Part Two

The European Language Portfolio as an instrument for documenting learning experiences- implementing the pedagogical function
or how hard can we make the soft pages?

Presentation at the 4th European Portfolio Seminar
Enschede, The Netherlands on 22-25 April 1999 by Gerard Westhoff

1.   Prologue

About ten years ago, I attended an international conference in France for the first time in many years. During working sessions interpretation was obviously provided, but there were many breaks and even more social events. For some reason, on each occasion I happened to be the lucky one, honoured to be the table companion of an important French official. My French was not quite up to standard and in spite of courteous statements that my French, albeit my third foreign language, was infinitely better than their Dutch or any other foreign language they might call their first language, I felt uneasy and, once home, I decided to do something to improve my French.

On the basis of my expertise in foreign-language acquisition I decided that I would need a lot of i+1 input and should organise some "pushed output", preferably combined with corrective feedback. I asked colleagues for suggestions and after some attempts I found out that I could read Regine le Forge's "La bicyclette bleue" with an effort, but without 'losing the thread'. Le Forge's book is a relatively easy to read, unpretentious, entertaining, cleverly written hybrid of a doctor's novel, a Du Maurier and "Gone with the Wind", (with which it has so many similarities that the author was sued for plagiarism). In three volumes and 1400 pages it covers France in the second world war. After that I took two volumes of Pagnol's memories: "La gloire de mon Père" and "Le château de ma mère", another 500 pages that, though not as trivial as Le Forge, would not have yielded me many credits from my former French teacher at school who would have preferred me to read Camus, Proust or Yourcenar.

Yet, French friends, whom I visited two years later, expressed their surprise as regards my progress in communicative competence. I noticed myself that, on this occasion, I was learning more from my ever-cumbersome conversations with them than I had done before. After two or three days of being forced to express myself in French I could participate in discussions, which I had not been able to at those terrible, frustrating dinner parties two years before.

I seemed to have reached a higher level of foreign-language competence but I had no other proof of it than my own impression and that of my friends. Yet the experience I had organised for myself had apparently been fruitful and I thought it would most probably also be useful for other people in or outside school. This brought me to two puzzling questions. Firstly, how can learners who are not experts in foreign-language acquisition be enabled to choose such effective learning experiences, and secondly, how do we make sure that they get the credit for it?

And then… somebody invented the ELP.

2.   Introduction: Two functions of portfolios

According to the definitions in European documents, "a language portfolio is a document (…) in which individual learners (…) can assemble over a period of time, and display in a systematic way, a record of their qualifications, achievements and experiences in language learning, together with samples of work they have themselves produced" (Trim, 1997, p.3). This definition is in accordance with much of what we find in the international literature. (Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991), often quoted in relation to portfolio-use by younger learners, define a portfolio as "a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the students' efforts, progress, and achievement in one or more areas. The collection must include student participation in selecting contents, the criteria for selection, for judging merit, and evidence of student self-reflection." (p. 60).

However, from the different approaches we recognise in the implementation and in the different requirements and accents in identifying problems to be solved, we see that this simple definition does not mean quite the same to everybody. It depends on whether a portfolio is primarily product-oriented (in terms of the ELP "the reporting function") or process-oriented (in ELP terms "the pedagogical function"). For some, a portfolio is primarily a tool that can help us to describe learning achievements that cannot easily be measured with the usual instruments. For others, portfolios can provide us with a device to elicit and direct learning processes that cannot be evoked by the usual tools such as closed assignments. In this pedagogical function two sub-functions can be distinguished: portfolios as instruments to elicit learning activities in the cognitive domain (experiences that can be assumed to have contributed to foreign-language acquisition, such as visits abroad, reading foreign literature) and the metacognitive function (activities that are thought to benefit learning to learn and learner autonomy, such as self-observation and reflection on experience). This difference is reflected in a different emphasis that is put on a number of aspects in the implementation. I summarise them in the table below.

Table 1: Two functions of portfolios

Product-oriented	Process-oriented
▪ Reporting	▪ Pedagogical
▪ Assessment tool	▪ Learning tool
▪ Qualifying	▪ Motivating
▪ Certification	▪ Experiences
▪ Conclusive force	▪ Potential learning opportunity
▪ "Hard" pages	▪ "Soft" pages

It is easy to understand that experts who view portfolios primarily as assessment tools emphasise the importance of transparency, the quality and verifiability of the documentation, whereas others stress the need for formats, hints, instructions, directions and ideas that can

direct the process, by structuring the learners' activities and reflections. In many cases, including the ELP, an attempt is made to combine both. In some cases this combination is even seen as the added value of the instrument. For example, Paulson et al. (1991) state that portfolios "are not just instruction or just assessment but rather, both. Together, instruction and assessment give more then either gives separately." (p. 61). In the following I hope to show that both types in fact share the same need for catalogues of activities with a high learning potential[1] and catalogues with forms and formats for their documentation.

