

Language portfolio design for a concurrent teacher education program in Ontario, Canada

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Résumé : Dans ce rapport expérientiel, nous examinons l'application de la philosophie, du design et de l'emploi du CECR/PEL à un processus pour créer et maintenir un portfolio langagier au sein d'un programme simultané de formation en Ontario, Canada. Une diversité de ressources, telles que des ateliers et des ressources numériques, appuie la création du portfolio électronique de langues, qui sert à décrire et à enrichir le développement de compétences linguistiques chez les futurs enseignants et futures enseignantes de langues secondes, dont la plupart comptent enseigner le français. Une analyse du design du portfolio démontre les influences tant européennes que locales sur l'élaboration de ce processus. La discussion des possibilités et des défis vis-à-vis de ce design met en évidence les avantages et les limites de l'application du CECR/PEL au contexte ontarien de formation à l'enseignement. Cette réflexion au sujet du design du portfolio langagier du programme simultané de formation à l'enseignement démontre les possibilités d'application du CECR/PEL au-delà du contexte européen tout en soulignant la nécessité de créer de nouvelles ressources en tenant compte des réalités locales.

Mots-clés : portfolio langagier, formation des enseignants, CECR/PEL, portfolio électronique, développement des compétences langagières

Abstract: In this experiential report, we examine the applicability of CEFR/EPL philosophy, design and use to language portfolio design in a concurrent initial teacher education program in Ontario, Canada. A variety of supports, such as workshops and online resources, are available to future teachers of a second language (primarily French), for creating an electronic language portfolio that serves to document and enrich second language proficiency development. An analysis of the design demonstrates how both European and local influences have shaped the language portfolio process. The discussion of opportunities and challenges related to this design help to highlight advantages and limitations of applying the CEFR/EPL to this particular teacher education context. The present reflection on the design of the Concurrent Teacher Education Language Portfolio (CLP) demonstrates the potential of adapting CEFR/EPL principles beyond the European context while highlighting the need to consider specific contextual needs in the development of new learning resources.

Keywords: language portfolio, teacher education, CEFR/EPL, electronic portfolio, proficiency development

Introduction

The established and well-known principles, design and use of the CEFR/EPL represent compelling resources for language portfolio design in a concurrent teacher education program. In this professional reflection, therefore, we consider the applicability of these resources in the design of the Concurrent Language Portfolio (CLP). To this end, we describe the CLP's context and rationale, analyse its connections to the CEFR/ELP, and highlight considerations for implementing the CLP. Samples of CLP components are included to illustrate the points raised in this paper.

The context for the development of the Concurrent Language Portfolio (CLP)

The linguistic duality provided by French and English and the cultural diversity that has grown from many decades of immigration help to define the context in which language teachers are prepared in Ontario, Canada. The following excerpt from the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages website (n.d.) highlights the complex interaction between duality and diversity:

English and French are essential components of the Canadian identity. Over time, this linguistic duality has been enriched by the contributions of numerous cultures. Canada increasingly relies on immigration to ensure both demographic and economic growth.

The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages is highly interested in the relationship between linguistic duality and cultural diversity. We believe that every Canadian should be able to benefit from diversity and duality.

Ontario was home to 52.3 percent of immigrants arriving in Canada between 2001 and 2006, who numbered just over one million (Statistics Canada, 2008: 48). More specifically, Toronto welcomed the majority of these newcomers. In addition, just over a third of immigrants to Canada are either children or youth up to age 24, and that three-quarters of newcomers whose first language is neither English nor French use a non-official language most often at home (Statistics Canada, 2008: 47).

At the University of Toronto, one of the four pathways to becoming a teacher is the Concurrent Teacher Education Program (CTEP) in which future language teachers simultaneously complete the requirements of a discipline-based undergraduate degree focusing on the language they want to teach and the requirements of a discipline-based undergraduate degree in education. There are 25 course units to complete over a 5-year period. Seven to 10 of these units include language, literature, linguistics, and culture courses. Seven units focus on various aspects of education, of which only one, on how to teach French, is taught in French. The remaining 8 to 11 course units vary, depending on individual student interests and the level at which they want to teach (elementary or secondary).

