

Language Learning in Europe: Launching Packs for Life-long Learning

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It is indeed a great pleasure to be back here in Hamburg, after an all too lengthy absence. My connection with *der Freien und Hansestadt* dates back to 1948, when my mother was Secretary of one of the first town links to be set up after the War, linking Leyton, our London suburb, with Wandsbek. I learnt the danger of providing a speaker with the translation of a text without a phonetic transcription, when the Pastor, giving a sermon in our Parish church, spoke of the common concerns of our two countries in the post-war world: 'These are problems to which we all seek an answer' I had written. [te:z a:r pro:ble:ms] he said, [to: vi:ç ve: al ze:k an ansve:r]. I was perhaps the only member of the congregation to understand. I suppose that, half a century later, one would not find a person in a similar professional position with no competence in English – thanks, in no small measure, to the work of your Association

It is a particular pleasure to be asked to participate in your Jubilee, because of the highly significant part which your Association has played in the development, not only of English, but more generally of foreign language teaching in recent years. Professor Piepho's *Kommunikative Kompetenz als übergeordnetes Lernziel* was a landmark in the formulation of the communicative approach, which has gained almost universal acceptance. Even those who term themselves 'post-communicative' are trying to move on from that position, not back. The work of Christoph Edelhoff and colleagues at the Reinhardswaldschule, now, alas, of blessed memory, has been a beacon for many years, not least with the prompt and enthusiastic organisation of the very first of the Council of Europe's workshops for teacher trainers in Fulda in April 1984. Yes, Europe owes a great debt of gratitude to our professional colleagues in the German Länder and to the federal and provincial educational authorities for their support. Nor should we forget our longer-term indebtedness. It was Wilhelm Viëtor, whose *Elemente der Phonetik* taught me and countless others the phonetics of German, whose pamphlet *Der Sprachenunterricht muss umkehren!* provided the manifesto for the great reform movement of the late 19th Century. We should never forget how much we stand on the shoulders of the band of pioneers who took the research findings and theoretical insights of the great generation of Neogrammarians (*Junggrammatiker*) in the 1870s and applied them to language teaching. At that time, of course, academic linguists took it to be part of their duty to apply their specialised knowledge and understanding to language problems in society, such as the teaching of the deaf, the treatment of the language handicapped, the development of writing systems for hitherto unwritten languages and of course the teaching of foreign languages. Only when Chomsky washed his hands of the pretensions of post-Bloomfieldian behaviourism was this tradition, regrettably, abandoned. We have to thank men like Viëtor, Sweet and Jespersen for taking modern languages out of the mould of classical humanism. We owe to them the ideas we now find almost self-evident: that languages are acquired and learnt for use; that our model is the everyday use of a language by its users for all their daily purposes; that spoken communication is worthy of respect and in fact primary, written language coming later and serving limited, though culturally highly significant purposes; that the criterion of selection and evaluation is use, which is in continual flux, rather than rigid adherence to immutable rules of taste and correctness laid down by some authority; that linguists should describe language in use and not pontificate. I sometimes think that our main achievement over the last half century has been to realise the visions of our predecessors a century ago. At that time, the classical tradition had so strong a hold in many parts of Europe – not least in Germany - that the neogrammarian tide swirled against the defences and receded. A century later, we have perhaps been more fortunate

Perhaps the main reason for our better success has been the dramatic change in the importance of communication in our lives over the past half-century and the challenge it has presented to a politically and linguistically fragmented continent. Not only have personal travel and transport of goods made international mobility an everyday matter, but also, thanks to electronics, the movement of information and ideas can be virtually instantaneous and knows no geographical limits. The transformation is far from complete. The pace of change is such that one cannot foresee the ultimate outcome, but it is most likely that what seems highly advanced now will be regarded as primitive in a relatively short time. Meanwhile, individuals everywhere are called upon to adjust their ideas, skills and practices to a changed and changing environment, as are all institutions: social, economic, political, military and, by no means least, educational, which find their traditional structures and practices no longer appropriate or even viable as the transformation proceeds.

