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Using the ELP as a basis for self- and peer assessment when selecting "best" work in modern-language degree programmes

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Abstract: The European Language Portfolio (ELP) was designed as a tool that "supports reflective learning and fosters the development of learner autonomy" (Little 2009, *The European Language Portfolio: Where pedagogy and assessment meet*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680459fa5 (accessed 20 June 2016)); it thus facilitates students in exploring, creating and documenting their own learning paths. This article will investigate an action-oriented approach to learning and teaching in an undergraduate language degree course at the University of Padova, Italy, based on the pedagogical principles of the ELP (Council of Europe 2011, *European Language Portfolio (ELP): Principles and guidelines, with added explanatory notes*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016804586ba (accessed 20 June 2016)). Students who enrol on this degree course arrive with varying degrees of language ability and diverse language learning backgrounds; due to the disparate nature of their proficiency levels, fostering language learning awareness is crucial. Task-based activities are fundamental to this approach, enabling students to explore and develop their communicative language competences through authentic target language use, and to reflect on their progress through guided self- and peer assessment. In the article, we will showcase examples of tasks which demonstrate the approach adopted. We will first explore how peer assessment of audio recordings was used in a course where first-year students were aiming to develop their spoken production skills. We will then illustrate how second-year students engaged in self-assessment of their skills in activities designed to explore the language of interaction and production. Finally, we will focus on the use of the ELP Dossier as a pedagogical tool, with students compiling an Academic Dossier and reflecting on the choices of work to include in it.

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1 Context

The English language courses for modern languages undergraduates at the University of Padova are of a blended type and generally organised on the basis of four hours per week of face-to-face teaching divided between a traditional classroom and a language laboratory and supported by an online component. The learning management system Moodle is used; all materials, resources and the products of tasks and activities are posted here, and contributions are visible to all members of the class. Student collaboration online has been important in helping to raise awareness of reflective practices inherent in such activities as self- and peer assessment and in fostering a sense of belonging to a learning community. An important consideration to add here is that all learning and teaching is carried out in the target language, the importance of which, especially at advanced levels, has often been stressed by scholars (see for example Little 2012). Task instructions, activities, including reflective diaries, self-assessment, and peer assessment are all, in this case, in English. Although students do not decide on the overall objectives of the English language course itself, they are, at the outset, familiarised with the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001) and those descriptors which are particularly relevant to the language skills and level which the course aims to develop. They are therefore fully aware of the long-term (end-of-course) target they are expected to achieve. In order to help them understand how they are going to reach this main target, they are asked to think of the smaller short-term targets they need to reach along their path towards the bigger picture and the end-of-course assessment.

These activities of familiarisation with main course objectives and raising awareness of short term target-setting are carried out first as group discussions, which are then rendered "real" by committing them to writing or in our case to an online diary (for details see Han 2011). The "learner diary" is a weekly routine task where students are asked to report, reflect and plan, doing all this in English and thus engaging in "authentic" use of the language (see for example Little 2012). Apart from the diary, reflection is further embedded into each task, and most tasks are carried out in pairs or in groups of up to five members, involving a wide use of peer feedback. Open collaboration and a sense of

individual responsibility to the group are key to the activity and have also served as a means of pre-empting plagiarism and fears of plagiarism within working groups. Here students comment on how well or not they feel they have carried out the activity, whether they have achieved what they set out to do and used vocabulary or language use patterns explored during task presentation. They are also asked to critically evaluate their work and say what they plan to do, or in the case of peer assessment what they would advise, in order to become more competent and confident if they are not satisfied with their performance. To quote Kohonen (2012: 35): "Self-assessment is [...] the hinge on which reflective learning and the development of autonomy turn". Individually students can also decide which pieces of their work they will submit for formal assessment. Students can choose whether they will submit items of coursework for the formal end-of-course assessment or whether they will sit the end-of-course (summative) exam.

2 Peer assessment of oral skills

At the start of the first-year language skills class, students are given a choice between two assessment paths: the traditional path, i. e. taking the end-of-year (summative) exam; or continuous assessment (CA), i. e. submitting three formative assessment tasks during the two semesters. Continuous assessment is incremental; in other words, students are required to fulfil certain sets of requirements at each stage of the assessment process. The requirements are: attending lessons regularly; completing all necessary work online (weekly learner diary entries, listening reports, and oral recordings) and passing three assessed assignments – a listening report (pass/fail), an oral recording (graded), and a 10-minute oral interaction with a peer (graded). The three assessed assignments are tied to certain topics, which are discussed in online forums and in the classroom. The oral recordings usually conclude each of the topic discussions; they are used as an opportunity for students to sum up their opinions and thoughts regarding a particular topic.