3.   Reporting and pedagogical functions in ELP documents

Assessment tool or learning tool? The documents underlying the European portfolio project are not very clear with respect to this dilemma. In its origins the project clearly emerges from needs related to assessment and certification. These origins lie in the Rüschlikon Symposium. This Symposium dealt with the lack of transparent terms for the information of clients and colleagues. For this purpose a "common framework" had to be developed, necessary for the description of an international set of parameters and categories describing language proficiency. In its report, "*Transparency and coherence in language learning in Europe: objectives, evaluation, certification*", the Symposium also recommended that, once the Framework had been elaborated, a document should be devised allowing individuals who so desire to maintain a record of language learning experiences (formal and informal) "*which would provide positive evidence of achievement* [my italics] in a manner that is transparent across national boundaries."

But in its elaboration, this clear, although possibly unconscious, choice became less unambiguous. In the Rüschlikon report it is also argued that the portfolio "would enhance and sustain motivation in language learning in a lifelong perspective *and help learners to plan, manage and assess their learning*". This means that the portfolio should also help them to organise their own learning activities and develop their ability to do so independently. The portfolio should not only make the learners' "level of mastery" of foreign languages transparent, it should also benefit the achievement of goals such as "learning to learn" and "learner autonomy". In other words, it should provide both an assessment tool and a learning tool in the metacognitive domain. Accordingly, the Proposals for Development, published by the Secretariat of the Education Committee, explicitly state that:

"The portfolios aim to fulfil *the double function* [my italics] of:

I.   helping learners to reflect on their significant cultural and linguistic experiences on an ongoing basis (pedagogical function);

II.   reporting clearly (…) learners' qualifications and other relevant experiences at particular points in their learning or career (reporting/information function)."

(Secretariat, 1997, p.2).

---

[1] It is astonishing and maybe significant that there seems to be no word in English to indicate the property that someone will probably learn much from having a certain experience or performing a certain activity. In this paper I have chosen "with a high learning potential" or "instructive", although, to my taste, the latter word is too teacher-centred. But there seemed to be no good alternatives. The word "illuminative" is too restricted to having insights and does not include learning a skill, for example, by practising. Informative, similarly, is too restricted to getting to know new facts. Valuable is far too general and can refer to many other aspects besides learning. Perhaps we have to invent new words. What about learnative/learnativity, learnsome/learnsomeness or learningful/learningfulness?

This double function is explicitly repeated on p. 18: *"The portfolio has both a learning and a reporting function"*. However, the "Proposals" are neither very clear nor completely consistent over the different contributions in implementing this double function:

- On page 4, nine ways in which the ELP can help to achieve the portfolio's aims are summed up. Only one deals with the learning function and an additional one with the motivational possibilities. The others are about assessment. However, in the next question about what the ELP should contain there are suggestions for all three functions to be present in the third part of the portfolio (Trim, 1997).

- On page 8 several activities are suggested for the Dossier part of the ELP in the domain of metacognition. But in the same document, in the description of the three parts of which an ELP should consist (Dobson, 1997, p. 19), very little about the metacognitive learning function can be found. The possibilities in the cognitive domain are absent here.

- In Trim (1997, p. 4), part 3 of the portfolio may include results of self-observation or reflection on experience and Dobson (1997, p. 6) puts as the key question whether gathering information from part three will help "to enhance the learning process". But the suggestions for the content refer almost exclusively to supporting evidence and illustrations for the other two sections. The same is true for the proposed ELP-content for young learners (Debyser, 1997, p. 31) and for junior learners (Christ, 1997, pp. 41 and 43).

- In Schneider & North (1997, p. 76), the pedagogical function is explicitly mentioned as a desideratum for future portfolios. But in spite of the formulation "like in this draft", I could not find clues as to how to implement this function in the portfolio as it is presented in the "Proposals". The prototype mainly elaborates the "hard" aspect of certification. In this proposal, too, the "Dossier" is described as a box full of illustrations.

- Schärer (1997, p. 90) also explicitly mentions the pedagogical function. But here too there are no clues regarding implementation. Schärer is the only one in the document who explicitly takes a position about how "hard" this pedagogical side should be. Not very hard. To be "hard" is apparently an exclusive property of the reporting part: "*In contrast to the flexible 'pedagogic' part* [my italics] of the Portfolio common forms and codes are needed to report in a transnationally comprehensible way. There needs to be certainty that entries are valid, particularly in high-stake situations."(p. 90).