The world of education is by no means immune from these pressures. Indeed, since those charged with the education of young people are responsible for equipping them to meet the challenges and exploit the opportunities presented by life in the Twenty-first Century, it is precisely the members of the teaching profession at all levels who should be most concerned with trying to foresee what these challenges and opportunities may be. . Effects of the changes reach into the everyday lives of countless people across the world, especially so perhaps in Europe, where they initially confront an intricate patchwork of peoples, with their inherited cultures and languages. The need for mobility and access to information taken together with the importance of mutual understanding and tolerance establish effective communication skills across language boundaries as an indispensable part of the equipment of tomorrow's citizens facing the challenges and opportunities of a transformed European society.

How are these barriers to communication to be overcome? Many wish to cut the Gordian knot by fixing upon one language as the universal medium of international communication. After all, there are historical precedents. Latin remained the universal language of religion, learning and education for more than a millennium after the collapse of the Roman Empire . As Latin declined, French came close to acceptance as the universal language of the social and cultural élite across Europe and even beyond, retaining something of that position in the Mediterranean Region and in official international communication until the Second World War. Since then, historical and economic forces have gone far towards propelling English into the position of prime candidate, not least because of its role in the communications industries themselves. This is not a particularly European, but rather a global phenomenon. Over the last half-century, English has established itself ever more firmly as the leading language of international communication on a global scale in science, technology, industry, commerce and in the travel and leisure industries. The emergence of a distinctive, universal youth culture plays a most important role. In response, English has become the first foreign language in most educational systems, thus producing a self-reinforcing spiral. Already, many parents feel that a child who is not offered the opportunity at school to become fluent in English is being seriously disadvantaged. Some educational planners regard the teaching of English as a *lingua franca* as both necessary and sufficient, justifying the exclusion of other foreign languages from the school curriculum. Their intention may be to concentrate resources in order to maximise communicative effectiveness in the major language of international communication. Others may wish simply to keep the role of modern languages in the school curriculum to a minimum, leaving more space for mathematics, science, technology, the arts and mother-tongue development.

It is of course for competent authorities to make language policy decisions according to their assessment of how best to meet societal and individual needs. Ultimately, it is the wishes of children, their parents and employers that will prove decisive. The policies of the European institutions are firmly in favour of multilingualism. The European Union favours the study of two languages other than the mother tongue in the school curriculum. The Council of Europe has promoted the more flexible concept of 'plurilingualism', that is, the encouragement of learners to extend their communicative competence, on a life-long basis, by learning and using a number of languages, to varying extents and for varying purposes in accordance with their developing needs and interests. The resulting communicative competence is not just the sum of single language competences. It is a complex of interacting components, to be brought to bear as a whole upon a problem of communication as required.

From this perspective, the aim of language education is profoundly modified. It is no longer seen as simply to achieve 'mastery' of one or two, or even three languages, each taken in isolation, with the 'ideal native speaker' as the ultimate model. Instead, the aim is to develop a linguistic repertory, in which all linguistic abilities have a place. This implies, of course, that the languages offered in educational institutions should be diversified and students given the opportunity to develop a plurilingual competence.. Furthermore, once it is recognised that language learning is a lifelong task, the development of a young person's motivation, skill and confidence in facing new language experience out of school comes to be of central importance. The responsibilities of educational authorities, qualifying examining bodies and teachers cannot simply be confined to the attainment of a given level of proficiency in a particular language at a particular moment in time, important though that undoubtedly is.