During the 2014–2015 academic year, 140 students elected to participate in CA, and 134 students reached the second phase, the oral recording. These students, who had met all of the previously stipulated conditions, were asked to go back and listen to all of their own oral recordings. They had to choose the one they thought best, which would then receive peer feedback (Figure 1).

Peer Feedback questions:

1. Does the student introduce the topic clearly?
2. Are there any parts that you could not understand?
3. Does the language flow?
4. Does the intonation help the listener to follow what is being said?
5. What else would you like to know about the topic?
6. Write at least two questions to ask for more information about what the student talked about.

Write up your feedback, include your answers to the questions provided and your overall impressions as well. Send a post to the forum **Peer Feedback**. **The deadline is 11 May**. Again, because this has to be followed by the conclusion of this activity, which is another oral recording, we ask all of you to do this in a timely manner – that means, the sooner the better.

Figure 1: Peer feedback questions.

The choice to include a stage of peer feedback in the assessment process was in line with the overall CEFR-oriented approach adopted during the course. In other words, learners are viewed as "social agents" (Council for Europe 2001: 9), acting collaboratively to improve their competences. Much has been written on the value of peer feedback (see for example DiGiovanni and Nagaswami [2001] for a discussion of online peer review) as it encourages an active, autonomous approach to learning, fosters the skills of critical thinking, and provides the learner with an audience for his/her work, other than the instructor. Yet students may be resistant to such activities, not only lacking in confidence as reviewers but also unwilling to criticize the work of their peers for fear of causing offence. For this reason, prior to peer assessment activities, students are also introduced to the language of positive criticism, strategies for hedging, and the importance of "agreeing to differ" through appropriate language use.

After they received peer feedback, students were encouraged to make adjustments to their original recording. They could either re-record or keep the original. Once they had a final recording, they were asked to transcribe the audio file verbatim, including any and all errors. They also had to include a short explanation as to why they believed that particular recording was the best out of the total of seven. Their recording was then submitted to the teacher for assessment. After the second semester, those who had participated in the second assessed assignment were asked to complete a questionnaire (see Appendix) to investigate not only their perceptions of peer feedback but to discover whether or not students found the feedback useful and ultimately whether or not they took into consideration any of the suggestions their peers made in order to improve their oral recordings. More than half of the students reported never having participated in peer feedback before (see Figure 2).

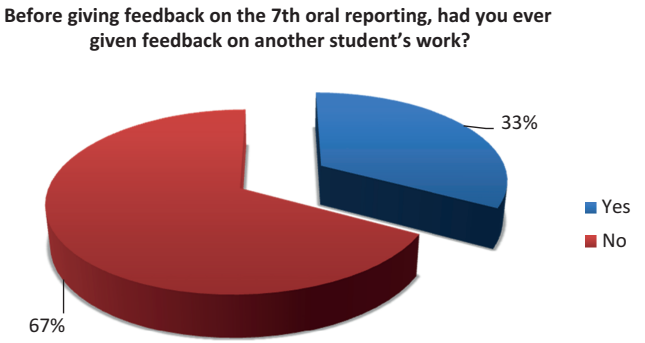


Figure 2: Previous experiences.

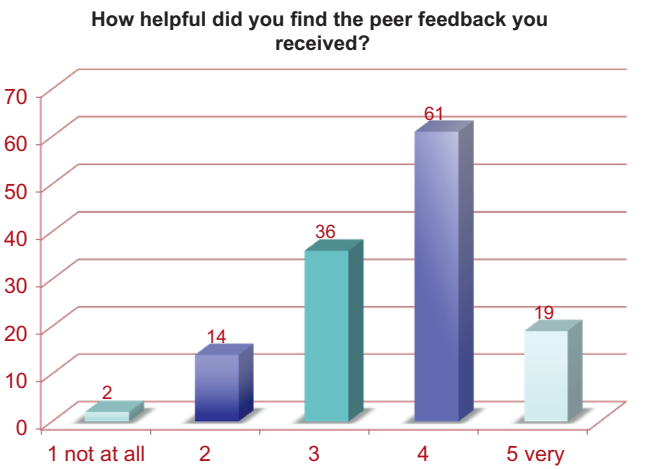


Figure 3: Attitudes to peer feedback.

Despite this, students tended to value the feedback they received and surprisingly reported that they felt they could indeed learn from their classmates (see Figures 3 and 4). Another important finding was that a significant number took on board the suggestions made by their classmates and made adjustments to their work (see Figure 5).

