Chapter 8

Fostering strategic, self-regulated learning: the case for a "soft" ELP

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Abstract

The European Language Portfolio (ELP) has two main functions: a reporting and a pedagogical function. Although a significant number of studies and pilots have focused on the pedagogical component of the ELP, there are still important aspects of the pedagogical function that have not been fully researched yet, such as the fundamental objective of the ELP which is "learning how to learn".

This chapter outlines how this pedagogical function can be developed in the future. Drawing on the pedagogical principles of the ELP and Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) it explores the possibility of taking advantage of the ELP's potential as metacognitive tool, in particular through the integration of explicit language learning strategy instruction. Central to this development are the features and added value which an electronic, "soft" Portfolio provides.

The chapter argues that the development of both metacognitive and strategic functions of the ELP and their integration with the other parts of the portfolio through the connectivity of a digital medium, would significantly enhance the pedagogical function of the portfolio and foster self-regulated learning.

Introduction

The word "soft" in the title relates to two aspects of the portfolio I want to explore in this chapter. The first one refers to a softcopy version of the ELP as an electronic portfolio, as opposed to the printed "hardcopy" version. The features of a digital version of the portfolio enable a number of functions and affordances for the user and make it possible to develop aspects of the ELP that could not have been envisaged in the paper version.

The second meaning of "soft" alludes to a characterization of the pedagogical function of the ELP made in a Council of Europe document (Christ et al. 1997). Gerard Westhoff (2001) has critically examined how the role of the pedagogical function of the ELP was described in that document as "soft pages" compared to the "hard pages" of the reporting function, and highlights the importance of developing the pedagogical component (Kohonen and Westhoff 2001).

In this chapter I share Westhoff's view of the necessity of further development of the pedagogical function of the ELP, however the word "soft" in this chapter? does not have negative connotations, on the contrary: it not only denotes the digital medium that enhances and enables new functionalities for ELP users, but also shows how so-called "soft" qualities, such as being flexible, process-orientated, instructional, motivating etc., can be further developed in order to make an ELP a stronger pedagogical tool.

The chapter starts by providing some background information about the pedagogical principles of the ELP and CEFR. It then focuses on the objective "Learning to learn" within the Language Biography, where some examples of the templates used in validated ELPs for "Learning to learn" will be reviewed.

Then the role of metacognition in relation to language learning will be briefly presented drawing on relevant literature. Within this framework the concept of cognitive knowledge

and its relevance for metacognition will be highlighted. The shortcomings of existing ELPs in relation to metacognition will be examined and some possible and desirable developments for the ELP in this field will be explored, in particular the pedagogical relevance of language learning strategies instruction is considered. The suitability of an electronic portfolio to introduce metacognitive skills will be then suggested. Within this context the chapter reports on the findings of a small scale project using an electronic Portfolio created by The Open University (OU) in the UK, in which a section on learning styles was introduced. Based on this experience and on cognitive theory the introduction of explicit metacognitive elements such as learning strategy instruction and learning styles will be proposed and explained within a model of self-regulated learning.

The potential of the ELP and in particular the electronic version of the ELP will then be presented in relation to its specific contribution to enhancing learners' ability to learn: e.g raising awareness of individual learning differences and developing appropriate learning strategies. Finally conclusions based on the theory and practice suggest that a soft, electronic version of the ELP enhances and transforms the pedagogical potential of the ELP and develops it in ways that were not possible with paper versions. The development of metacognitive skills would make the ELP a stronger pedagogical tool and a more flexible tool to use in different educational settings, such as blended or distance learning.

Background

The ELP draws on the pedagogical theory and principles of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Based on a communicative and action approach to language learning, the CEFR highlights the importance of becoming aware of the language

learning process: "Autonomous learning can be promoted if 'learning to learn' is regarded as an integral part of language learning, so that learners become increasingly aware of the way they learn, the options open to them and the options that best suit them." (Council of Europe 2001: 141)

The European Language Portfolio, in words of David Little, the "CEFR's companion piece",(Little, 2009), was designed as a pedagogical tool to promote learner autonomy, as stated in the Principles and Guidelines (Council of Europe, 2006: 2.4). It "has both a pedagogic function to guide and support the learner in the process of language learning and a reporting function to record proficiency in languages" (Council of Europe, 2006: 2.5).