It seems that young Europeans, including 5 out of 6 young Germans but, alas, far fewer young British people, are receptive to the idea that each successive language is a further enrichment, contributing to that overall communicative competence in which the different languages learnt interact and give confidence in facing new experiences. Of course, the school timetable is not infinitely elastic. There is so much more to be learnt! That fact means that even more attention needs to be paid to other principles which have long characterised the Council of Europe's approach to modern language learning. Firstly, that language learning is a whole life pursuit. Learning at school level and even in higher education is of great value in its own right, but it can never be seen as an end in itself. There is no such thing as 'eine abgeschlossene Bildung'! It is rather a launch-pad for learning throughout adult life. We need healthy institutions for further education, in which languages always have an important place, but much learning will be by direct contact with experience. It is an increasingly important responsibility of teachers to systematically prepare students to work autonomously, not only to work

in an independent study mode with prepared materials but also to develop discovery procedures that will enable them to extract meaning from texts in languages they have not studied and to use that experience to experiment with the use of that unstudied language for communication with its speakers. That in turn means being prepared to make mistakes and to learn from them, rather than playing games safely within rules laid down by authorities that regard errors as failures. In such a framework, teachers of languages need no longer be perfectionists, dominated by fear of error and staying within the safe areas established by their qualifications and seeing themselves as single language specialists. It becomes part of their expertise and their responsibility to arouse curiosity and to widen horizons, at least to languages which are closely related. If all young Germans know English as well as knowing German, why do only 0.6% know Dutch and only 3% express any interest in the language? If they express interest in French, Spanish and Italian, all Romance languages, are they to learn each in isolation from the others? In this respect, the Euro Com Rom project: 'Romanische Sprachen sofort lesen können' is surely of interest. It shows how much of the vocabulary of those languages, derived with surface changes only from classical or learned Latin, is shared not only with each other but also with us, who have also borrowed extensively from those sources as well as from each other. Indeed English, a hybrid language that has opened itself over the centuries to so many sources is an excellent launch pad for the understanding, acquisition and learning of other languages. It is virtually a plurilingual experience in itself. Teachers of English have a particular responsibility for inspiring students to experience the language as a window opening onto the whole world and its wealth of languages and cultures.

These thoughts naturally lead on to others. If our languages, in our intensely interactive modern world, are not as we thought well-defined, discrete entities, but intertwining growths, all contributing to each person's unique plurilingual competence, why must our education systems treat them as discrete and separate curricular subjects, for which only one specialist teacher is responsible to a class for a specified number of hours per week in a specialised classroom at defined times? It isn't a question simply of using a foreign language as a medium of instruction in an equally segregated curricular subject, valuable as that has proved to be. It goes beyond that, to seeing the school itself as a microcosm of an interactive Europe, in which languages are interlaced and in which relevant texts in various languages are brought into play wherever and whenever they are appropriate. The school becomes a place where a number of languages are present, and their use is spread across the staff, bringing foreign language teachers out of the isolation, even marginalisation to which they are often subject. The internationalisation of schools means ending their traditional role as formative agents for the homogeneous, monocultural nation-state. That is no doubt visionary, and to some may perhaps seem a threat rather than a promise! If it comes about, it will do so, not so much as the result of a conscious political decision but as a response to the rapidly changing conditions of life in this new Century.

However, even without going that far, there are steps which can readily be taken to strengthen the international, intercultural aspects of school life. Clearly, educational visits and exchanges have an important part to play, particularly if they are handled not as isolated events but integrated into structured, on-going relationships, which may develop into life-long friendships. Technology adds greatly to the possibilities of exchange. Schools in different countries can use electronic communications in a number of different ways: they can form interaction groups and exchange e-mails. Networks can establish a common web-page and update it with fresh news items, jokes and so on. Again, the intrinsic interest of the material should be strong enough to motivate students to surmount the linguistic obstacles to understanding. Our objective should be to see **every** school linked into a multinational network of this kind and committed to a programme of international understanding and co-operation, and to the promotion of plurilingual competence.