This lack of clarity is not exceptional. It is even to be found in Paulson et al. (1991), the champions of the double function. According to the title of their publication, they promise to give us eight guidelines that "will help educators encourage self-directed learning". On closer examination, only one of them directly refers to the learning function (a portfolio should contain proof of self-reflection) and one indirectly (portfolios should contain the rationale for activities that are reported on). Most of the others concern the reporting function and its credibility such as proof of growth and relation of reported outcomes to the goals of the instruction programme.

What many formulations have in common is a terminology that does not reflect a very high degree of appreciation or acknowledgement. The pedagogical part is in the "soft pages", "flexible", etc. This may be the reason why there are so few suggestions as to how to make the pedagogical part as "hard" as possible. Yet, in my view, it is a very important issue. As I will now attempt to argue in the following section, an ELP without a well-elaborated and implemented pedagogical part will have little added value and will shrink to a folder with

diplomas. I believe that the success and acceptance of the pedagogical function is to a great extent dependent on how hard we are able to make its reporting function.

4.   Prerequisites for fulfilling the pedagogical function

If we wish the ELP to be accepted as providing added value and worth putting energy into, it must meet the requirements of three groups of users: the learners (the "supply side", so to speak), the "demand side" in the form of employers and others (for example, training courses, schools, colleges, universities, etc.) and the "organisers", the curriculum developers. For the reporting function this is not a big problem. All sorts of descriptive documents already exist. The only problem is to make them fit into a common framework, which is provided by the Common European Framework (CEF). It will, however, be quite an effort to calibrate all the existing reporting systems so that they can be brought into line with that common framework.

As far as the pedagogical function is concerned, the problem is more fundamental. In the documents it is repeatedly stated that the ELP should give learners the opportunity to show that they have taken part in activities that can be expected to enhance learning. The very fact that this aim had to be formulated shows that there are apparently such activities which are not already covered by the usual educational programmes. The reason is probably that there are experiences with substantial instructive power whose effects cannot be easily demonstrated by common instruments of measurement. If we try to "save" them by incorporating them into a portfolio, the problem is how to make them convincing. For that purpose it is important to know for each of the three groups of users which activities are instructive and which characteristics in these activities are responsible for the effect. The learners want to know, because they wish to make calculated choices, the demand side wants to know approximately what can be expected as an effect, and the curriculum developers need some indication as to the content, properties and conditions of what they have to prepare and organise. In other words: all three groups need a catalogue of learning activities, based on learning theory, to help the developers to create, the learners to choose and the suppliers "to believe".

Before the "demand side" is willing to believe, another requirement has to be met. The employer will not only want to be convinced that the described activity or experience is very instructive, he will also want some certainty with respect to *the extent* to which the said experience has occurred. In order to meet this requirement a repertoire of documentation forms and formats will have to be developed. This is not only important for the "demand side". The learner and the curriculum developer also share an interest in that the documentation of the learning experiences is convincing and transparent both to the supplier (the learners) and to the demand side (employers, other training courses). For a learner it is not very motivating to perform an activity if it is not certain that future potential employers will be impressed by it. Since it seems to be impossible to show the outcomes in the usual way, he has an interest in forms or formats for documentation that will be convincing to the demand side. The curriculum developer will know that the activities he designs will not be very popular if they do not result in convincing credits.

Table 2: Questions for the parties involved

"The demand side"

- What can I expect the learners to have learned?
- How do I know that they really have done it?

The learners

- What and how much do I learn from the suggested activity, compared to the time invested?
- How do I convince the demand side:
  - that it was valuable?
  - that I really have done it*?*

The curriculum developers

How do I describe experiences in such a way that learners:
- See that they are valuable?
- Understand how to perform them?
- Can document the crucial elements convincingly?

Table 3: Estimated interest in a documentation repertoire and a repertoire of useful and powerful learning experiences

	Demand side	**Learner**	**Curriculum developer**
Repertoire of useful and powerful experiences	X	xx	xxx
Documentation répertoire	Xxx	xx	x

5. The roots of portfolios as learning tools for cognitive objectives

One of the potential added values of portfolios lies in the fact that they can fill a gap that was caused by the trend in curriculum development to describe curricula in terms of clear instructional objectives. In its most extreme form the requirements for such objectives were formulated by Mager (1962). According to Mager, educational objectives had to be defined in terms of observable behaviour. The subject of the behaviour to be assessed had to be clearly indicated and the minimal acceptable performance had to be specified in measurable terms. The movement was a reaction to the prevailing vagueness in the curricula and the broadly perceived desirability of making those responsible for the organisation of educational programmes accountable. The application of Mager's requirements made it easier to judge

these programmes more fairly, objectively and verifiably. This was a particular advantage for educational authorities, responsible for the quality of educational programmes and educational institutions, funded with public finances. As a consequence Mager's ideas had much influence on curriculum development.