There is no doubt that the pedagogical component of the ELP has always been a central and necessary component of the portfolio. This fundamental function of the ELP has been carried out in particular through the language Biography of the ELP, which helps learners to document and reflect on previous languages learning, to assess their own language skills and to plan and monitor future learning (Schneider and Lenz, 2000). The role of the dossier as pedagogical tool has also been highlighted. (Kohonen and Westhoff 2001).

The pedagogical function is designed to make the language learning process more transparent and to help learners to develop their capacity for reflection and self-assessment. In this respect Kohonen points out that this self-awareness belongs to the so-called invisible curriculum. It is invisible in so far as there is no external testing or recording of these properties and participants have only a peripheral awareness of them, however "without a clear awareness of what learning to learn means for them in their own contexts, students may have difficulties in undertaking a conscious reflection and assessment of their language learning." (Kohonen and Westhoff, 2001,10). Precisely one of the goals of portfolio oriented pedagogy is to make all of this learning process visible.

In the study by Westhoff mentioned above (Kohonen and Westhoff, 2001) that focused on how to enhance the pedagogical function of the ELP, Westhoff considers that this function is not taken very seriously and warns: "an ELP without a well-elaborated and implemented pedagogical part will have little added value and will shrink to a folder with diplomas" (Kohonen and Westhoff 2001, 36). When the studies on the ELP implementation and use in the last decade are taken into account, it is evident that the pedagogical function has been taken very seriously indeed. In fact the majority of research and pilots related to the ELP has been based on the concepts of learner autonomy, self-assessment and reflection. The numerous works by David Little and Viljo Kohonen are good examples (Little 2005, 2007, 2009, Kohonen 2001, 2009).

However some of the original principles related to the pedagogical function - apart from self-assessment and reflection- have not been carried out in practice, in particular in relation to "learning to learn", one of the main objectives of the Language Biography. Indeed, many of the ELPs do not have an explicit part dedicated to this objective.

"Learning to learn" within the ELP

In the "Guide for developers" Schneider and Lenz (2001) pointed out that the Language Biography focuses on processes rather than in products, and that this part in particular "builds upon the idea that conscious reflection on learning processes will eventually improve learning outcomes as well as the language learners' ability and motivation to learn languages." (Schneider andLenz, 2001: 24). Further they stated that the function of the Biography is to help learners to

- reflect on their objectives, ways of learning and success in language learning,

- plan their learning,

- learn autonomously (Schneider and Lenz, 2001:7)

Within the context of learner autonomy they furthermore suggest a way in which the Biography might foster this reflection on learning process and lead to autonomous learning through " checklists or other forms of descriptions of skills and competencies that are not related to the *Common reference levels" (*Schneider andLenz, 2001:24. As an example of this type of checklists they mention the North Rhine-Westphalian ELP which includes a section *"Me as a language learner" with the rubrics:* "Learning techniques and strategies" (Schneider and Lenz, 2001,39). These checklists consist of very general questions or statements to foster reflection about the learning process such as: "How I learn words, How I revise and further develop my texts, etc"; there is, however, no mention of particular learning strategies or techniques.

The Common European Framework of Reference in relation to "Learning to learn" gives more information about how to foster the ability to learn: "In its most general sense, *savoir-apprendre* is the ability to observe and participate in new experiences and to incorporate new knowledge into existing knowledge, modifying the latter where necessary. Language learning abilities are developed in the course of the experience of learning. They enable the learner to deal more effectively and independently with new language learning challenges, to see what options exist and to make better use of opportunities." (Council of Europe, 2001, 106). According to the philosophy of the CEFR this "learning to learn" has a fundamental active component and a self-regulatory motivation, it is not confined to reflection on the ways one learns.