In the Preamble to its Recommendation R(98)6 to member governments, the Committee of Ministers reaffirms the political objectives of its actions in the field of modern languages:

- to equip all Europeans for the challenges of intensified international mobility and closer co-operation not only in education, culture and science but also in trade and industry.
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- to promote mutual understanding and tolerance, respect for identities and cultural diversity through more effective international communication
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- to maintain and further develop the richness and diversity of European cultural life through greater mutual knowledge of national and regional languages, including those less widely taught.
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- to meet the needs of a multilingual and multicultural Europe by appreciably developing the ability of Europeans to communicate with each other across linguistic and cultural boundaries, which requires a sustained, lifelong effort to be encouraged, put on an organised footing and financed at all levels of education by the competent bodies.
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- to avert the dangers that might result from the marginalisation of those lacking the skills necessary to communicate in an interactive Europe.

Particular urgency was attached to this last objective by the First Summit of Heads of State, which identified xenophobia and ultra-nationalist backlashes as a primary obstacle to European mobility and integration, and as a major threat to European stability and to the healthy functioning of democracy. For many the challenges and opportunities brought by an increasingly interactive European society offer exciting prospects. For others, however, they are seen more as a threat than a promise. Those in particular who do not understand the changes which are taking place and are ill-equipped to respond to them see their livelihoods endangered and their distinctive identity imperilled by the operation of extraneous forces they are powerless to control. They feel their living-space invaded by outsiders with alien customs and practices and are aware of a crumbling away of the solidarity of the stable, balanced local community, which with varying degrees of idealisation they believe to have existed beforehand. Under these circumstances, those people with little knowledge or experience of the outside world can be brought to see outsiders, especially foreigners, as responsible for their difficulties. Negative stereotypes can be played upon by the unscrupulous, and dangerous as well as unpleasant forms of inter-community fears and hatreds can be built up into violent backlash against closer European and global co-operation. The best protection against all such forms of racism and xenophobia is provided by knowledge and direct experience of the foreign reality and improved life and communication skills.

The Second Summit made preparation for democratic citizenship a priority educational objective. What then, may we ask, can the teaching of modern languages contribute to the achievement of that objective? It is often thought that foreign language teaching is inherently authoritarian. After all, the teacher knows the language. The pupil does not and must accept what is said. Edelhoff and Weskamp cite. Andreas Flitner: ... (die englische Sprache ist) 'doch nicht aktiv hervorbringen oder neu zu erfinden, sondern sie besteht an sich und muss, mit Lehrer- und Bücherhilfe, angenommen werden. Das bildet die Argumentation, die Macht des traditionellen Lernens'. Of course, they and their collaborators show in *Autonomes Fremdsprachenlernen* how this modern version of the *Nürnberger Trichter* is to be overcome in theory and in practice. I should like, however, to consider more closely the political aspect of the question.

A strong democracy rests not on parliamentary and other representative institutions alone, but on the active involvement and participation of a democratic citizenry. Such people are marked by:

- independence of thought, judgement and action
- respect for the truth, ability to distinguish fact from opinion and genuine argument from meretricious manipulation
- ability to find and handle information
- social responsibility
- strong self-confidence and sense of identity as an individual and as a member of interlocking communities
- freedom from prejudice and intolerance, with a willing acceptance of diversity and difference (pluralism)
- a proper balance between co-operation and competitiveness
- willingness and ability to communicate with others in both receptive and productive modes.

It is the task of the education system to prepare young people for democratic citizenship by promoting the development of each of these qualities. This is a whole-school, cross-curricular task. The success of the undertaking requires the replacement over a period of time of received authoritarian structures and attitudes by more democratic ones. Too often, teachers feel themselves to be the mere agents of decisions made at higher levels, which they have simply to execute and impose upon pupils, who in turn do what is imposed upon them only to the extent that they must. Democratisation means that within an overall framework democratically agreed to represent the common interest educational decisions should be made as close to the point of learning as possible. Democratisation of education is of course a primary objective of the comprehensive school and is close to the fundamental concerns of your Association, to overcome the platonic stratification of society reinforced and perpetuated by the separation of children into Gymnasien, Realschulen and Hauptschulen.

Modern language teaching can contribute to education for democratic citizenship in many ways, e.g. by:

- providing young people with direct, authentic experience of communicating with other peoples and cultures in an atmosphere of mutual acceptance and co-operation, building good working and personal relations and free from prejudice.