CLP Rationale

For students preparing to become French teachers, therefore, typically 32 to 44 percent of coursework over a 5-year university program relates to French. Because many of the students enrolled in this initial teacher preparation program come from diverse backgrounds that reflect the immigration patterns to Ontario over the last few decades, only a handful of students use French as a « home » language. Many students may have only had the opportunity to study French as a subject in school for 5 to 8 years

before their admission to the Concurrent Teacher Education Program. Throughout the country, most French second language teachers use French as a second language (see e.g., Lapkin, MacFarlane, Vandergrift & Hart, 2006). Therefore, the CTEP Language Portfolio (CLP) was developed to help increase the students' opportunities to develop their French-language proficiency during the 5-year program.

Although the students undoubtedly benefit from their coursework, they may need additional proficiency practice in preparation for teaching in either elementary or secondary schools (see Bayliss & Vignola, 2000). Within an English-language program in a city where other languages are more present than French, and given that students have limited opportunities for study in a Francophone milieu, the language portfolio supports students in taking charge of their proficiency development by encouraging them to find opportunities to use French and reflect on their learning at the university and beyond.

Students are encouraged to manage and plan their proficiency development through maintaining a CLP with the ultimate aim of becoming autonomous language learners. Because future French teachers are simultaneously developing their proficiency in French and learning to teach, the CLP encourages them to develop an insider's awareness of what is involved in learning an additional language. We hope that this awareness will transfer to the development of sound teaching strategies in the second language classroom. Finally, the CLP scaffolds students' journey in becoming teachers who can serve as models for their elementary or secondary school students.

CLP Description

The CTEP language portfolio (CLP) is an optional, learning-oriented, web-based portfolio that documents and enriches teacher candidates' language proficiency development. Although optional, the language portfolio is strongly recommended for future teachers of French and international languages, and its development is supported through various resources. The resources include a manual for portfolio creation, sample CLPs, online proficiency development activities, as well as available workshops and individualized assistance. The CLP connects to the program's e-Portfolio, which is a required, learning-oriented, web-based portfolio that documents and enriches teacher candidates' overall professional development.

In line with its learning purpose, which contrasts with a showcase purpose, the CLP should be developed using organizational and reflective approaches that suit students' learning needs, interests and creativity. For example, students can choose to organise their CLP according to five domains of language competence deemed important within the program: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and culture(s), where the culture(s) section encourages explicit attention to sociolinguistic variation and intercultural communication. Nevertheless, students may also organise their CLP according to the language activities outlined in the CEFR (listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, writing), as the CEFR is garnering significant interest in the current educational context (e.g., Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers, 2008; Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2010; Vandergrift, 2006, 2008).

Students create the CLP using tools in the university's learning platform. Students who create a CLP will be familiar with these tools through their coursework and through

the development of their e-Portfolio. The digital environment enables students to use multimedia, to link to external sites, and to revise or share their work easily. Nevertheless, because the CLP is contained in each student's individual storage area, security and privacy are maintained.

In sum, several guiding principles have influenced the development of resources designed to encourage students to create a CLP. First, the CLP builds on pre-existing structures and resources in the program, such as the e-Portfolio, while promoting a focus on proficiency development required of future teachers of a second language. Second, various options for creation and maintenance of the CLP are proposed. Students therefore demonstrate autonomy by choosing ways of implementing their CLP most suitable to their learning needs. Finally, resources are available for all stages of CLP process: creation, addition of artefacts and reflection.

Connecting to and diverging from the CEFR/ELP

Given the significant research and resources supporting the CEFR and the ELP, and considering the increasing attention to these resources in the Canadian context, the CLP draws on relevant aspects of the CEFR and the ELP in its design. However, specific characteristics of context in which the CLP will be used require divergence from the European-based materials. Table 1 summarises these similarities and differences.