The CEFR also examines different ways of developing learners' study skills and acceptance of responsibility for their own learning, such as:

- "systematically raising the learners' awareness of the learning and teaching processes in which they are participating;
- engaging learners as participants in experimentation with different methodological options;
- getting learners to recognise their own cognitive style and to develop their own learning strategies accordingly." (Council of Europe 2001:149)

David Little and Barbara Simpson point out in their study about "Learning to learn" in which they refer to different validated ELPs, that these suggestions made by the CEFR describe ways of developing and exploiting the pedagogical function of the ELP, and they highlight that "learning to learn and learning to assess oneself are two sides of the same coin" (Little and Simpson, 2003: 28-29).

They provide twenty-three templates of validated portfolio that foster the function "Learning to learn". These templates are similar to the above-mentioned example from North Rhine-Westphalia: they support reflection with open questions, they help identify the own learning style and use of strategies, and they raise awareness of the personal strengths (e.g. the Irish ELP for lower and upper secondary) or reflection on the own cognitive style (the Irish Adult Migrant ELP). The Cercles ELP for University Students provides some questionnaires focused on "Learning to learn" with general questions about the own learning process, such as "Can I identify my learning strengths and weaknesses? Can I set short-term objectives?" (Little and Simpson, 2003: 50-51).

This sort of reflection is very valuable in order to foster awareness of the learning process, however in relation to "learning to learn" this type of questionnaires cannot offer any new knowledge in relation to other ways or methods to learn. Even if they include "target setting" based on past learning experiences, the targets will remain in the field of the already known. That means that new insights about learning styles and strategies cannot arise from these templates, because learners can hardly set a target they do not know about. In order to get new insights it seems to be necessary to have some input in the form of explicit instruction, where different types of learning strategies and ways to use them are presented and explained. The examples of templates mentioned facilitate reflection and self-assessment and were not designed to include instruction. The paper version of the Portfolios did not facilitate this type of input and were clearly conditioned by its paper format where including explicit information would significantly increase the number of pages of the ELP and make it unpractical and expensive.

Rebecca Oxford, one of the leading researchers in the field of language learning strategies, highlights the necessity for mediation for learning strategies. She stated two strong assumptions: "a) Almost everyone can learn an additional language effectively by employing appropriate strategies, assuming some basic interest in learning the language and sufficient time. b) Strategies can be learned through mediation or assistance." (Oxford, 2011: 27).

The concept of mediation comes from the psychologist Vygotsky who developed this idea within his socio-cultural model of learning where in a learning process the more capable other helps and leads the learner by means of different types of scaffolding within their "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's model of self-regulated learning states that learning is mediated through dialogues with more capable persons or through books, technology or other means (Vygotsky, 1978, Oxford 1990).

While in traditional educational settings such as classrooms the teacher or the peers can play the role of mediator, in the context of the electronic ELP, the portfolio itself would play the role of mediator. The interactive features of the ePortfolio would enable ELP designers to plan and introduce different types of scaffolding tasks to help learners developing their strategic knowledge and skills This mediation would take place through interaction with the portfolio and inner speech.

The importance of interactive affordances makes clear the relevance of the soft format for the portfolio. The paper based ELP does not allow the possibility to include information, links, explanations and other types of inputs that can act as mediate the learning experience or provide scaffolding. For this reason, it is argued that the printed format has not enabled the full development of the objective "Learning to learn", because it cannot provide access to specific new knowledge, and support or scaffold the extension of learners' knowledge and skills.

 "Learning to learn languages" is generally considered to include metacognitive knowledge and strategies, language learning strategies and cognitive styles. (Jaakkola et al, 2002). In the next section the characteristics of metacognition from the point of view of second language acquisition and educational psychology will be briefly reviewed.

Metacognition as pedagogical function within the ELP

Since its launch in 2001 one of the main functions of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) has been the development of learner autonomy and hence the capacity for independent language learning. This implies that the different versions of the ELP had to be designed "to help learners to achieve a fuller awareness of themselves as language learners and to develop

language learning skills that they can deploy to meet individual needs" (Council or Europe, 2006: 8). According to the principles stated by the Council of Europe "The Language Biography facilitates the learner's involvement in planning, reflecting upon and assessing his or her learning process and progress". (Council of Europe, 2006:3.2). These activities of "planning", "reflecting upon" and "assessing" are clearly in the domain of metacognition. The term metacognition was coined originally by Flavell meaning "knowledge and cognition about cognitive phenomena" (Flavell, 1979:.906). Since then the field of studies on metacognition has produced a large number of terms related such as metacognitive beliefs, metacognitive awareness, theory of mind or metamemory, and is characterised by a lack of coherence (Veenman et al, 2006). In this chapter I will use metacognition in the general sense defined by Flavell. Metacognition includes metacognitive knowledge and skills.

