

The European Language Portfolio (ELP) in early childhood education (children aged 3 to 7)

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Development

For many years now, IPE has devoted itself to the issue of „early multilingualism“ – by offering training courses for educators, by counselling teams of day-care institutions, at symposia in Germany and abroad, through publishing and developing practical material and through numerous practical projects in day-care facilities.

As partner in the EU-Comenius project „ENEMU-Enhancing early multilingualism“ (2005-2008), in which linguists and language teachers from Germany, Italy, Latvia, Austria and Turkey developed a manual for educators as introduction into linguistics, IPE was able to benefit from the expert knowledge of its international partners, but could also contribute its own ideas and experience in language education.

In the framework of a Turkish-German language project (2001) and particularly in the project for „Italian-German language education in three multilingual day-care facilities in Mainz“ (2005-2010), the IPE project group established strong interest and high motivation among children as well as parents whose first and family language was not German. However, German-speaking children and their parents were also interested in dealing with multilingualism and actively using them.

This is how the idea of developing a European Language Portfolio (ELP) for children in day-care facilities came about – all the more so since IPE had already been working with some elements of the Language Portfolio in its own projects. In these efforts, it was able to benefit from the Language Portfolio models which already existed for early childhood education and had been validated by the Council of Europe – models from Spain, Poland, Turkey, Switzerland and the Autonomous Province of Bolzano (for children aged 9-11).

Objective and justification

It is mainly due to migration that most day-care facilities have become multilingual institutions. What is needed for them to become also *plurilingual* places is systematic didactic support of an experience and learning process on multilingual living environments in early childhood education. The Council of Europe has long since advocated support and respect for the mother tongues of migrant workers in the member states. The potential that is arising from the fact that many children in day-care institutions are fluent in more than one language is by far not being fully utilized yet. In order to achieve the European Union's objective of every citizen being able to communicate in three languages, more ideas have to be developed and implemented so that *all* children – those with non-German mother tongue and those with German mother tongue – are getting familiar with multilingualism as early as possible.

It is for that reason that when conceiving a project about education and multilingualism IPE chose the group of children aged 3 to 7 as its target group. Children aged 7 were involved in order to find opportunities for using the Language Portfolio also in the transition from elementary to primary education, thus motivating teachers to continue working with the portfolio in primary school.

ELP has proved to be a suitable instrument for developing a coherent and consistent concept for language education. Since, in Germany, there was no such thing as a portfolio for children aged 3 to 6, it was the aim of this project to develop such a model.

To us, ELP seemed to be appropriate for the use in early childhood education,

- because it allows to combine linguistic and intercultural learning experiences;
- because it is a motivation to value *all* language skills, no matter where or how they were acquired, and to promote independent active language learning;
- because, in the transition from pre-school to primary education, it can supply valuable information for the individual development of linguistic and intercultural skills;
- because working with the “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages” (CEFR) should start at an early stage, since CEFR can serve as a basis for proofs of language skills which allow comparability within Europe.

To this day, several countries have developed Language Portfolios for different age groups (children, young people, and adults) and different purposes (e.g. job applications, naturalization, change of school). Also, Language Portfolios for primary education are already available. At the moment, however, only very few ELP validated by the Council of Europe (a Spanish, a Polish, a Turkish and a Swiss portfolio) are on hand for pre-school education. In Germany, European Language Portfolios in pre-school education are still „new territory“.

The Language Portfolio can already help young children to become aware of their own language skills and to describe them. Getting familiar with a Language Portfolio in early childhood will later facilitate the entry into a European model of learning and certifying multilingual skills. Many day-care facilities have already introduced portfolios, e.g. for documenting progress in the development and learning progress of children. Those experiences with portfolios can be utilized in order to introduce a Language Portfolio or to incorporate it with its core elements in the general portfolio, especially if the general portfolio already includes an area of learning „Communication“ and/or „Language“.

Structure of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) for Children

The new developed ELP for children aged 3 to 7 is being offered to day-care institutions in a slipcase containing material for children as well as the manual for educators.

1. The material has been devised on the basis of already existing ELP models validated by the Council of Europe for children aged 3 to 7. As a result of our experiences in the trial phase their content was partly borrowed, modified and amended. Work sheets for children are being supplied as loose-leaf-collection so that they can be photocopied individually. They are intended especially for working on the language biography. Form and design of the dossier is left to educators and children in the individual institutions. Suggestions on that are to be found in the manual. As for the Language Passport, a CERF version adapted to the age group 3 to 7 is also offered.

