Europe and Modern Languages

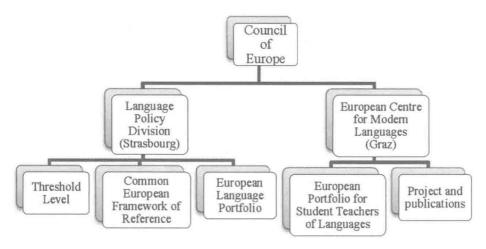
Since the 1960s the Council of Europe has played a major role in language teaching methodology and research throughout Europe (see Trim 2007 online). Based on educational and political aims its Language Policy Division (LPD), formerly the Modern Languages Section, has made a significant contribution to the development of language education policies and to promoting linguistic diversity and plurilingualism. Some of its best-known contributions are "tools and standards to help member states elaborate transparent and coherent language policies" (Council of Europe 1 online). From 1975 onwards the categories of communication found in its *Threshold Level*, revised in 1991 (see van Ek 1980; van Ek and Trim 1990), not only served as a basis for curriculum design in many European countries but its notional and functional categories provided essential theoretical input to the Communicative Approach to language teaching.

At the beginning of the 21st century the *Common European Framework of Reference* (*CEFR*) built on the rationale but extended the scope of the *Threshold Level*. Not only did its "action-oriented" view of language use enable human communication to be described explicitly in terms of user competences, but its categories of "general competences," which included both the ability to learn languages and various types of "cultural competence" (*CEFR* p. 6), went beyond the language-based taxonomies which had previously been drawn up by applied linguists, for example by Canale and Swain (1980). The specification of learner/user competences, opened the door to what has become the best-known part of the *CEFR*: its scaling of language competences by means of the now widely-adopted levels A1 – C2.

An important "sister instrument", the *European Language Portfolio*, reinforced the reflective mode of language learning advocated in the *CEFR* and provided a means for learners to self-assess their language competence and to reflect on and provide evidence of both linguistic and cultural competences and experiences.

In the year 1994 the work of the Language Policy Division was complemented by the establishment by the Council of Europe of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in Graz, Austria, Since that time, the Graz centre has carried out and supervised projects aimed at implementing innovation in the organisation, learning and teaching of modern languages. It further aims to train multipliers, develop expert networks and to disseminate good practice (European Centre for Modern Languages online). Currently 34 states are members of the ECML and therefore participate in its activities. Projects that take place under the its auspices are the result of project proposals submitted by language experts - teacher educators, applied linguists, teachers, educational stakeholders etc. - and respond to the foreign language educational needs of member states. With their practical orientation, they seek to bridge the gulf between theory and practice. It was within the framework of an ECML project that the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL) was developed. The Language Policy Division and the European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz work in close cooperation. Various projects have had the specific aim of supporting the implementation of policies and documents that have been developed in Strasbourg. Figure one shows some of the main publications of the respective institutions.

Figure 1: The Council of Europe – examples of instruments that have been developed



2 The Origins of the *EPOSTL*

The EPOSTL project was instigated in 2005 by the Governing Board of the ECML, which comprises representatives of all member states. It was the wish of the Board that a project should be initiated which would contribute to the "harmonising" of teacher education in Europe. In initial discussions with an invited group of 10 language experts from a variety of European countries, various ways of approaching this rather abstract task were considered. What soon became clear was that any attempts to set up a structural, top-down framework – for example, a common teacher education curriculum - would prove futile since both the structures and rationales of teacher education programmes differ widely from country to country. It was eventually decided that a more reasonable task would be to develop some sort of portfolio for use in teacher education, which would on the one hand aim at a harmonisation of teacher competences, but on the other would take into account the diversity of different national contexts. The resulting project was entitled "A Framework for Teacher Education" and was coordinated by teacher educators from five European countries: David Newby (Austria), Anne-Brit Fenner (Norway), University Barry Jones (UK), Hanna Komorowska (Poland), Kristine Soghikyan, Brusov Linguistic University (Armenia) and Rebecca Allan (UK). The project group identified the following specific tasks:

- to address the content of language teacher education with a view to identifying "core competences";
- to formulate corresponding didactic competence descriptors relating to language teaching;
- to embed these in a portfolio to help student teachers reflect on their knowledge, skills and values.

During the two years of developing the *EPOSTL* the authors had the benefit of having draft versions evaluated by participants at two workshops held at the European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz. At the first of these, a workshop entitled *Back to the Future*, held in September 2005, student teachers from the 34 member states of the ECML were confronted with the first draft version of the *EPOSTL*. Their critical voices and creative suggestions made from their student perspective led to considerable changes being made to the *EPOSTL*, particularly in the wording of its descriptors. In April 2006, a further workshop was held, attended by 30 teacher educators, who evaluated and suggested revisions of the second draft version. The fact that the project team worked in a

wide variety of teaching cultures and that the *EPOSTL* was evaluated by students and teacher educators across Europe provided a justification for including the "European" label in the title. The final version of the *EPOSTL* was published by the ECML in English and French in 2007 and in German in 2008. It has in the meantime been translated into 13 languages.

3 The *EPOSTL* in a European context

From the outset, the authors of the *EPOSTL* were very much aware that the intended Portfolio did not constitute a *tabula rasa* but would be able to build on three notable contributions that had already been made to language learning and teaching in Europe. These were the *European Profile for Language Teacher Education: A Frame of Reference*, a project commissioned by the European Union and drawn up by a team from the University of Southampton, and the two well-known instrument developed by the Council of Europe, the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* and the *European Language Portfolio*. These documents will be briefly described and their relationship with the *EPOSTL* indicated. A full discussion will follow in section II of this publication.

CEFR & EPOSTL (see chapter five)

The overall rationale of the *EPOSTL* derived to some extent from the *Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)*. This can be illustrated by examining a statement taken from the introduction to the *CEFR* (p. 1):

The Common European Framework (...) describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively.

This statement can be adapted to show what the *EPOSTL* aims to do, as follows:

The European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages describes in a comprehensive way what language teachers have to learn to do in order to teach a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to help learners to develop so as to be able to act effectively.