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ENCOURAGING LEARNER AUTONOMY: WORKING WITH PORTFOLIOS, LEARNING AGREEMENTS AND INDIVIDUALIZED MATERIALS

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Abstract

A teaching approach to developing learner autonomy in literacy classes is described. A focus on German as second language with a workplace-orientation is set. This approach is built on the use of a portfolio, the learner-directed definition of Learning Agreements and working with Learning Stations. The interrelated use of these instruments is described. Basic concepts that are fundamental to the approach are explained: heterogeneity, homogeneity, differentiation, individualized teaching, learner autonomy and teacher autonomy.

Keywords: portfolio, learner autonomy, teacher autonomy

1. Some facts about illiteracy in Germany

In 2011, for the first time, reliable data on illiteracy in Germany were provided by the leo.-Level-One Study (Grotlüschen & Riekmann 2011). The data show that the proportion of illiterates (functionally illiterate as defined in the level descriptions $\alpha 1$ - $\alpha 3$) is 14.5%, which correspond to an estimated 7.5 million of the total population aged 18-65 (ibid.: 4). Of these 7.5 million illiterates, 41.8% have a first language other than German (=3.1 million illiterates) (ibid.: 8; for limitations in the sample, see Buddeberg & Riekmann 2012: 213-214). Very interesting is the fact that 56.9% of these 7.5 million illiterates are employed (Grotlüschen & Riekmann 2011: 9) and that illiteracy among second language learners shows approximately "[...] the same extent as for people with German as their first language" (Buddeberg & Riekmann 2011: 216; see also Rammstedt 2013: 15-16).

Literacy among the immigrant population in combination with workplace orientation is therefore an important social issue that stands in the focus of the research program "Workplace-Oriented Research and Development in the Area of Literacy and Basic Education" with a funding of about 20 million euros for the period 2012 - 2015. The program is financed by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

Ineke van de Craats, Jeanne Kurvers and Roeland van Hout (eds.)

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Particularly demanding in teaching is the combination between oral and written language goals (see BAMF 2009) on one hand and workplace oriented goals on the other hand. This combination increases the usual heterogeneity in literacy classes for immigrants, as workplace experiences, skills and interests are different for every individual. Self-direction and self-evaluation of the learner's own learning process are therefore essential.

The project "Alphaportfolio" targets literacy teaching in German as a second language, and at the same time puts a focus on workplace oriented experience, competencies and interests of the learners (see "Alphaportfolio" in the bibliography for more information). It was launched in October 2012 in cooperation with the school for adult education "Internationaler Bund Bielefeld" and aims at the development and implementation of individualized materials. Working together with expert practitioners in literacy teaching, the materials were tested in six courses: two A1-courses, two A2-courses and two A2/B1-courses (for the description of the levels A1-B1, see Council of Europe 2001). The materials consist of a portfolio, learning agreements and individualized materials (for individualized teaching methods see Winter 2012; Hegele 2006; Vaupel 2006). One target group of the project is thus illiterate adults who are learning German as a second language and learning to read and write with a workplace orientation. The main objective of the project, however, is the formulation of hypotheses on how to use a portfolio and individualized materials in literacy classes (see Dammers et al. 2013; Feldmeier et al. in press; 2015; Kuhnen et al. 2014). Therefore, in addition to the learners in literacy courses, the teachers are a second target group of the project (see for first results Dammers in press).

An underlying starting point of the project is a concept of autonomy, in which both learners (for the concept of learner autonomy, see Sánchez González & Koch 2004; for a critical examination of the concept of learner autonomy, see Schmenk 2014) and teachers (see the concept of teacher autonomy; La Ganza 2008; Little 1995) must grow into the setting, realizing an evaluation of individual learning goals. Learner autonomy and teacher autonomy are consequently interdependent and can be understood as a learning goal for students and as a professional goal for teachers: individualized materials offer an opportunity to realize these goals.

2. Dealing with heterogeneity in class

Learning groups are always heterogeneous. Every attempt of homogenizing (for example by external differentiation within a course system or internal

differentiation within a single course) is illusive, since defining groups by a concrete factor (e.g. oral competence in German as a second language) will always neglect other important factors (Schilmöller 2011). For literacy classes with immigrants, the concept of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees defines three major teaching goals: oral competences, written competences and learner autonomy (BAMF 2009).

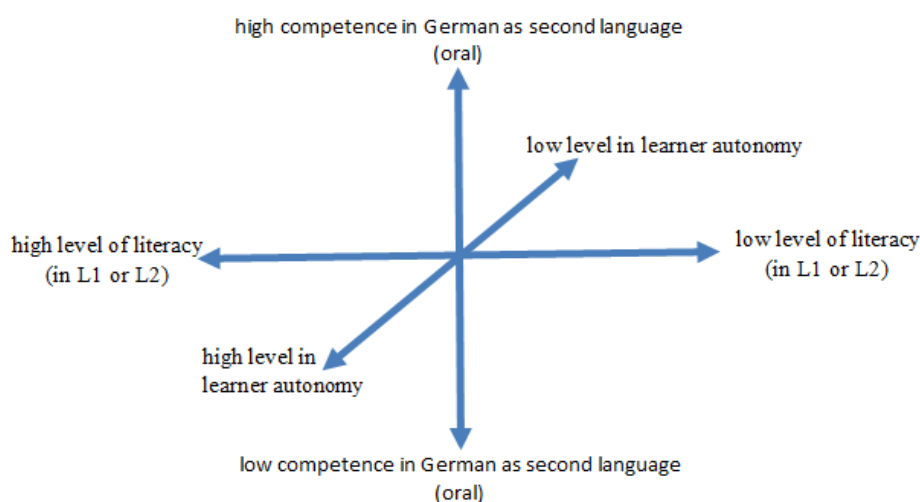


Figure 1: *Heterogeneity based on oral competences, writing competences and learner autonomy*