The relevance of learning metacognitive knowledge and skills for language learners , i.e. "learning to think about what happens during the learning process" (Anderson, 2002:1) has been highlighted in a significant number of studies (Anderson, 2008; Wenden, 1999, White 2008) to name but a few. Metacognition has been proven to be a predictor of learning in general (Wang, Haertel and Walberg 1990) not only for language learning.

The council of Europe has also taken the importance of metacognition for language learning into consideration. Some aspects of metacognition are widely developed in the ELP such as planning, evaluating and self-reflection. These metacognitve skills are actually defining features of the ELP so that the ELP can be considered a "metacognitive tool" (Scifoni, 2004/2005). However there are other aspects of metacognition that have not been developed yet within the ELP. According to the metacognition model proposed by Anderson (2002, 2008) there are five components : preparing and planning for learning, selecting and using strategies, monitoring learning, orchestrating strategies and evaluating learning. The ELP

accounts for the first and last principle: preparing and planning and evaluating learning. In fact these are the most valued characteristics of the ELP from a pedagogical point of view (Little 2005, 2007, Kohonen 2009). The other metacognitive components, in particular selecting and using language learning strategies, are also crucial skills, they are however not currently contemplated in the ELP as shown in the previous section.

Researchers (Anderson 1999, Cohen 1998, Oxford 1990) have highlighted the importance of teaching learning strategies to raise learners' awareness so that they are able to select appropriate strategies and to know when to use and learning strategies was introduced. There are different taxonomies of learning strategies, the most widely used is the one proposed by Oxford (1990) which distinguishes between cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies

Also Kohonen points out the role of learning strategies in raising awareness of learning process "This helps language learners monitor their learning towards increasingly self-directed, negotiated language learning and self-assessment and involves knowledge about learning strategies. These strategies refer to the behaviours of language learning and language use in which students engage in foreign-language learning. Strategies are problem-oriented, that is, learners utilise them to respond to an identified learning or communication need"(Kohonen/Westhoff, 2001, 17). Even if the importance of strategic skills seems to be acknowledged within the principles of the ELP, learning strategies have not been an explicit part of the ELP to date. Some validated versions of the portfolio have developed a section within the Biography to reflect on the learning process and introduced some general questions about the individual's ways of learning, for example the Irish, German and Swiss portfolios (Forster Vosicki, 2000; Brettman *et al*, 2000, Little and Simpson 2003), however none of them has invited learners to use learning strategies or other type of explicit metacognitive knowledge, such as learning styles awareness before.

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There have been some attempts to introduce learning styles and strategies explicitly within the ELP. Scifone (2004/2005), who used questionnaires about learning styles in a project working with the ELP, remarks that even if these types of questionnaires , are not explicitly recommended by the Council of Europe, they are in line with the Principles and Guidelines, since they help the learners to develop metacognitive tasks. Another example is a pilot carried out by the Open University using an electronic ELP in which an explicit section on learning stylesknowledge about learning strategies or styles.

However the notion of metacognitive knowledge is fundamental to develop awareness of one's own learning process. According to Benson (2001) the notion of 'metacognitive knowledge' was introduced into the literature on autonomy in language learning by Wenden (1995).   Wenden defines metacognitive knowledge very simply as "knowledge about learning (Wenden, 1998: 516). Thus according to cognitive literature (Flavell 1979, Wenden 1995, 1999) knowledge is a fundamental element of metacognition. Wenden (1999) argues that metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive strategies are complementary components of the broader notion of metacognition: "Metacognitive knowledge refers to *information* learners acquire about their learning, while metacognitive strategies, i.e. planning monitoring and evaluating, are general *skills* through which learners manage, direct regulate and guide their learning" (Wenden 1999, 436 emphasis in the original).

