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Reflective teacher professionalism in foreign language education: enhancing professional growth through ELP-oriented pedagogy

Teaching is like an ice-cube – it evaporates in room temperature

I wish to begin my contribution with this quote from Lee Shulman that I remember noting down in his talk at an international teacher conference in California in the late 1980s. I see the metaphor as referring to the busy schedules of classes during the school day, with one class leaving for recess and a new class arriving after a short break, requesting again the teacher's full attention. By the end of a busy day, the teacher's mind is buzzing with a myriad of events, experiences and feelings arising from the numerous encounters, and it may be difficult to make sense of them afterwards: teaching kind of evaporates in the classroom air in the hectic flow of the day's work.

The evaporation of teaching experiences can be counteracted by goal-oriented professional reflection in detachment. To reflect on one's teaching, it is necessary to set aside some time for thinking, choose a place where one is able to concentrate on reflection without being distracted by other engagements – literally, one needs to stop to think. In language education, such reflection may deal with the language teaching goals, as part of wider educational goals, as well as the curriculum contents and the pedagogical processes in the given classroom context. Teacher professionalism can be enhanced through personal reflection and sharing of thoughts and feelings with colleagues, whether informally over a cup of coffee or in more formal contexts such as agreed appointments and collegial seminars.

In this contribution I will discuss these issues in the context of two recent initiatives in foreign language education launched by the Council of Europe: the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR 2001) and the *European Language Portfolio* (ELP 2000/2011), with reference to foreign language education in Finland.

1. Intercultural communicative competence in language education:
the CEFR and the ELP

The CEFR (2001) has consistently emphasized reflective learner autonomy and plurilingualism and pluriculturalism as goals in foreign language teaching. It proposes an action-oriented pedagogical approach based on the language user's underlying *existential competence*. In this view the learner is seen as an autonomous person and a social actor who uses cognitive, emotional and volitional resources and a wide range of abilities to achieve desired aims in communication. The individual identity of the student is constructed in this process through complex social interaction in an authentic dialogue between the participants. To promote the goals of democratic citizenship education for multilingual and multicultural Europe, language teaching is aimed at developing working methods that will strengthen „the independence of thought, judgement and action, combined with social skills and responsibility" (CEFR 2001: 2-4; Beacco/Byram 2002).

While the notion of autonomy suggests a significant measure of independence in language learning and use, it is balanced by the participants' social interdependence in the classrooms and real-life contexts of language use. Autonomy in language learning and use develops thus in an authentic interaction between the participants. It requires that students are facilitated to assume a stance of socially responsible language learning in their foreign language study whereby responsibility is shifted to them progressively as appropriate to their age, study skills and proficiency in the target language.

The goal of *intercultural communicative* competence in language education emphasizes reflection, interaction, and emotional and social learning as inherent elements in authentic communication. It focuses on the student's personal identity, social abilities and attitudes, such as risk-taking, openness to ambiguity, and respect for cultural and individual diversity (CEFR 2001; Little 2001; Kaikkonen 2001, 2002; Kohonen 2001, 2007, 2012).

Based on the CEFR, the *European Language Portfolio* (ELP) provides essential concepts and practical tools for translating the educational paradigm into pedagogical action. It is a resource for developing, and a format for documenting, the language user's progress towards achieving the goals of the CEFR, manifest in the principles that constitute the common European core of the ELP (Principles 2001/2011, 5-6). The ELP makes the goals of the CEFR more concrete and accessible to the participants in terms of what they are able to do in the target language in meaningful communication. Based on

classes. Through their capacity as professional language educators, and their educational discourse, they build the road of language teaching/learning as they travel along it together with their students. To help the students engage themselves in their journey for a life-long learning perspective, teachers need to encourage them to see themselves as unique persons with their own voices and capacities for true agency, and as language users and intercultural actors.

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