The disadvantage was that learning activities that could not easily be linked to clear and predictable outcomes became less popular, indeed, almost extinct. However, the awareness that there are many instructive and sometimes even irreplaceable experiences kept educational scientists looking for a means to incorporate them into the official curricula. One of them was Eliott Eisner who defined two other types of educational objective and described them in two influential publications (Eisner, 1969; Eisner, 1972). According to Eisner there are educational objectives that are, distinct from Mager's homogeneous "instructional objectives", not *per se* homogeneous. He distinguished two types. Firstly there is a type of learning situation:

> "in which meanings become personalised and in which children produce products, both theoretical and qualitative, that are as diverse as themselves. Consequently the evaluative task in this situation is not one of applying a common standard to the products produced but one of reflecting upon what has been produced in order to reveal its uniqueness and significance."

Eisner named such outcomes "expressive objectives". In order to achieve them, "educational encounters" have to be organised.

A few years later Eisner introduced a third type of objective, which is a hybrid of instructional and expressive objectives. Because he could not find a satisfactory name, he labelled this category "type III objectives". With instructional objectives they had in common that it was relatively easy to decide whether the product met the requirements set out beforehand. They share with expressive objectives the characteristic that the number of correct outcomes was in principle indefinite. In this case the objective was not formulated in terms of educational encounters, but in open assignments, such as designing a building that meets given requirements.

Table 4: Three types of objective

---

1) Instructional objectives (Mager)

    a)   Observable behaviour
    b)   Specified, under which conditions
    c)   Minimal performance in measurable terms

2) Expressive objectives (Eisner)

    d)   Outcomes not uniform
    e)   All outcomes acceptable
    f)   To be specified in "educational encounters"

3) Type III objectives (Eisner)

    g)   Exact requirements to be met
    h)   Indefinite number of acceptable outcomes
    i)   Specified in "open assignments"

With expressive objectives, only the experience is given. With type III, the assignment is open and has an indefinite number of different outcomes. Both characteristics make them unfit for the regular way of organising and assessing learning processes. Yet it is clear that leaving these objectives out of the curriculum would weaken its instructive power, perhaps even substantially. Incorporating them in a portfolio can create an opportunity to give them an official and acknowledged status in the curricula. If that is our hidden agenda, it is also very clear that the need for a convincing, preferably theory-based and empirically confirmed catalogue of powerful encounters and assignments is even stronger, because we will have to convince not only the "demand side", but also the "supply side" financiers and their agents: the educational authorities.

6. Instructive experiences in foreign-language acquisition

The next question is of course, how far it is justified to expect expressive and type III objectives to be especially important and useful in the field of foreign-language education? Why shouldn't we first experiment a little in the field of social science, religion and the like? Of course I do not pretend to have found the complete answer. What I will try to do is to sketch a conceptual framework from which we can start to look for it. In order to find an answer it seems promising to take a closer look at what is known about activities that apparently facilitate the process of foreign-language acquisition. I will summarise the main points very briefly.

6.1 Input

Although very few of Krashen's ideas could be confirmed empirically and although there have been long and fierce debates regarding this issue, there seems to be a broad consensus in the recent literature that being exposed to foreign-language input is a crucial prerequisite for

foreign-language acquisition (Krashen, 1985). Without input, no output. Although it has turned out to be impossible to operationalise the famous *i + 1* level, few seriously doubt that being opposed to input is more effective if its level of difficulty is not too far above the learner's foreign-language knowledge. Other factors frequently found in literature are attractiveness, functionality in terms of containing information the learner would like to know and realism (the sort of language utterances that the learner is likely to encounter later in real-life situations).

6.2 Content-oriented processing

There also seems to be little doubt that being exposed to input is only effective if the input is processed (or in more practical terms, if the learner has tried to understand its meaning). We do not know, however, what learners learn from this content-oriented processing. There are indications that the effect of processing the same input in terms of acquired knowledge differs from one learner to the other. We do not seem to have much influence on that. So it is an illusion that a closed curriculum can direct this process in such a way that it leads to prescribed outcomes. This does not seem to be a disadvantage. Learners do not need the same knowledge for the same performance. Groot, for example, reports the results of some experimental investigations into the relationship between coverage and text comprehension. He postulates that, besides the knowledge of the 2500 most frequent words, knowledge of *any* [my italics] 5000 words, selected by the individual reader on the basis of a combination of criteria such as frequency and personal interest, will yield such a dense coverage of general L2 texts, that they can be understood without a problem (Groot, 1994a; Groot, 1994b).