Among the similarities, both the ELP and the CLP draw on a communicative orientation to language proficiency, where the materials focus on how language is used in communicative contexts (Canale & Swain, 1980; Council of Europe, 2001). This communicative approach to proficiency reflects a broader change in language pedagogy generally. Both portfolios promote learner autonomy, where learners remain maximally responsible for their learning (see Richards & Schmidt, 2002: 297). For instance, in both settings, each portfolio belongs to the learner, who participates actively in developing portfolio content, reflection, language awareness and self-assessment. Such activities propel learners on an individualized journey that can integrate learning and assessment.

The CLP diverges from the CEFR and/or ELP in several important ways. First, in connection to the different language policy environments between plurilingual Europe and officially bilingual and multicultural Canada, although the ELP encourages documentation of language proficiency in all languages of a student's repertoire, the CLP focuses on the language that the teacher candidate wishes to teach. For instance, the sample CLP provided to students includes mention of the student's language learning strategies and experiences in three languages. However, the samples, artefacts, reflection and self-assessment address almost exclusively the (French) second language development of the portfolio creator, a fictitious student (see Appendices A and B). This focus on French reflects the teacher candidates' need to attend specifically to their French language development in a Canadian English-language teacher education program (see Bayliss & Vignola, 2000, 2007; Laplante & Christiansen, 2001; Salvatori & MacFarlane, 2009).

Table 1: Similarities and differences between the ELP and the CLP

Similarities	Differences	
CEFR/ELP and CLP	CEFR/ELP	CLP
Proficiency focus	Language policy: plurilingualism	Language policy: bilingualism, focus on L2
Communicative orientation	Portable	Specific to context
Design elements	Large-scale implementation	Small-scale implementation
Assessment & learning	Required (institutionalized) or optional	Optional
Possibilities for reflection, language awareness	Paper or electronic	Electronic
Learner autonomy	Learning and showcase purposes	Focus on learning purpose
	Learning and assessment	Learning
	Three parts: passport, biography, dossier	Variable number of parts: e.g., welcome page, language identity text, artefacts and reflection, self-assessment
	Autonomy as principle of learning and assessment	Autonomy as principle, also contextually necessary

Second, the design of the large-scale ELP contrasts with the program-specific CLP in its portability, scale, status as a requirement, its format and its purposes. The ELP needs to be portable as it must be appropriate for numerous settings: the total number of ELP versions should be as small as possible but as large as needed (Schneider & Lentz, 2003: 8). The ELP developers' guide suggests considering mainly the age of learners in developing different versions of the ELP (Schneider & Lentz, 2003: 10). The CLP, on the other hand, is designed for specific aspects of the particular setting: the CLP manual indicates that students should draw on prior knowledge of e-Portfolios, and consider their language activities, learning needs, interests, and creativity. The number of CLP versions could therefore be equal to the number of students creating them.

Further, since all students in a given setting will use the ELP, its design appears relatively uniform within the setting. In contrast, the CLP, as an optional activity, allows individuals to tailor the process of their LP development to their own language proficiency development process. Although Schneider and Lentz (2003: 56) provide some advantages to creating an ELP in an online environment, they note that most ELPs have been on paper. In addition to advantages noted by Schneider and Lentz such as the increasing use of digital records in society, and the possibilities for revising portfolio tools, the convenience of the web-based CLP relates also to the incorporation of multimedia, the ease of storage and sharing, and the possibilities for creating or connecting various portfolios. Within the electronic environment, students can easily individualize their portfolio format and content.