Also the thorough review of metacognitive studies by Murphy (2008) highlights that most of the relevant research in metacognition agrees in the view that there are two elements implied: knowledge and management of knowledge. The knowledge does not only include knowledge of one's own cognition, but also knowledge of cognition in general   (Anderson et al. 2001: 46).

This sort of domain-specific knowledge of general principles of learning is lacking in the ELP. The studies mentioned suggest that its inclusion in the portfolio would significantly enhance its metacognitive dimension and hence its pedagogical value. The next section will explore this possibility in relation to a specific development: the introduction of learning strategies instruction.

Language learning strategy instruction

Learning strategies research can be considered a continuation of the so-called "Good language learner (GLL) studies" developed in the 1970s and 1980s (Rubin 1975, Stern 1975, Naiman 1978). The starting point for these studies was the obvious difference between good and poor second language learners. . Rubin and Stern in their seminal studies identified a list of qualities and skills that good learners had, as well as a number of strategies used by successful learners, such as guessing, focus on form, looking for patterns in the language, drive to communicate, monitoring their performance etc.

In the 1980s and 1990s language learning strategies research produced a significant number of studies including Wenden and Rubin, 1987; O'Malley and Chamot 1990; Oxford, 1990. A large number of empirical studies have been carried out into learning strategies with the main focus on how language learners can become more effective. This field has proved to be very complex and one of the main outcomes of a thorough review of learning strategies research by Cohen and Macaro (2007), was the lack of consensus in defining the term.

Conscious of the difficulty of finding a good definition of learning strategy and reflecting on the findings of 30 years research Carol Griffiths (2008) proposes one based on six essential features. According to Griffiths, learning strategies are "activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own learning". (Griffiths, 2008: 87) A major outcome of learning strategy research was the view that learners should be taught not only language, but also strategies for more effective learning.

Thus Learning Strategy instruction, also called "strategy training" or "learner training", became one of the main research strands in the spirit of the Good Language Learner studies: drawing on the idea that strategies used by 'good' students could be adapted and taught to less successful students. (Cohen and Macaro, 2007). Chamot and Rubin (1994) argued that effective management of strategies was useful for all learners. The use of learning strategies implies an active approach to language learning, and has been closely linked to self-directed learning (Knowles, 1975) and learner autonomy (Holec,1981). Learners needed preparation for self-directed learning including the use of learning strategies. In the Language Strategy research post 1990 there was a significant shift in moving the responsibility for learners off the shoulders of the teachers and on to those of learners (Cohen and Macaro, 2007: 21). Learning to learn became a major area for development and the importance of enabling learners to understand and manage their strategies, learning patterns and feelings became a central pedagogical goal (Harris, 2003). However even if there was consensus about the importance of strategy instruction, there was an on- going discussion focused on the questions whether strategy instruction should be integrated in lessons or taught separately, embedded in the language teaching materials or made explicit (O'malley and Chamot 1990).

This debate has produced a number of studies supporting either explicit or implicit strategy instruction as shown by Murphy (2007). For instance in the context of learner autonomy

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Holec and Little argue (Holec *et al*, 1996) in favour of presenting and learning strategies in a meaningful way within a communicative context,

On the other side Dörnyei has pointed out the advantages of explicit learning strategy instruction, as it not only raise learners awareness about learning strategies, but it also offers a wide menu of strategies for learners to choose from, and it encourages students to reflect on their strategy use (Dörnyei, 2005: 174)   Also O'malley and Chamot (1990) argued in favour of separate instruction, where students can focus their attention on developing strategic processing skills rather than trying to learn content at the same time. Other strong arguments for explicit instruction are highlighted by Mariani (2002) who advocates for a shift from implicit presentation of strategies to explicit instruction with the goal of promoting student-regulated strategies use. The relevance for Learning Strategies research and instruction for language learning has been evidenced in particular for independent learning (Wenden 1999, Dickinson 1992, Grenfell & Harris 1999, White 1995, 1997, 1999) with special emphasis on the role of metacognitive strategies, but also it has been studied in classrooms settings (Wenden 1987, Dickinson 1992), eLearning environments (White 1999) and in distance language learning materials (Murphy 2008).