Of the 134 participants who filled in the questionnaire, 85 answered question 13, "How do you think that peer feedback could have been improved? Please write out any thoughts you have." A third of these (28) suggested that they would have liked more peer feedback activities and also suggested that

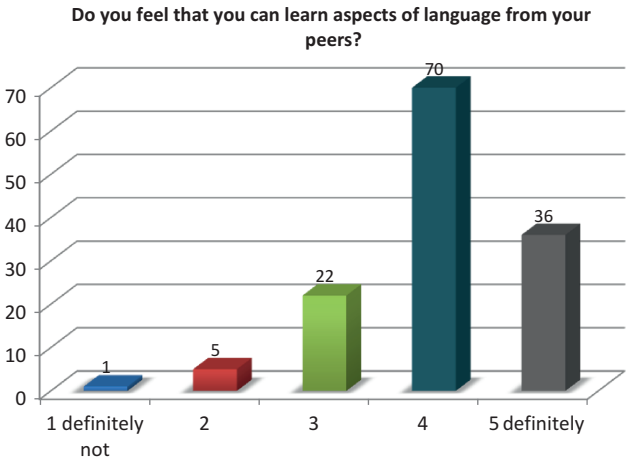


Figure 4: Perceived usefulness of peer feedback.

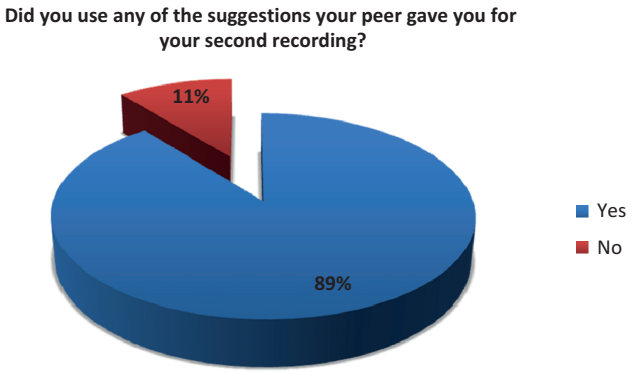


Figure 5: Use of peer feedback.

there should be more "training" available throughout the year. Here are some of the student comments:

> I think it would be helpful to do peer feedback often. I think we didn't do enough. We had a lot of tasks to complete on Moodle, but they were not with peers. I believe that your classmates' opinion and feedback are important.
>
> I think that students should check each other's works more often.
>
> I think that the peer feedback could have been improved by doing more peer feedback activities.

Fifteen students suggested that more accuracy from their peers and more specific guidelines from the teacher could have made the feedback better.

> The feedbacks my peer gave me were helpful even though they were not that accurate; for this reason feedbacks should be more precise and they have to refer to the concrete words or mistakes of the text/oral recording. If the peer corrects a mistake (grammatical mistake, collocations, verb patters) he/she should give the source reference he/she used to check it.
>
> Peer feedbacks are very useful, but I think that they could be improved. For instance, they should be more detailed and maybe it would be better if the teacher comments whether the peer feedback is appropriate or not.
>
> It could be improved by giving to students more instruments in order to do a better job with correction.

There were of course a few students who expressed negative opinions about peer feedback.

> I think it's not so correct judging what a colleague has done without knowing him or her, maybe somebody could feel ashamed and also offended by it. I know that it depends on the way you talk, that it's expected to be kind and polite, but it isn't always like that.
>
> My opinion about this kind of activity is that a student may feel afraid to express negative judgments on a peer's work and posting that judgment publicly.

More interesting was that a number of students (7) were aware of the responsibility required on the part of students for the activity to be successful.

> Firstly, peers should be responsible of their work in order to let other do theirs. Then I think sometimes they don't have the knowledge to do this but it's good to practice and share opinions.
>
> I've noticed that not everyone has respected the deadlines, so everyone should be more serious to do this activity.
>
> I think that every student could be more responsible in this activity. Somebody didn't do it in a serious way.

Overall the peer feedback activity as it was implemented was positively received by a large majority of participants. According to one student, "A classmate gave me feedback telling me what I had done wrong and what I had been good at. So when I was recording my 7th oral recording again I paid more attention because I knew what I had to do." In order to make the collaborative task more rewarding for students, better guidelines need to be set at the beginning of the task and students need the opportunity to engage more frequently in similar tasks. Perhaps they should also be asked not only to give and receive constructive feedback but also to reflect on the activity itself. The fact that a significant

number of participants generally viewed the entire task as a positive learning experience is a good sign that students are open-minded about language learning occurring outside teacher-led classroom interaction.