The ELP serves both learning and showcase purposes (Schneider & Lentz, 2003: 4), whereas the CLP focuses on the learning purpose because it is meant to contribute to ongoing language proficiency development. Even though assessment, in particular self-assessment, is an important component of the CLP, it is largely intended as diagnostic or formative assessment (assessment *for* learning and assessment *as* learning). Students are welcome to include summative assessment (assessment *of* learning) pieces - and

reflection thereon - from learning experiences such as coursework, yet the CLP resources emphasise the use of assessment *as learning*. In sum, although both the ELP and CLP include attention to learning and assessment, the CLP is oriented more toward learning, where assessment enriches that ongoing learning.

Third, beyond the policy contexts and design differences, the components of the ELP and the CLP differ somewhat. The ELP contains three main components: the passport, the biography and the dossier. Since the language passport is the part of the ELP most likely to be used for the showcase function (see Schneider & Lentz, 2003: 16), it is not surprising that it is not part of CLP. The language passport that indicates levels of achievement for various languages in the language user's plurilingual repertoire was not included in CLP resources in keeping with the portfolio's focus on second language proficiency development. Nevertheless, depiction or inclusion in the CLP of multiple languages, particularly in the language identity text, can support this focus on the language that students are preparing to teach (see Appendix A). Also, the self-assessment section provides students an opportunity to assess their language proficiency in relation to (a) CEFR levels, (b) checklists of skills developed for the CLP that reference language skills relevant to second language teaching, or (c) other measures that are familiar to the students.

For the other sections of the CLP, rather than using the ELP titles of « biography » and « dossier », the CLP materials reference components with which students are familiar from their e-Portfolio experiences within the program: 'artefacts' (items that represent language learning experiences), reflection and self-assessment. However, as the biography and dossier sections of the ELP include these components, the learning processes for each portfolio appear similar. In addition to CLP web pages that document growth in particular language areas, such as listening, speaking, reading, writing and culture(s), CLPs can include a welcome page or other optional sections that serve to personalize the CLP and to support the individual's language learning trajectory.

Finally, learner autonomy is central to each portfolio process. The ELP includes the promotion of autonomy as a principle (Schneider & Lentz, 2003: 85). Autonomy in the CLP also constitutes a principle insofar as future language teachers should engage in managing lifelong second language development. However, the instrumental reasons behind promoting autonomy in the concurrent teacher education context should not be overlooked. The optional status of the CLP means that students access its resources and create it with relative independence. Although students can access individual assistance, they must do so by autonomously choosing to contact a CLP resource person.

To summarise, although the CLP references CEFR and ELP resources in its design and resources, and although there are meaningful parallels between the two portfolio processes (ELP and CLP), the specific context in which teacher candidates create and maintain a CLP necessitates divergence from the principles, design and elements of the ELP.

Looking back and moving forward

In analysing the CLP design with particular reference to its connections to the CEFR and the ELP, we notice several considerations important for implementing the CLP in the complex, multi-unit concurrent teacher education program:

Within a complex, multi-unit program integrating undergraduate study with teacher education, we see a need to work closely with colleagues who teach French across the university to raise awareness of the existence of the CLP. Further, garnering support from French and other language instructors will allow students to see and benefit from the value of linking formal coursework and the CLP. However, given the optional status of the CLP and the ensuing importance of learner autonomy for CLP creation, it is important to introduce the CLP process to students early in the program so they can develop new habits that will serve them during their university studies and beyond. To this end, the CLP design promotes sharing CLPs online to provide models and motivation for students in the early years of the program. The resources and activities such as workshops and individual support aim to enhance students' development and use of the CLP throughout the five years of the program, while providing opportunities to celebrate their learning and proficiency development.

Despite inevitable implementation challenges related to the optional status of the CLP and to the complexity of collaboration among diverse stakeholders, we are confident that the CLPs well-planned design and its potential use can lead in the long-term to higher levels of proficiency and a greater sense of professionalism amongst students preparing to be language teachers in elementary or secondary schools in Ontario.

This reflection on the design of the Concurrent Teacher Education Language Portfolio demonstrates the potential of adapting CEFR/EPL principles beyond the European context while highlighting the need to consider specific contextual needs in the development of new learning resources.