6.3 Form-oriented processing

There is far less agreement about the role of grammar or so-called "formal instruction". Yet a growing support for the *weak interface hypothesis* (Ellis, 1990) seems to be emerging. This hypothesis tries to explain the paradox that formal instruction, combined with a great deal of content-oriented input processing, leads to better results than input processing alone, but that taught grammar rules are not used in producing output. The weak interface hypothesis claims that part of the learner output is rule-directed, but that we do not know the rules. Learners form hypotheses about form aspects of the language by processing input. Formal instruction works indirectly by making them aware of morphological form aspects. That leads to both form- and content-oriented processing. As in the case of vocabulary, we know very little about these hypotheses, not even whether they are the same for all learners or whether they occur in all stages of acquisition. For the time being we will probably have to be content with the assumption that our learners apparently form them, as long as we stimulate them to do so, in one way or another.

6.4 (Pushed) output

Recently there has been support for the facilitating and stimulating role of output production. Several arguments are given in its favour. It is assumed to enhance fluency, it makes language learners conscious of their deficits and through that increases their motivation to learn. According to this output hypothesis (Swain, 1995; Swain & Lapkin, 1995), pushed output contributes to form-orientation and gives the teacher or the communication partner the opportunity to give corrective feedback (for an overview of its effect see Spada, 1997). In some cases this is even assumed to be the only possibility of providing the learner with

"negative evidence" about the formal correctness of certain utterances (like when to use *vous* or *tu* for an anglophone learner). Experiments seem to confirm this claim (Nobuyoshi & Ellis, 1993; Swain & Lapkin, 1995).

Two varieties can be distinguished. Part of our language utterances consists of unanalysed combinations (chunks) that are perceived as a whole. Their use is mainly formulaic speech. Pushed output increases the learner's ability to use these chunks in different situations and combinations. The other variety is somewhat misleadingly labelled "creative speech". misleading because it has little to do with poems or creative writing. The term is used for rule-guided production. Although there is not much reason to assume that a large part of our spontaneous speech production is consciously rule-guided, let alone that we would know these rules, practising with this variety is one of the main activities of most closed curricula.
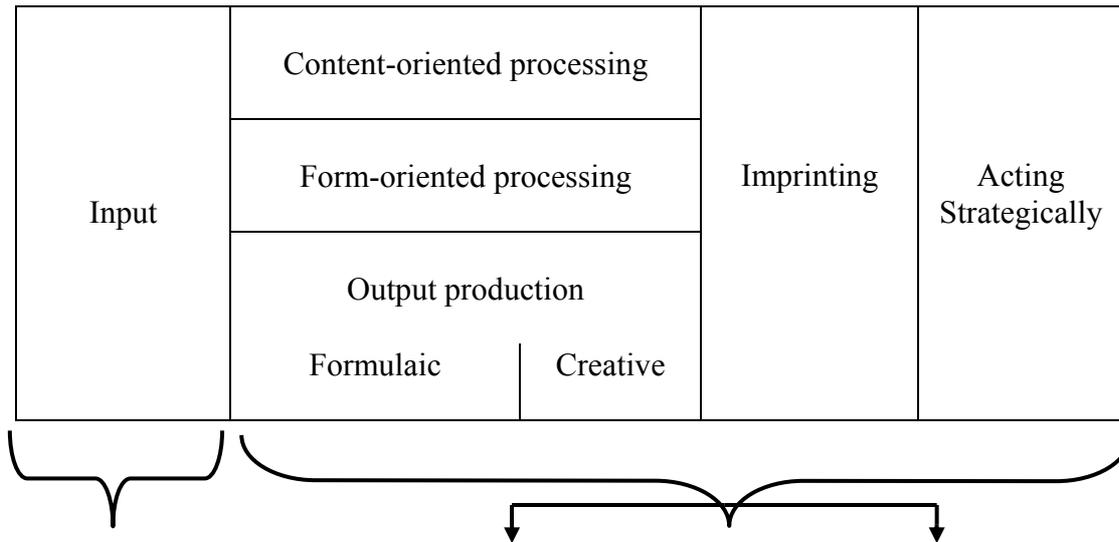
6.5 Imprinting

Input processing results in storing part of the processed content in the long-term memory. Performing mnemonics can enhance the availability of this knowledge when needed. Since the Ancient Greeks, much literature has appeared on this issue and some of these strategies are very well known, such as repeating, associating, categorising, etc.