3 Self-assessment of oral skills

The orals skills module described here runs for two semesters, with the first semester devoted to interaction and the second to production. As mentioned for the first year of the English language course, continuous assessment is also a key element in organisation and design. The aim of this module is to expose students to appropriacy of register and explore the differences between language variety in formal and informal settings. Interaction and production are compared, explored and practised, and the characteristics of both skills are discussed in an attempt to understand those elements that determine progress from B1 through to B2. The target CEFR descriptor for sociolinguistic appropriateness at B2 level describes the following attributes and skills: "Can express him or herself confidently, clearly and politely in a *formal* or *informal register, appropriate to the situation and person(s) concerned*" (Council of Europe 2001: 122; italics added). A further aim of the module is to explore aspects of discourse competence in spoken interaction, in particular, flexibility (which reinforces awareness of register): "Can adjust what he/she says and the means of expressing it to the situation and the recipient and *adopt a level of formality appropriate* to the circumstances" (Council of Europe 2001: 124; italics added). Awareness of further characteristics such as turn-taking and active listening, hedging, politeness conventions, and the role of discourse markers and signalling in interaction and production are also explored.

Can *intervene appropriately* in discussion, exploiting appropriate language to do so. Can *initiate, maintain and end discourse appropriately with effective turn taking*. Can initiate discourse, *take his/her turn when appropriate and end conversation* when he/she needs to, though he/she may not always do this elegantly.

> Can use *stock phrases* (e.g. "That's a difficult question to answer") to gain time and keep the turn whilst formulating what to say. (Council of Europe 2001: 124; italics added)

Within the interactive activities and strategies described in the CEFR it was decided to concentrate on tasks and activities based on informal discussion with friends, formal discussion and meetings, goal-oriented co-operation (e. g. discussing an issue, coming to an agreement, organising an event), and

transactions to obtain goods and services for which descriptors are provided in the CEFR; for example, making a complaint and dealing with difficult negotiations or disputes (see Council of Europe 2001: 77–80). For production, it was decided to concentrate on addressing audiences (Council of Europe 2001: 60). The theoretical aspect of the speaking activities is first introduced in a traditional classroom context and then further explored with practical applications during language laboratory sessions. Typically, during class the situations set up as role-plays are explored and discussed, building on the strategies, lexis and language use deemed appropriate and new language and/or lexis introduced as required. In the language laboratory, students practise role – plays similar to the situation discussed in the previous class. A typical role-play might involve querying an invoice, complaining about a delivery, dealing with lost luggage at an airport, or renegotiating a previously agreed solution to a problem, where students work in pairs and can also exchange roles so that they are able to practise both sides of the interaction (Figure 6).

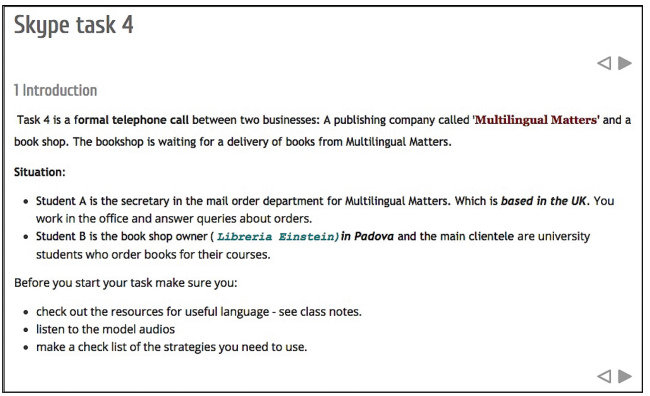


Figure 6: Skype task description.

Less formal contexts include asking a favour of a friend, cancelling an outing, and letting a friend know about damage to a borrowed item. The interactions take the form of telephone conversations and are carried out using Skype, with students contacting each other across the large language laboratory (75 places), and are recorded using Skype Mp3 recorder. Task instructions require them to attempt to use any new lexical elements or unfamiliar strategies encountered during the exploratory class sessions. At first this often results in weaker students scripting their whole conversation, whereas stronger students tend to use a flowchart with keywords or bulleted lists or mind maps. As students

become more used to recording their voices the scripting gradually becomes less detailed. The recordings are uploaded into the appropriate forum in the learning platform for the whole group to listen to, review and comment on. Each uploaded audio file is accompanied by one message written by both role-play participants describing what they were attempting to do, what they felt they succeeded in doing, and what they did not. They also comment on which descriptor from the CercleS ELP appendix is appropriate to the task and how confident they would feel in a similar "real-life" situation (Figure 7).