- eliciting and disciplining individual judgements on cultural and social issues, especially those affecting international relations.
- involving both teachers and learners in decisions concerning objectives and methods by:
 - progressively increasing the responsibility of individual students for not only their own learning, but also for that of fellow students, replacing competitive attitudes by co-operative ones.
 - progressively increasing the scale and complexity of co-operative projects a) in class, b) in multinational networking
 - progressively increasing the role of self- (and peer-) evaluation

‘Progressively’ means that there is a planned development of the relation between teacher and pupil/student with the stage of maturation reached. The experience, knowledge, skill and authority of the teacher should be respected throughout, but the degree of dependence of the pupil upon the teacher is steadily reduced. The concept of negotiation is introduced as soon as pupils are ready for it and their role is steadily strengthened as the techniques of negotiation and co-operation are developed.

National, regional and local authorities responsible for educational planning and decision making above school level can promote democratic citizenship by:

- observing democratic practice in their relations with each other as well as with schools, teachers, parents, user interests and students,
 - building democratic processes and practices into curricular guidelines, but otherwise constraining schools and teachers only to the extent that is necessary to safeguard the public interest,
 - ensuring that all teachers are enabled to understand the principles and master the practice of education for democratic citizenship through initial and in-service programmes of teacher training,
- thus giving added importance to a further objective pursued in recent projects, namely:
- to promote methods of modern language teaching which will strengthen independence of thought, judgement and action combined with social skills and responsibility.

The full implications of such a paradigm shift have yet to be worked out and translated into action, but, clearly, the development of study skills and of learner autonomy become more and more important.

In an increasing number of countries (e.g. Finland, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland), school laws and national curricular guidelines emphasise the importance of learner autonomy

- learners are instructed more systematically in the use of learner strategies and are consciously given opportunities to apply them
- there is an effort to heighten learners’ awareness and metacognition through teaching, group discussion and planning
- theme-based studies and projects on issues important to learners are conducted by students, in many cases problem-based and requiring the formulation and testing of hypotheses using the target language as a tool rather than treating it as an object of study and making greater use of authentic documents in the language.
- information technology gives access to authentic sources of information, opportunities for independent practice and for direct communication with native speakers, and for objectives, confidential self-evaluation.
- self and peer evaluation increasingly replace formal testing and assessment, especially in formative and diagnostic assessment.
- the roles of learners and teacher are transformed; teachers become facilitators of learning and communication while learners are given more responsibility for their own studies.
- both initial and in-service teacher education pay attention to learning to learn and the management of autonomous learning, of which trainee teachers are given direct experience.
- not only general school education but also adult and vocational education increasingly involve the attitudinal and strategic training of students for self-direction and development towards learner autonomy.

One objective of courses in modern languages should be to develop the students' ability to learn more efficiently and to develop independent management of their own learning, so that by the end of institutionalised education students have the motivation, competence and confidence to face real-life communication using the languages they have already learnt and to tackle the new language learning necessary to cope with new challenges.

School programmes should promote student self-direction in learning by:

- conducting collaborative projects involving independent data collection and presentation
- encouraging the use and development of metacognitive strategies, including reflection skills
- developing specific strategy areas such as self and peer evaluation, collaboration skills and compensation strategies, as well as differentiated reading and writing strategies
- the development of negotiation skills, especially for the conduct of negotiations in the target language.
- the development of study skills through different kinds of materials and tools such as literature, special study tasks, telematics and satellite TV.
- the development of heuristic and inferencing skills for understanding newly encountered authentic texts and the application of both inductive and deductive logical principles and processes in building up knowledge of a language and using that knowledge when dealing with the production and reception of texts.
- the enhancement of self-esteem and self-confidence for dealing with new situations requiring social and communication skills.