In the last decade the use of portfolios for pedagogical purposes has become increasingly relevant (see the Chapter by I.Alvarez in this volume). Vialpando et al (2005) highlights the characteristics of portfolio assessment, that " develops a longitudinal portrait of what the student can and cannot do in the areas identified" (Valpando et al, 2005, 41), portfolios also include rubrics for self-evaluation and reflection on the students' learning. With regard to strategy assessment and instruction the use of portfolios has been the focus of a number of studies (Oxford 2011, Yang 2003).

In the next section the possibilities of an electronic ELP for LS instruction will be explored.

Piloting a 'soft' ELP: incorporating a focus on learning styles and strategies

Although most of the Council of Europe- validated ELPs are paper based, over recent years some electronic ELPs have been developed. This has introduced significant changes in the characteristics and features of the portfolio with regard to interconnection of the parts, affordances such as navigation, sharing possibilities etc,

In relation to explicit strategy instruction the functionality of a soft ELP is fundamental, in this sense the use of ICT could be transformative. I use this term in the sense of Peter Twinning who distinguishes three functions of ICT in education: support, extend, transform, with 'transform' meaning that the changes could not have taken place without the functionalities of a computer (Twinning 2002, 505).

In a pilot study on the use of portfolios for learning-trategy-based instruction (SBI) Yang (2003) argues that portfolios can serve at least three major functions in strategy-based instruction. First, portfolios can document the planning, learning, monitoring, and evaluation processes. Second, portfolios can help raise students' awareness about learning strategies and autonomy. Third through compiling portfolios, learning-trategy-based instruction can be reinforced.

A digital environment can be seen to allow more autonomy for the user: e.g. the opportunity to access information adapted to individual needs and interests and to customize it; the possibility access tests, questionnaires and updating facilities, so that learners can manage their progress and update their profile in relation to their learning strategies. It also enable learners to easily archive and store information and share it with other users.

A preliminary study on the pedagogical development of the Language biography within an electronic language portfolio (Perez Cavana 2010) suggests the positive impact of introducing explicit instruction of metacognitive skills. In this pilot the focus was on learning styles and content-based templates for self-assessment of learning styles were used, also some learning strategies were suggested according to each learning style. The aim was to encourage students not only to assess their learning styles but also to get awareness and information about which learning strategies were more appropriate to their learning style.This was part of a pilot electronic portfolio designed by the Department of Languages of The Open University. The aim of this pilot ELP was to explore the use of an electronic version of the portfolio and to examine the attitudes and experiences of the distance learners who used it (for more details see chapter by I. Alvarez in this volume and Perez Cavana, 2010). In this electronic ELP a new section within the language Biography, "Me as language learner", was expanded to explore possibilities and usefulness of reflecting on and assessing individual learning style using specific learning styles categories. This section was structured in three steps:

1. Raising awareness of the own learning style through reflection and self-assessment in three dimensions (sensory channel, cognitive style, personality type.

2. Explanation of learning styles and suggested learning strategies for each of them. The eELP provided information and specific vocabulary about learning styles and learning strategies

3. Self-evaluation: the students looked into their preferred ways of learning, reflect on that and to assess their preferred style.

Working with the section "Me as a language learner" helped the students:

- To understand their learning process, their learning difficulties and possible alternative ways to overcome them

- To set learning goals and to develop learning strategies

- To explore other ways of learning

- To gain self-confidence

The findings of the OU eELP were very promising. Learners valued also very positively the self-assessment process and the explicit information about styles and strategies. The ePortfolio format allowed the students to easily access information about the different learning styles categories if they needed to, by clicking on the terms such as "sensory channel" or "cognitive analytical style". They were also able to access an online short version of the personality test "Myers-Brigg Type Indicator" and read more on each of the categories e.g. "introversion", "thinking" "perceiving" etc. Students learned specific vocabulary and metacognitive categories that helped them to reflect on their way of learning and to evaluate it.