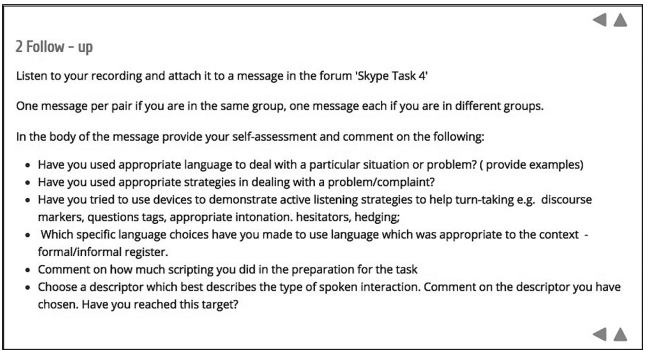


Figure 7: Follow-up task.

The situations for production are examined and language use and strategies explored, and practised in the same way. Strategies from the use of signposting in order to organise production and the functions of discourse markers and hedging techniques are also made evident. Oral Production tasks include summarising the main points of an academic lecture from an audio file or academic paper, or giving an account of the outcome of a group discussion in class, presenting an argument or defending a decision or opinion. Students record their productions individually and upload the file with an accompanying message commenting on their performance. They also work on a group project researching a topic of their choice relevant to the focus of their degree course. Topics typically have to do with language and heritage, language and culture, intercultural communicative competence, and English as a lingua franca (ELF). Students decide on their principal research question, then prepare a questionnaire in order to gather responses from their cohort and beyond if they are particularly enthusiastic. They are required to obtain a minimum of 100 responses to their questionnaire and then analyse the data in order to prepare a formal group presentation to deliver their results. They also back this up with a

group report on the process of deciding on their research question, designing the questionnaire, the organisation of the data analysis, and the outcome of working together as a group. The whole project lasts for the final 6 weeks of the 10-week semester. The final presentation is given in a formal pseudo conference setting at the end of the course, when their peers are the audience and are required to ask questions at the end of each presentation.

By recording their interactions and presentations students are able to listen to their own voices and reflect on various aspects of their oral language. When they assess their performances they can choose to re-do their task and in their assessment describe why they found their first recording unsatisfactory and why the recording they chose to upload is in their view better. They are encouraged to "notice" pronunciation issues which may make comprehension difficult, to notice language patterns and grammatical forms which they used appropriately or omitted to use when they would perhaps have been appropriate. Assessment criteria and guidelines for "noticing" are discussed prior to the activity. These criteria and guidelines are aimed at helping students focus on those aspects of the tasks that they are learning and improving on. On occasions the peer assessment task requires students to transcribe their peers' utterances; thus they engage in a further "noticing" activity, identifying interesting language use and pointing out any anomalies. Self- and peer assessment are an essential part of the activity. Teacher feedback is constrained by the large numbers of students enrolled in classes and as a result is provided in general terms to the whole group and on an individual basis only where absolutely necessary.

Collaboration and cooperation, then, are important features of course delivery and organisation, and respond to one of the stated aims of the ELP, that of fostering learner autonomy (see for example Little 1991). We learn by being part of a group in which different identities, backgrounds, and experiences can all be pooled and shared and interpreted and where strengths and weaknesses can be gauged and/or readdressed. To repeat, the importance of self- and peer assessment to autonomy requires the continuous practice of conscious reporting and reflecting on one's learning, of being aware of which decisions to make about what needs to be done and how to achieve that purpose (Dam 1995). The capacity to make these decisions, the self-confidence required to act, and the course of action taken on an individual basis all depend on interaction as part of a group or classroom community which can be said to form a community-of-practice (Wenger 1998). This does not mean that all group members need to decide on the same means or the same end. It does however imply the development of another important skill, "learning how to learn *intentionally*" (Little 2004: 105), and is therefore linked to motivation and engagement in learning (Ushioda 2011).

Learning becomes more visible and students are able to focus and construct it according to their individual goals. Could reflection and the formalization of that reflection by committing it to writing also be akin to developing "critical thinking"? As students become more adept at articulating their thoughts in English, reflective practice could become an authentic means of developing criticality beyond the context-sensitive definitions of their subject specialisms, where "critical thinking" has acquired different interpretations.

Kohonen (2012: 23) identifies the following elements as important for promoting learner autonomy: "A coherent framework, consistent action, sustainable progress, a culture of collaboration and assessment", where "assessment" refers to self- and peer assessment and teacher feedback. By consistently following the same basic pattern, the strategies that encourage autonomy can be embedded into course routine. This approach is as relevant to short-term as it is to long-term courses and is also linked to the role of the teacher and how he or she perceives his or her autonomy.