Appendix A: Sample reflective writing

This sample reflective writing text was developed for pedagogic purposes, and is included in the program's language portfolio manual. It draws on the 3R's structure of retell, relate, reflect (Schwartz & Bone, 1995), and connects to an artefact, or evidence of the learning experience. Many possible artefacts and suggestions for drawing on coursework to create portfolio entries are proposed in the CLP Manual (see also Laplante & Christiansen, 2001; Bayliss & Vignola, 2000). The examples include text, audio or video files providing excerpts from (a) discussions in French, (b) interviews, (c) reports on films, shows or books, or (d) school assignments.

Name:	Laure Patrick
Date:	Sunday 30 November 2008 (Year 2)
Title:	French in Toronto
Competency:	Speaking
Artefact:	My 2 nd year speech

For FR 201, I was required to prepare and present a speech related to *La Francophonie*. The research that I did on Francophone services in my area enabled me to learn about French in my environment... and to meet some new people! My oral French improved by listening to various accents of the employees at the regional Francophone centre, and I was able to incorporate some improved pronunciation in my presentation. Thus, this artefact belongs on the « Speaking » language competency page. Additionally, this activity is important for me as a future teacher because, through this experience, I gained the courage to participate in some Francophone activities such as a cultural evening and a children's day: such activities will help me to continue developing my language proficiency.

Appendix B: Self-assessment checklist of language skills related to teaching

Students are encouraged to conduct self-assessment regularly. They can draw on CEFR/ELP resources and/or use a checklist developed for the CLP. Students should indicate on the list their competence and confidence in relation to a number of statements about listening, speaking, reading, writing and cultural dimensions of language. The following excerpt from the program's language portfolio manual shows the statements for the speaking section.

For each statement, indicate your level of (a) competence or skill, and (b) confidence. On the scale of 1 to 7, the lowest score is 1 whereas the highest score is 7.

Statement	Competence	Confidence
I am strong in speaking the target language.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I can express myself in an informal context.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I can express myself in a formal context.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I can present easily in front of my peers.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I can present easily in front of students.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I can present easily in front of unfamiliar adults.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I have very good pronunciation in the target language.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I know how to promote target language use in classrooms.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Appendix C: Sample language identity text

The excerpts that follow are part of a fictional text, created for pedagogical purposes to provide a sample of a language identity text, included as a sample in the program's language portfolio manual.

Name: Laure Patrick
 Date: Monday 16 March 2009
 Title: My language identity text

Bonjour, hello, and *habari gani!* This text discusses my language identity, with particular reference to French, because I am a student in the Concurrent Teacher Education Program (CTEP) at the University of Toronto. In addition to French, which I learnt as a second language in French immersion, I also speak English fluently and I know a little Kiswahili. This is an updated version of my language identity text: in the 2008 version, I told my "linguistic story" in a chronological way, but this year I describe certain key experiences that encouraged me in learning French. In this text, therefore, I will address the following themes: (1) early French immersion, (2) challenges, (3) my teachers and professors, (4) intercultural activities, (5) my learning strategies, and (6) French in my life. ...

This year, I have learnt quite a bit about learning strategies and metacognition. Dr. Clementino talked about metacognition once in class, and we continued the discussion when we had our meeting last term. When you reflect on your learning, you are working on a metacognitive level. To know and manage learning strategies is also part of metacognition. I recently noticed that I have been using the same learning strategies since Grade 7: dictionary, dictionary, dictionary! My bookish approach made learning an isolated and lengthy process. Now, thanks to the advice I received from Dr. Clementino and to my own reflection, I am starting to diversify my strategies. I am a member of a French discussion group: We may create a book club, and we are planning to help each other revise our school assignments. ...

It is true that in reflecting here I am thinking of my future teaching career, and the varied learning experiences that could enrich my language learning and therefore my teaching practice. Nevertheless, I don't want to forget that to learn a second language involves a life-long process, one that should be lived.

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