2. Manual for educators

During the trial phase, educators very often expressed their wish not only to have material (for children) but to be given also a manual for educators in which ELP's conception and

objectives are explained and which includes helpful suggestions on how to work with the material, with parents and with primary schools.

The first chapter deals with multilingualism in connection with European language policy and highlights matters of education and language policy which are of importance already for pre-school education institutions (Filtzinger).

The second chapter addresses ELP's importance for language teaching in the early childhood and discusses perspectives of multilingualism in the work with the portfolio (Montanari).

The third chapter focuses on multilingualism and the European Language Portfolio in early childhood education. The discussion is complemented by concrete ideas resulting from the experiences of the trial phase (Montanari/Junkert/ Nachit).

The fourth chapter includes a description of the work material, offers ideas for activities as well as methodical and didactic advice (Cicero Catanese/Junkert/Nachit).

Project group:

- Prof. Otto Filtzinger, IPE/Free University of Bozen · Bolzano, project manager
- Marina Wagner, IPE, project co-ordinator
- Jun. Prof. Dr. Elke Montanari, Pädagogische Hochschule Heidelberg (University of Education), scientific support - linguistics
- Dr. Giovanni Cicero Catanese, IPE/Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz/ Pädagogische Hochschule Karlsruhe (University of Education), scientific support - educational science
- Maria Unali, Dipl. Päd., certified educator and graphic designer
- Margret Junkert, manager of Kindertagesstätte (day-care centre) Goetheplatz, Mainz (up until June 2010)
- Regina Schneider, manager of Goetheplatz day-care centre, Mainz (as of July 2010)
- Patricia Nachit, educator at manager of Goetheplatz day-care centre, Mainz
- Ursula Kaiser, manager of Kreyßigstraße day-care centre, Mainz
- Yvonne Gross, assistant manager of Kreyßigstraße day-care centre, Mainz
- Heike Hermes, language trainer at Kreyßigstraße day-care centre, Mainz
- Sonja Lubkowski, manager of Catholic day-care centre Liebfrauen, Mainz
- Julia Miczka, educator at Catholic day-care centre Liebfrauen, Mainz
- Adam Ocseck, IPE, technical assistance

Scientific support

Starting in 2007, expert meetings and regular project meetings were held the result of which were an inspiring exchange and a fundamental reflection on the practical work and the material. Special emphasis was put on observing the interests of the participating children (see Cicero Catanese 2010).

Prof. Dr. Hans H. Reich (University of Koblenz-Landau) who, as a linguist, has especially concerned himself with multilingualism has contributed valuable ideas and suggestions to the project.

We were very pleased to see that our project has also found broad interest among other scientists. Some of them - to whom we give special thanks – have also visited our test institution in Mainz.

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Robert Bosch Stiftung

Mainz - Stadt der Wissenschaft (Mainz – City of Science)

Further plans for implementation

What is still lacking is an integrated language policy oriented towards the recommendations and objectives of the Council of Europe and the European Union. Especially in early childhood education, we need to further develop integrative language education approaches which, in the educational institutions, utilize multilingual and multicultural resources in order to develop communicative and intercultural skills.

Day-care facilities themselves can make an important contribution towards the development of a culture of multilingualism by creating a language-friendly climate in the institutions and gaining a positive attitude towards a multilingual education of all children. Creative multilingual education with all senses will boost children's motivation and activate integrated learning processes. To be able to do that educators need sensibility and respect for children's individual ways of language acquisition. Therefore, it is most desirable to further develop language promotion in day-care facilities into an overall concept of early multilingual and intercultural education.

For the introduction of the European Language Portfolio into the pedagogic practice, the project group plans the following steps:

- information events on the language portfolio in early childhood,
- training and counselling offerings and expert support for staff and teams in day-care facilities,
- increasing parent counselling,
- stronger involvement of parents in day-care facilities,
- stronger intercommunication between day-care facilities and primary schools.

Publications on the language portfolio project:

Cicero Catanese, G. (2010): Das Europäische Sprachenportfolio. Anwendungs- und Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten zur Unterstützung einer interkulturellen und mehrsprachigen Bildung in vorschulischen Einrichtungen. Waxmann Verlag Münster/ New York/ München/ Berlin

Filtzinger, O./ Montanari, E./ Cicero Catanese, G. (2011): Das Europäische Sprachenportfolio. Mehrsprachigkeit in der frühkindlichen Bildung wertschätzen und dokumentieren. Sprachliche Bildung 3-7Jahre. Bildungsverlag EINS Köln

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