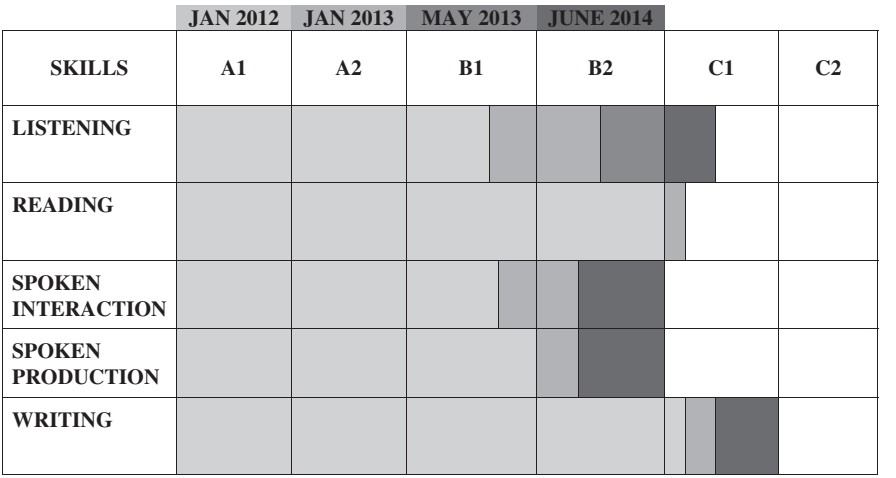
4 Choosing work for the Dossier

A third-year task, conducted towards the end of the academic year, is that of compiling an Academic Dossier. Students are asked to imagine that they are about to go abroad on an international exchange programme and have to choose a small number of examples of the language work produced during their university careers (Dalziel 2011: 190–191). These can be examples of writing or voice files, but also other activities such as acting in English or taking part in online exchange programmes. The Dossier is online and is posted to the Moodle system. It includes an introduction to each item included, mentioning the following: what skill(s) this item involved (students can refer to the ELP descriptors, but may also add more specific descriptors related, for example, to their intercultural/translation competence); why they have chosen to include it in their Dossier; whether it was corrected (by teacher or peers); whether it is an example of individual or group work. Some learners also choose to provide a general introduction to their Dossier, as the following example shows (Figure 8).

The Dossier may be seen as the part of the ELP more geared towards the "reporting function", but as often pointed out (see for example Kohonen 2001), it also serves a pedagogical purpose. In this case, in taking decisions about what to include in their Dossier, learners have to make conscious choices about which work best represents their present level of language competence. In asking

MINI-DOSSIER

First of all, I'd like to begin my dossier by showing the progress I have made in English throughout my university years (2011/2012 – 2014). The following table shows the progress in each skill, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.



I have seen significant improvements above all in my listening skills especially during the first university year thanks to my weekly listening reports. During the second year I worked both on my speaking skills and on the listening, always by doing listening reports. Finally during the current year I have improved my writing skills a lot.

Figure 8: Introduction to Dossier.

students to produce these brief introductions, their choices are necessarily made explicit, and as the following discussion shows, may offer insights not only into how learners assess their own work, but also the value which they attach to it, with reflections both on the product itself and on the process(es) involved in producing it.

An analysis of 60 Dossiers submitted at the end of the 2013–2014 academic year revealed that the items included by learners covered all language skills; most of these were directly connected to the content of the language courses followed, but some were examples of other activities learners were engaged in, both inside and outside the university environment. The student Dossier choices are summarised in Table 1.

The majority of the items chosen by students were the product of work undertaken at university during the third (and final) year of their studies (for example, translations from and into Italian, academic essays, and filmed video debates). This was indeed to be expected, as one would imagine that the most

Table 1: Learners' Dossier choices.

Language skills	Items chosen
written production and interaction	academic essays/papers, formal reports/letters, informal pieces, personal profiles, translations (into English and Italian), reflective pieces
spoken production and interaction	filmed video debates, oral reports/presentations, Skype interaction
Reading	articles, books
Listening	listening/video reports, songs
other activities:	seminars/conferences held at university, intercultural telecollaborative exchanges, participation in university theatre groups, work experience

recent work would best represent the learners' level of language competence at the time of Dossier compilation. However, there were numerous examples of second-year and even first-year work, which for a variety of reasons, as we will see below, were deemed significant.

It is interesting to note that in providing the reasons for their choices, learners focused on the selected items as both product and process in their language learning. As regards the former, learners saw their work as something to be proud of, a good representation of their language skills (in some cases related to a specific level of the CEFR) and perhaps a task which had gained them a good grade:

> I have decided to add this essay in my Dossier because I think that this may be the point in my learning path where I am now. I think it is one of the best representations of the work I did this year, as well as a step forward in my academic writing skills. Despite I still have lot to improve (I do not think I am in a full C1 level), I am now able to 'vary my vocabulary and style according to the context'.
>
> I chose it because, in my opinion, it is well-structured, compelling and original. It is the work that best shows, in only one text, what I have learnt during these three years at university.
>
> I think this is the best essay I did during the second semester of the third year at university.
>
> My teacher marked it with a B, which is a good result for me because I was not a good writer when I started the university.