Based on this pilot experience with learning styles, as well as on the theory and research in the metacognitive literature mentioned in the previous sections, the next section will suggest future research directions to support the integration of language learning strategy instruction within a soft ELP.

Towards a "soft" ELP with explicit language learning strategy instruction

Within the field of language learning strategies instruction there have been some attempts to adapt strategy instruction using an ePortfolio (Harris, 2003; Yang, 2003) that have identified

the challenges that it involves, such as the lack of teacher and the absence of evidence from observation, as most Language learning strategy research has taken place in classroom settings.

In spite of the challenges that the introduction of strategy instruction in an electronic ELP presents, in the following it will be argued that there is potential to expand the metacognitive tools of the European Language Portfolio and to integrate learning strategy instruction. This can be summarized in three main points:

1. **The ELP involves already implicit metacognitive strategy instruction**. The European Language Portfolio is based on self-assessment and reflection, as stated in many studies on the ELP (Little 2007, 2009) meaning that implicitly the use of the ELP trains learners in metacognitive strategies: As ELP users, learners need to reflect, plan, monitor and evaluate their learning.

2. **An eELP can also be used for explicit language learning strategy instruction (metacognitive, cognitive, socio-affective strategies).** Following the pilot experience of the OU eELP, explicit strategy instruction could be introduced in a soft ELP adapting the steps proposed for learning strategy instruction (Oxford 1990, O'Malley & Chamot 1990, Weinstein & Underwood 1985, Chamot 2005). That would involve following steps:

- Diagnosis: a section where learning styles, learning strategies and other variables, such as tolerance of ambiguity are identified

- Preparation and awareness raising: where the importance of the knowledge and use of these metacognitive categories are explained,

- Instruction: where direct instruction through explanation, practice and modelling is provided. Evaluation of the own strategy use and training.

3. **An eELP can foster self-regulation.** The ePortfolio format would provide the resources and navigation facilities to enable students to focus on their individual needs and interests. The advantages that software tools present are not only that they provide multimedia display and assessment possibilities that are useful for authentic assessment of prior learning, but also because they may scaffold attempts at knowledge construction, (Abrami and Barret, 2005). The features of an electronic, soft portfolio can thus facilitate learners establishing links between learning strategies and their language learning. For example linking strategies and concrete learning goals, monitoring the process, evaluating the results and modifying the use of strategies if necessary. This would foster self-regulated learning where students would be able to develop their own repertoire of strategy knowledge and to understand their individual learning style or preference depending on the task, On this basis they would be able to apply the strategies that work best for them and to connect strategies to the task and goals they have. The connectivity of the different parts of the portfolio would enable them to relate all these functions in a much more integrated and meaningful manner.

Self-regulation within a soft ELP

A significant number of studies have demonstrated that portfolios are good tools for training metacognitive skills in general and for structuring reflection in particular (Kohonen and Westhoff, 2001, Wade and Yarborough, 1996, Alvarez, 2012). Recent research (Wade et al 2005, Jenson 2011, Abrami & Barret 2005) shows how electronic portfolios significantly

promote self-regulation and critical reflection. Abrami and Barret (2005) point out in their study on ePortfolios how the so-called process portfolios in particular are expected to foster the learner's ability to self-regulate and monitor their own learning by developing their metacognitive awareness. A process portfolio is a purposeful collection of student work that tells the story of a student's effort, progress and achievement (Arter and Spadel, 1992)

The self-regulation aspect of portfolios is evident in the possibility for students to review and reflect on their work and to modify their learning goals or methods. Within this context an electronic, soft ELP can be used to develop not only awareness of the own learning process but also strategic actions to improve the language learning and to achieve greater efficiency. According to a definition of "self-regulation" by Zimmermann: "Students can be described as self-regulated to the degree that they are metacognitively, motivationally and behaviourally active participants in their own learning process" (Zimmermann 1989, 329) Wade et al. clearly explained how self-regulation and metacognition are related:

"The main aspect of self-regulation is metacognition, and it includes planning, monitoring, and regulating activities. Planning involves setting educational goals and outcomes as well as task analysis. Self-regulated learners set specific learning or performance outcomes and then monitor the effectiveness of their learning methods or strategies and respond to their evaluations. Self-monitoring is essential in enhancing learning. It helps students focus their attention on and discriminate between effective and ineffective performance and reveals inadequate learning strategies. It improves time management as well."(Wade et al 2005, para.18)

This feature of self-monitoring that allows learners to discriminate between effective and ineffective learning would be a key property of the soft portfolio in order to support language

learning. Rebecca Oxford has recently proposed a model of learning strategies instruction based on self-regulation (Oxford 2011). Her model, called Self-Regulation S2R Model of language learning, draws on a significant amount of research about strategically self-regulated learners, suggesting that it positively influences learning and that learners develop their sense of self-efficacy.

This self-regulation could be facilitated and enabled by the affordances offered by the soft ELP. The connectivity features of an eELP would allow learners to link different sections of the portfolio. In the pilot of the OU, mentioned above, the section on learning styles and strategies was in the biography as a separate part where students could work specifically on their learning styles. The idea for further developments of an electronic Portfolio, which provides metacognitive knowledge and strategies instruction, is to connect this part with all the other elements and sections of the portfolio to thus enhance the whole ELP as a pedagogical tool, not only the biography section. Some suggested links between different parts would be:

> the self-assessment lists of the Passport (*"I can do…."* or *"…. is an objective for me"*) could be linked to corresponding cognitive language learning strategies (e.g. reading, speaking, listening strategies)

> this information could be expanded or deepened for each type of strategy if required, or the learner could get an overview of more strategies in the section "Learning to learn" of the Biography

- a new section "Learning to learn" with practice activities would allow learners to choose the strategy they need or want to try out, could be accessible from any other part of the ELP

- In the section "Me as language learner" (Learning styles and learning strategies), learner could diagnose their use of learning strategies, become aware of their learning style, model the use of learning strategies for different purposes and evaluate them

The eELP would provide different possibilities for monitoring and evaluating during this process in relation to the self-assessment list and set goals. Learners would be able to modify their strategies according to the results and regularly update their records, thus learners would be involved in a process of self-regulation.

To summarize in relation to the envisaged soft ELP, the functionalities and interconnectivity of the electronic portfolio would enable learners to develop not only self-awareness in relation to their learning, as in the paper versions of the portfolio, but they would be able to learn and develop their learning skills interacting with the knowledge and practice opportunities provided while monitoring and evaluating themselves. The soft ELP would enable self-regulation, and that means a much more active approach to their own learning, in which the role of learning strategies would be central. The soft ELP user is thus envisaged as taking control and managing their own learning in a more proactive way than is the case with the paper portfolio. This would imply a significant increase in the significance of the pedagogical function of the ELP.

Conclusions

The objective of "Learning to learn" in the Language Biography is a key aspect of the pedagogical capacity of the European Language Portfolio. This function however has not been fully developed in existing validated portfolios.

This chapter argues that one of the reasons for this shortcoming resides in the printed format of the ELP that does not allow developments other than checklists. The printed format clearly limits the features of the ELP by not allowing for introduction of new knowledge or instruction.

Although metacognitive skills are an integral part of the ELP through planning, reflecting and assessing functions, other aspects of metacognition, such as developing metacognitive knowledge, has not been part of the ELP as yet.

This chapter suggests the benefits of introducing explicit language learning learning strategy instruction into the ELP. The importance of leaning strategy instruction has been shown in particular for independent settings. The use of an electronic European Language Portfolio seems to offer a range of advantages for explicit metacognitive instruction.

It furthermore shows the great potential of a soft ELP, since this involves implicit metacognitive strategies and it could easily incorporate explicit instruction. The features of a soft ELP would enable integration of strategic thinking with all the other functions and parts of the ELP and would significantly enhance the pedagogical aspects of the ELP through self-regulated learning.

The flexibility offered by the proposed model of soft ELP in relation to the function "Learning to learn" would give the ELP a much more relevant role within educational settings and could possibly be a reason for extending its use in contexts where it has not been

acknowledge as yet, such as adult education in general, and distance or blended education in particular.

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