6.6 Acting strategically

Generally speaking, for foreign-language acquisition there is only limited time available. That means that there will always remain greater or lesser gaps in our knowledge. For that reason it is useful and practical to develop a repertoire of strategies to compensate for deficiencies. We can compensate for deficiencies in receptive skills with reading and listening strategies, such as inferring unknown elements, using prior knowledge, etc. To make up for deficiencies in productive skills we can use communication skills such as negotiating meaning, avoiding, description, fillers, and the like.

Diagram: Components of foreign-language acquisition

Input	Content-oriented processing		Imprinting	Acting Strategically
	Form-oriented processing			
	Output production			
	Formulaic	Creative		

Content

- i + 1
- attractive
- realistic
- functional

Activity

- powerful
- efficient
- functional
- realistic

Assignments

- valid
- clear
- suitable
- feasible

7.   Implications for portfolios

As I explained before, Eisner formulated his two types of objectives for those learning processes that have outcomes which cannot be predicted and which are most probably different for each learner. As was evident from the short review of aspects of foreign-language acquisition, summarised before, the process of learning a foreign language has many characteristics of Eisner's expressive and type III objectives. This has two implications. Firstly, they cannot be formulated in terms of closed curricula and instructional objectives as regular educational programmes try to do. Secondly, portfolios can contribute substantially to making foreign-language acquisition more effective on condition that we:

- take the pedagogical function very seriously,

- consider the experiences-to-be-documented as essential and important elements of the educational process, and

- formulate them carefully, so that their instructive value is clear and convincing to all involved.

This is not what has happened until now. The "pedagogical function" is indicated in the documents as the "soft pages" (The European Language Portfolio – Proposals for development. Language learning for European citizenship 1997). That does not sound very serious. It will be our challenge to make these soft pages as hard as possible, both in descriptions of "powerful learning experiences" with precise and concrete criteria they have

to meet in order to have the assumed instructive value and in terms of a repertoire of documentation forms that will have conclusive power for the demand side.

It is true that we cannot be very strict in our desiderata for the outcomes, but we can try to be very "hard" in formulating the required characteristics of the experiences. The stricter we are in this respect, the greater the effect and acceptance. In this paper I can only give a few examples. If you agree with me, elaborating them will have to be one of the aims of our project.

8.   Cognitive learning activities

Precisely because i+1 cannot be operationalised, it is very difficult to incorporate something like "rich input processing" in a closed curriculum. Not only will the appropriateness of a certain piece of language in terms of i+1, attractiveness, functionality and realism be different for every learner, but also the learning product of processing the same input will differ from one learner to the other. Thinking in terms of instructional objectives therefore easily leads to leaving such activities out of the curriculum. A portfolio can help us to save this very useful activity, because it enables us to concentrate on the experiences and their potential learning effect instead of on the outcome. For we know the properties that give it its learning power (i+1, realistic, functional and the like). As a consequence, learners can be asked to document in their portfolios that their experiences had these properties, in terms of quality and quantity. For example:

- Document that you have been in situations in which you were exposed to the foreign language.

- Document why you think that the language you were exposed to was about $i + 1$.

- Why do you think it was realistic?

- How much was it?

- What gives you reason to think that you learned something?

Such an assignment will not only make it possible to estimate the instructive value of the experience, but also direct the learning process in such a way that the learner will be stimulated to look for the most instructive settings without explicit instructions.

I argued that the curriculum developer or the teacher has very little influence on what is actually acquired by input processing. This means that it does not matter very much what input is processed, provided it meets the criteria mentioned before. What counts is that the learner is stimulated to process the content. Types of assignments that do so can be incorporated in portfolios. For example, the instruction to keep a diary for vocabulary, idioms and expressions (ten words, one idiom, one expression per day) during a stay abroad, will suffice and can be very easily documented in the form of "my own lifelong vocabulary book".

What was said about content-oriented processing is, *mutatis mutandis*, true for form-oriented processing. The activity is open and the outcome up to the learner. It is crucial that the learner gets an assignment that encourages him to be aware of morphological form aspects. Similar to the open-content orientation assignment, a portfolio could "enhance learning" by requesting during a stay abroad one morphological form rule every day from the language the learner is

exposed to (such as: with *he, she, it*, a verb usually ends in an –s) and to document it in the portfolio under the heading "my own lifelong grammar book".

For organising output production in general, portfolios can easily be used to stimulate the learner by asking him to document some form of communication, orally and in writing, with someone in the target language. The instructive value of this activity can be further increased by asking learners to document additionally how they organised feedback on their products and what they learned from their own attempts and from the feedback they received.