Overall, the students' comments, display a high level of confidence in their powers of self-assessment, which one could argue have been acquired as a result of an approach firmly anchored in the pedagogic principles of the CEFR and ELP. Mention of the processes related to the item in question appeared in a

range of guises: learners spoke of the fact that an activity was of interest, enjoyable or stimulating; and they spoke about the challenges posed by certain tasks and the development of their skills. The importance of the latter has been pointed out by Lowie (2012: 30), who argues that: "One of the most important principles of the CEFR is a developmental perspective. Using the framework, learners should be able to follow their own progress over time in relation to a wide variety of dimensions of language comprehension and language use." Moreover, given the stress on group work in the first two years of their university studies (see Sections 2 and 3), it was not surprising that collaborative activities were mentioned; it is however heartening for the teachers involved to see how important learners found these for their learning. Also of interest was mention of new tools which were felt to be highly beneficial for language development.

> I enjoyed doing my essays because I like the topics we have to work with: Internationalization, English as Lingua Franca, the differences between the several kind of English (black English, white English…) and I learnt lots of new things. I think that if a topic is interesting, students will have less problems to talk about and then also to do their assignments. The most useful thing was that my essays were corrected from my classmates thanks to a "peer review" so, in this way, I could correct some mistakes I did before to send my final work to the teacher.
>
> Oral skills. I really enjoyed this course, firstly because I have always found difficult to develop my English oral competence and I have considered the course as a sort of personal challenge, secondly because working mainly in group has really helped me to improve my oral skills as well as having amused me a lot.
>
> It is the most challenging I have ever listened to because, in a way, it put me to the test. Indeed, I have noticed that I had few difficulties in understanding the main topic than in the past and this means a little progress I made during the year.
>
> In my first year I attended 'Accademic language skills' course in which I learnt not only how to structure a sentence with its pre-modifiers and post-modifiers, but also the vocabulary and expressions used by native speakers thanks to a corpus and a concordance (software) which have been useful for me to examine the collocations of a particular word and to expand my vocabulary.

In some cases, the Dossiers became more than simply a collection of language work accompanied by reflections on their components. Some students took this opportunity to reflect on their language learning paths as a whole, revealing a keen awareness of their styles and preferences; and as can been seen from the example below, the comments can be extended beyond the realm of languages to attitudes, beliefs and values regarding learning in general, which is in line with *Schä*rer's observation that: "To be meaningful the ELP has to contribute to education as a whole" (2010: 331).

> I have chosen academic writing, again because it is something new for me and because at first sight I considered it hard, and everything that seems to be hard excites curiosity on me. I really enjoyed writing this text due to the fact that at the same time I had the chance to acknowledge new information, to wide my vocabulary and to develop my critical thinking. I think that translating is another tool that helped me significantly to improve the use of the English language; it can be very difficult and challenging, however translating enhances the ability of writing smoothly and correctly in both source and target language. I found listening reports to be very helpful for my language learning because they help me maintain constancy.

> Having worked in a group with other 6 mates has given me the opportunity to be aware of appropriate negotiation skills including politeness strategies, to demonstrate a sensitivity to views and opinions of others and help along the progress of a project by inviting others to join in, express their opinions and etc. I chose this item because this kind of activity helped me work on fluency and spontaneity and face a situation which could happen in the everyday life in the world of work. I think I was able to be professional, firm and polite at the same time, using an appropriate register. This work helped me work in group, consider others' ideas, make compromises and share different ways of working. It helped me to learn to organise an academic group work and to learn to interact with other colleagues by expressing my point of view and listening and accepting other ideas.

Finally, some of the students mentioned intercultural awareness alongside language awareness. This stemmed mainly from the topics of certain tasks and from participation in intercultural online exchanges, which can be chosen as an alternative to job placement on the degree course in question. Once again, the space for reflection provided by an ELP-based approach allowed learners the chance to step back and take stock of the benefits of such encounters in shaping their outlook on (language and cultural) learning. In so doing, this approach "seeks to bring to the foreground not just the linguistic needs of the learner but also his or her whole being and aims not solely at an improvement in the learner's proficiency in the FL, but also of his or her abilities to reflect and make sense of the world and his or her immediate surroundings" (Sisamakis 2010: 363).