In the light of these objectives, the Committee of Ministers stressed 'the political importance at the present time and in the future of developing specific fields of action, such as strategies for diversifying and intensifying language learning in order to promote plurilingualism in a pan-European context' and drew attention to the value of further developing educational links and exchanges and of exploiting the full potential of new communication and information technologies

The 'kit' of instruments which the Modern Languages Division of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg has been developing in recent years are devised to promote plurilingualism in a practical way by empowering learners and teachers to undertake take responsibility for language learning as close as possible to the point of learning and use, based on knowledge and understanding of the whole process of human communication .

The first tools within the 'kit' were of course the Threshold Level series of documents, originally developed in the early nineteen-seventies as part of a project to provide a structure for adult language learning across Europe. It was at once apparent that a common structure could not be based on linguistic form, which varies greatly from one language to another. What we do share is our communicative intent and, to a large extent, the ideas we wish to express and to understand. The detailed classification of functions and notions we produced has now been used as the basis for the specification of language learning objectives for well over 20 European languages. The concept has proved to be of an extraordinary longevity. The most recent additions have been Czech, Hungarian, Romanian and Slovenian - two Slav languages, one Romance and one non-Indo-European. In the last decade or so, it has been particularly the Central and East European countries, for so long cut off from full and free communication with the rest of Europe, which have taken this opportunity for revitalising and modernising the learning and teaching of their languages to foreign visitors, students and business people.

The Threshold Level model was first applied to English. The response was immediate. Within a decade, almost all textbooks, examinations and patterns of teacher training were reorganised in most European countries around themes and functions. By now, the assimilation of the basic concepts has lasted for so long that they have entered into the unexamined assumptions of current practice. It is no longer necessary to present them to an audience of experienced teachers. Over the years, the model has, of course, developed further. The level, though conceived as the minimum necessary to allow a learner to deal effectively and independently with the basic requirements of everyday life, proved quite demanding, and a halfway 'Waystage' was filtered from it as the first year objective for adults following the Anglo-German multi-media course Follow Me, which was originally aimed at the Volkshochschulen, but eventually attracted a global audience of 500 million students in over 60 countries. The model itself was updated in 1990 to give more attention to pronunciation (including intonation), socio-cultural aspects such as politeness conventions and a more systematic presentation of grammar. In 2001, a third level 'Vantage' was added corresponding roughly to what

might be expected at the end of upper secondary education. At the other end, a 'Breakthrough' level as a very first objective, is under development. As you may imagine, it has to cater for very diverse audiences, from very young learners of English placing small feet on a very tall ladder to adults already experienced in language learning and wishing to add a new language to their communicative repertoire for limited practical or cultural purposes. What needs do these very different classes of learner share? How is a learning objective to be differentiated to offer different, but in some way equivalent options to each? Above all, this low-level objective must be seen as worth-while attaining, and not defined in negative terms which emphasise the learners' incompetence by stating what they cannot do rather than what they can do – a point I shall return to later.

This series of carefully articulated objectives, elaborated over a period approaching 30 years, offers the learner of English a guiding thread through to a relatively advanced level of language proficiency and awareness, perhaps directly, but more often by means of the instruments flexibly developed on this basis by the many agents professionally concerned with planning, structuring and facilitating learning – educational authorities, inspectors, teachers, teacher trainers, textbook authors and test constructors.

Over the past decade, the Council of Europe has developed two further instruments.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching and assessment has already been published, in English by Cambridge University Press, in French by Hatier/Hachette and in German by Langenscheidt. Versions in some further languages, including all four official languages of Spain: Castilian, Catalan, Basque and Galician) are already in preparation. The aims of the Common European Framework for language learning, teaching and assessment (CEF) are:

- a) to promote and facilitate co-operation and mutual information among educational institutions in different countries;
- b) to assist learners, teachers, course designers, examining bodies and educational administrators to reflect on their current practice, to plan their activities and to situate and co-ordinate their efforts.
- c) to provide a sound basis for the mutual recognition of language qualifications;
- d) to encourage and facilitate:
 - the decentralisation of decision-making
 - the diversification of language provision
 - the development of plurilingualism
 - self directed learning (learner autonomy)