It is clear that in almost all these cases keeping a learning diary is one of the main tools. It is also clear that this activity can greatly improve the instructive value when it is carefully structured by the teacher or curriculum developer, based on their insight of how to elicit learning processes. For a learner and teacher or curriculum developer a catalogue of possibilities to structure this type of documentation in terms of activities with a strong learning effect, connected to suitable documentation forms would be very helpful, for the teacher to be able to give hints and to assess the effectiveness of student plans and for learners to be able to make calculated choices or to experiment with different possibilities in order to build up a personal repertoire. So far, such a catalogue has been lacking in our prototypes. It is my conviction that without this aspect, the contribution of the ELP to its pedagogical aim is only a small part of what it could be.

Table 5: Examples of possible "instructive" experiences in the cognitive domain

Exposure to input
- i+1?
- Realistic?
- Quantity?
- How do you know what you learned?

Content-oriented input processing
- Personal lifelong vocabulary book

Form-oriented input processing
- Personal lifelong grammar book

Output production
- How much?
- How did you organise feedback?

9. Metacognitive learning experiences

What has been said about the cognitive learning experiences is probably even truer for metacognitive learning experiences. I think that imprinting in itself is not the first thing to consider in looking for means to take advantage of a portfolio. But for learning to learn this issue has possibilities. From training studies in strategy learning we know that reflection is a powerful learning activity. There are few subjects about which so many strategies have been

described in literature as imprinting. These lists are very well-suited to practising learning to learn. Students can be asked to try the proposed strategies out and reflect on the results. In various publications portfolios are presented as especially good tools for training metacognitive skills in general and for structuring reflection in particular (for an overview see, for example, Korthagen & Wubbels (1995) and Wade & Yarbourgh (1996). Again, this structuring is not given in the phenomenon itself. It has to be built in carefully. But it seems to be as good as the only substantial contribution to learning to learn that a portfolio can make. What was said about imprinting in particular is also true for strategy use in general. An important issue to be worked out for the ELP will be to develop examples of how this structuring reflection can most effectively be achieved. One of the few examples is the five questions that we use to structure reflection in teacher education.

Table 6: Five questions for structuring reflection

1. What did you want to learn (how)?

2. Did you succeed?

3. How do you know?

4. Can you explain the result?

5. What do you learn from answering the previous questions?

(Westhoff, 1993)

All questions can be answered regardless of whether the outcome was positive or negative. In both cases answering is an illuminating experience. When they know in advance that they will have to answer them, the questions will have a "steering" effect. Question one stimulates learners to plan in a goal-oriented way, question three stimulates them to organise their own feedback. Through answering again and again, question four learners build up a theory about their own learning. The last question leads to resolutions that can serve as answers to the first question the next time. Again the learners' diary will probably have to play a role. That makes this diary one of the crucial elements of the ELP. As far as I know, not much work has been produced on this subject so far.

10. Documentation forms with conclusive power

It is clear that there are many clues in the proposals so far of *what* should or could be reported in the portfolios. However, very little exists about what is probably one of the critical factors for success and, most of all, acceptance: how do we give the reports an element of conclusive force? Yet the demand side will not only want to be convinced that, in principle, the documented experiences have the instructive value that they should have. They will also want to make sure that they take place in the most effective way. Let us assume that living in a country where the target language is the medium of communication for three months is a useful and powerful learning experience. How do you make it plausible (let alone how do you prove) that you were there all the time. Let us also assume that the effective ingredient of this experience is to be forced to use the foreign language exclusively all the time. How do you give an accurate impression of the degree to which your stay has met this criterion? It makes a big difference whether you were all alone in a native family, lived in a youth hostel with

people from your own country, or in a dorm with an international student population or were lying on the beach with your girl/boyfriend from home all the time. How do you "document" that?

I am a specialist in didactics. The organisation of learning operations is my field. I am not an expert in the domain of documenting learning experiences. That may be an explanation for my ignorance. In that case I am too pessimistic. But I doubt whether learners and employers even have a common language or terminology that would enable them to answer or understand very general basic questions such as:

- what have you done?

- for what reason?

- what you have learned by doing this activity?

Let alone the much more difficult (and important) ones such as what did that experience teach you about:

- the way you learn a foreign language, and

- how your way of learning may be made more effective.

I had a quick scan done in the Eric database and not very much (not to say nothing) was found on this subject. For some strange reason it does not seem to have evoked much interest among educational scientists. That means that for most useful learning experiences a repertoire of documentation forms and formats with reasonably convincing "conclusive force" will still have to be developed. That again is a great challenge to our project, because it seems (as in the European Project) to be an underestimated and unexplored problem, whereas it is probably at the same time an important factor influencing the social acceptance of the portfolio.