> Thanks to the articles provided by the teacher and the lessons about cultural identity, as well, I have increased my awareness about cultural differences and, most important of all, I have learnt that what we see of another culture is only the top of a far bigger "iceberg" [...] The importance of the issue is clearly stated also by the name of my degree course (Linguistic and Cultural Mediation): once graduating, I am expected to be able to "mediate" from one culture to another. This will affect my future since this is the field I would like to work in, but it will be possible only by owning the right knowledge and the appropriate understanding/respecting/interpreting abilities.

> [...] I have also improved my intercultural communication competence. Our worlds are sometimes completely different, and it may be, and it was, difficult to fully understand

some cultural aspects of the Eastern world, but I have learned to see things from different point of views and not to judge before knowing, since things may be different than one may think.

5 Conclusions

The examples presented in this article have attempted to provide an account of the embedding and consolidating of ELP pedagogy in a university language degree course. What they have in common is the stress placed on providing the learner with means for both noticing and demonstrating learning. Reporting and reflecting on language learning, through self- and peer assessment, help make learning explicit, thus enhancing awareness of individual learning paths. In all activities illustrated, we see the importance of using the target language to create authentic and challenging tasks which will foster autonomy. Here there is a clear link to the constructivist approach to learning, with "language use in realistic contexts of communicative interaction, which creates opportunities for creating new knowledge from experience" (Lowie 2012: 25). The role of the teacher in promoting learner autonomy is to set the scene and provide scaffolding which is gradually removed as students become familiar and confident with the "routine". Over the three years of study referred to in this article, the teacher's role passes from controlling to supervising, facilitating to advising. This does not mean that this role becomes less important, although many fear that that is what it entails. Learner autonomy by its very nature relies on the autonomy of the teacher in gauging which tasks and which members of the class need more or less scaffolding. It is also important to create tasks where students can collaborate, reflect on a task and use the experience for the following task and relate this to "real" or authentic language use as writers and speakers of English in their chosen domain.

The role of the autonomous teacher involves a change in stance from the domination of teacher-controlled scenario, where the teacher is expected to fill empty heads and then decide whether what has been taught has been learnt. Rather, the autonomous teacher encourages active rather than passive learning and facilitates and guides students through collaborative and reflective practices toward greater confidence in their abilities and autonomy in making decisions about how or what they have achieved or need to achieve in order to progress (Smith 2003). This process is in turn aided by the adoption of the online environment mentioned. This has the advantage of not being ephemeral; records remain of asynchronous forums, written

production, and recordings of spoken interactions and production, and the implications of this for self- and peer assessment are enormous. Learners can at any point refer back to examples of past production and interaction to gain a better grasp of their own abilities, needs and strategies so as to "take actions dealing with their own learning" (White 2008: 5) and thus achieve enhanced independence through "opportunities and experiences which encourage student choice and self-reliance and which promote the development of learning strategies and metacogntive knowledge" (White 2008: 5). The online Dossier compiled as a final task at the end of three years of language study provides students with an opportunity to look back on their university language paths, but at the same time it is the first step in the journey of lifelong learning that will continue outside the walls of higher education. At this point, equipped with tools such as the ELP descriptors and with enhanced confidence as self-assessors of their skills, it is hoped that they will have attained a sufficient degree of autonomy to progress along this road with success.

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Appendix: Peer feedback questionnaire

Please answer each question to the best of your ability. All of your responses will remain anonymous and will only be used for research purposes.

1. Before giving feedback on the 7th oral recording, had you ever given feedback on another student's work before? (circle your answer)

   Yes No

2. How difficult did you find it to give feedback to a peer?
   (5 = extremely difficult, 1 = not difficult at all)

   1 2 3 4 5

3. Were the instructions given by the teachers helpful?
   (5 = very helpful, 1 = not helpful at all)

   1 2 3 4 5

4. Did you receive feedback from a peer?
   Yes No
5. How helpful did you find the peer feedback you received?
   (5 = very helpful, 1 = not helpful at all)
   1 2 3 4 5
6. Did you use the any of the suggestions your peer gave you for your second recording?
   Yes No
7. Did you feel that the feedback was accurate? (5 = very accurate, 1 = not at all accurate)
   1 2 3 4 5
8. Would you like to participate in more peer feedback or similar tasks?
   Yes No
9. Overall, how would you rate this type of task (i. e. peer feedback) as a learning activity?
   (5 = very good, 1 = not good)
   1 2 3 4 5
10. Do you feel that you can learn aspects of language from your peers?
    (5 = definitely, 1 = definitely not)
    1 2 3 4 5
11. Do you feel that feedback should only come from the teacher?
    (5 = definitely, 1 = definitely not)
    1 2 3 4 5
12. Do you think that the peer feedback activity could have been improved?
    Yes No
13. How do you think that the peer feedback could have been improved? Please write out any thoughts you have.

Bionotes

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