To do so, CEF should be comprehensive, transparent, coherent, flexible, open, dynamic and non-dogmatic. The Framework provides a comprehensive account of language proficiency in terms of language use and the many inner 'competences' which enable a language user to communicate through language. Language use is analysed and categorised according to: situations, with their attendant conditions and constraints; themes, tasks and purposes; activities and strategies; processes and finally texts. The competences are divided into general and language competences. General competences include: knowledge of the physical world and of society; skills and know-how; personality factors; ability to learn. Language competences include: linguistic competences narrowly defined, such as knowledge and mastery of grammar, lexicon, phonology and orthography; sociolinguistic competences; pragmatic competences. Wherever possible, progress in learning is calibrated using brief descriptors, mainly of a 'can do' character to characterise language proficiency at a series of six levels from A1 up to C2, which are defined in broad, user-friendly terms. The Framework does not specify a particular objective, as do Waystage, Threshold Level and Vantage Level. By providing the categories of use and competence at different levels, it aims to help all those engaged in different aspects of language teaching to reflect, to plan and to communicate their decisions, as well as to calibrate courses and qualifications on a common scale. The Framework does not supersede the T-level series, which still offers a way of putting flesh on the bones of the Framework scales. An ambitious project, commissioned by the Goethe-Institut and conducted by a team from Germany, Switzerland and Austria to formulate learning objectives for German as a foreign language (*Profile Deutsch*), makes an interesting and, I believe successful, attempt to organise, in a developed form, the material of *Kontaktschwelle* according to the structure of the Framework. Its publication by Langenscheidt is imminent and may well act as a model for similar projects for other languages, including English..

The second new tool to be offered is the European Language Portfolio. This is a document which is personal to its holders and allows them to record and display the full range of qualifications, courses and other experiences of other languages and cultures. It also helps holders to estimate their own language proficiency and guide their

progress by reference to a self-assessment grid taken from the Common European Framework. It consists of three parts: a language passport, a language biography and a dossier. The 'passport' gives a summary overview of competence in each language, by self-assessment backed up by whatever qualifications may have been obtained. The language biography goes further and encourages learners to actually write down all the experiences of language learning, as well as cultural experiences, most of which may well be informal in character but significant nevertheless, such as personal contacts with speakers of other languages, school projects, exchanges, work experience, a term spent in a school abroad, a radio or television course followed but with no examination attached to it. This means that the contribution to plurilingual competence made by experiences of many different kinds in several different languages can be set down and referred to when anyone wants to get the full picture of the breadth of a person's language and cultural experience. The language dossier can contain whatever the holder cares to put in it: samples of work done; an essay, a poem, a piece of translation, an actual project or a contribution to a project, an account of an exchange visit, a correspondence. Of course, the nature of the dossier is likely to change as learning progresses and the holder becomes older and more experienced. Indeed, different portfolios are envisaged for younger children, secondary school pupils, students and adults. Of course, anyone can compile a record of this kind. However, the Council of Europe logo and the name 'European Language Portfolio' are protected and proposals to issue a document to holders have to be accepted by a Validation body as complying with criteria laid down by the Council of Europe. For example, all recognised portfolios contain provision for self-assessment according to the Fifteen countries were involved in the initial piloting. Many more are now developing models. The co-ordinator for developments in Germany is Eike Thürmann, of the Landesinstitut für Sprache in Soest, from whom further information is available. A model has already been validated and approved for use in Nordrhein-Westfalen. I see no reason why it, or a similar model, should not be adopted in all German Länder.

So, the time for a real advance in plurilingual, pluricultural, life-long language learning, teaching and use seem to be ripe here and across our Continent. Conditions are favourable and if the will is there, the means are at hand. It remains for me only to wish every success to all those who have worked hard to prepare this Conference and above all to a new generation, who will in their turn stand, as we have done, on the shoulders of their predecessors, taking our achievements for granted and doing their best to repair our mistakes