In other areas the solution is sought in test results. With respect to the ELP this solution is recommended. The ELP should also contain "a record of language qualifications obtained" (Trim (1997, p. 4), but it should be recognised that this is something quite different from and possibly not always compatible with showing the ability "to plan, manage and assess their own learning" (p. 4). The less we succeed in developing the means to make the effect to be assumed from other learning experiences visible with conclusive force, the more these regular ways of reporting one's language abilities, reported in the so-called "hard pages" (Dobson, 1997, p. 17) will dominate the ELPs. Through that we will miss the substantial potential added value of the ELP. For the successful implementation of the pedagogical function we need repertoires for instructive experiences and documentation formats and forms that are transparent, informative, concrete, convincing, motivating, and

As hard as possible.

Part Two

Christ, I. 1997. Language portfolio for language learning in schools and beyond. In Council of Europe (ed.), *The European Language Portfolio. Proposals for development* (pp. 39-74). Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Debyser, F. 1997. Portfolio for young learners. In Council of Europe. (ed.), *The European Language Portfolio. Proposals for development* (pp. 23-39). Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Dobson, A. 1997. A European portfolio (ELP): purposes and uses. In Council of Europe. (ed.), *The European Language Portfolio. Proposals for development* (pp. 13-21). Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Eisner, E. W. 1969. Instructional and expressive educational objectives: their formulation and use in curriculum. In W. J. Popham, E. W. Eisner, & H. J. Sullivan (eds.), *Instructional objectives: an analysis of emerging issues*. Chicago: MacNally.

Eisner, E. W. 1972. Emerging models for educational evaluation. *The school review,* 80, pp. 573-590.

Ellis, R. 1990. *Instructed second language acquisition.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Groot, P. 1994a. Lexical coverage, text comprehension and vocabulary selection. *Toegepaste taalwetenschap in artikelen* 50, pp. 167-168.

Groot, P. 1994b. Tekstdekking, tekstbegrip en woordselectie voor het vreemdetalenonderwijs. *Toegepaste taalwetenschap in artikelen* 50, pp. 111-122.

Korthagen, F. and T. Wubbels. 1995. Characteristics of reflective practitioners: towards an operationalization of the concept of reflection. *Teachers and teaching: theory and practice* 1, pp. 51-72.

Krashen, S. 1985. *The input hypothesis: issues and implications*. London: Longman.

Mager, R. F. 1962. *Preparing instructional objectives*. San Francisco: Fearon Publishers.

Nobuyoshi, J. and R. Ellis. 1993. Focussed communication tasks and second language acquisition. *ELT journal*, 47, pp. 203-210.

Paulson, F. L., P. R. Paulson and C. A. Meyer. 1991. What makes a portfolio a portfolio? Eight thoughtful guidelines will help educators encourage self-directed learning. *Educational leadership*, pp. 60-63.

Schärer, R. 1997. Language language portfolio (Adult sector). In Council of Europe. (ed.), *The European Language Portfolio. Proposals for development* (pp. 89-111). Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
Schneider, G. and B. North. et al. 1997. European Language Portfolio for young people and adults. In Council of Europe. (ed.), *The European Language Portfolio. Proposals for development* (pp. 75-89). CC-Lang (97) 1. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Secretariat of the Education Committee. Language learning for European citizenship 1997. The European Language Portfolio. Introductory note. In Council of Europe (ed.), *The European Language Portfolio. Proposals for development* (pp. 1-2). Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Spada, N. 1997. Form-focussed instruction and second language acquisition: A review of classroom and laboratory research. *Language teaching,* 30, pp. 73-87.

Swain, M. 1995. Three functions of output in second language learning. In G. Cook and B. Seidlhofer (eds.), *Principle and practice in applied linguistics: Studies in honour of H.G. Widdowson*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Swain, M. and S. Lapkin. 1995. Problems in output and the cognitive processes they generate. A step towards second language learning. *Applied linguistics,* 16, pp. 371-391.

Trim, J. 1997. A European Language Portfolio: some questions relating to its nature, function, form, preparation and distribution. In Council of Europe (ed.), *The European Language Portfolio. Proposals for development* (pp. 3-12). Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Wade, R. C. and D. B. Yarbourgh. 1996. Portfolios: a tool for reflective thinking in teacher education. *Teaching and teacher education,* 12, pp. 63-79.

Westhoff, G. J. 1993. Leren leren onderwijzen. Een contradictio in terminis. In A. Steeman, T. Wubbels, and G. Willems (eds.), *Leren om te leren. De rol van leerling, leraar en school. Meso Focus,* 15 (pp. 22-35). Houten: Educatieve partners.