Figure 1 shows a three-dimensional representation of heterogeneity based on the factors oral competences, writing competences and learner autonomy. Adding a fourth dimension, for instance, workplace oriented language competences, would give an idea of the complexity needed in materials for individualized teaching. Working with heterogeneous groups normally forces teachers to make abstracting assumptions about the group, in order to adjust their teaching concept towards an idealized learner that somehow combines average features. At first glance, this seems to be the best way to go. Deciding, for example, which topics, grammar or orthographic aspects should be taught would normally be based on the middle section of a normal curve of distribution: an idealized average learner becomes the guideline for pedagogical decisions. Those learners who are too slow or know too little (or are too fast or know too much) would be addressed by the teacher through internal differentiation. At the same time, testing learners within such a setting means comparing single learners to other learners in the group (or to a baseline

in similar groups). A basic idea in this kind of building learning groups is that within a class, as time goes by, it will be possible to balance the differences between learners; however, this is only possible in reference to a specific feature, while simultaneously neglecting others. As mentioned before, for literacy classes in Germany three major goals are defined. Thus, the attempt to equalize differences might seem to be possible if we concentrate on, for example, written competences, but this poses questions about the oral competences and competences belonging to learner autonomy. Do those learners who may have been brought to a similar level in written competences also have similar oral competences in the end? Are they in the same way autonomous? Common sense should have us doubt that. In fact, for many learners the differences might even increase over time. Especially those learners with no schooling have to learn many things that are not measurable in a linguistic sense: how to hold a pencil, how to use it without cramping, writing along a line, orienting yourself within a textbook, learning in groups, finding a new social role in the learning process, learning new communicative patterns, and so on. Thus, many learners with little or no schooling use part of the time to learn widthwise. In the perception of the teacher they hence seem to be slow learners, but they are not. Another important point is worth mentioning: some learners have their own curriculum, which is not only different from the external curriculum (for example a textbook) in the sense that it has different topics, but also in the importance the learner ascribes to these topics. An example of my own teaching experience exemplifies this:

Back in the nineties I taught in literacy classes for women. They all were non-literates with no formal schooling. One typical observation in these kinds of groups is that some learners do write without space characters. Every word is joined to each other, producing a block of words that is sometimes hard to decipher. I decided to help a woman by putting my pinky finger on her copybook to make sure that she realizes the space character. While doing that, I would tell her every time about the importance of leaving an empty space between words. As she finished writing a word I would replace my pinky finger to force her to leave an empty space between words again. Very patient, I did that for more than two months, emphasizing every time the importance of the space character. But, in spite of every attempt she kept writing in a block as soon as I moved on to other learners. So, I finally gave up, since it was hopeless. After three months she gave me a sheet with a text on it. I had to look twice to notice the difference. "You got all space characters in there! How is that possible?" I asked her. Her answer was astonishing and embarrassing at the same moment: "Well, I wanted to do it for a long time."

This example shows that some learners are quite aware of what they have to learn but have a different road map and different time table for it. Therefore, a Procrustean bed seems to be a questionable way to deal with individual differences.

Comparing learners with other learners thus is based on many idealized assumptions that can be problematic. An alternative way to that traditional concept of teaching is given when the teaching is supported, for example, by a portfolio. The portfolio makes possible to compare learners with themselves. Deciding what to teach to a learner will then always mean estimating the present competences of this learner and adapting every future step to it (see for example, the concept of the zone of next development Vygotsky 1964). Working with a portfolio offers an alternative way of teaching and evaluating and can complement traditional ways of teaching and testing (see for an adaptive test in literacy Bulut et al. 2010a; 2010b). It is not meant to replace traditional curricular thinking or traditional testing, but to establish a parallel counterbalancing system.

3. Learner autonomy

Like other instruments (e.g. counselling; see for that Markov et al. 2015), a portfolio works only if it is based on a certain degree of learner autonomy. At the same time it promotes learner autonomy. Hence, by introducing a portfolio, a teacher adopts a strategy similar to a “zipper”. He or she encourages the learners to develop learner autonomy, while he/she uses the learner autonomy at the same time in class. As Little defines:

The basis of learner autonomy is that the learner accepts responsibility for his or her learning. This acceptance of responsibility has both socio-affective and cognitive implications: it entails at once a positive attitude to learning and the development of a capacity to reflect on the content and process of learning with a view to bringing them as far as possible under conscious control.

(Little 1995: 175)

Being able to take responsibility for one’s own learning process is not a competence given at birth. It has to be learned and is therefore not only an instrument in the hand of a teacher but a pedagogical goal that can be described with a progression line. And, as is the case with many other didactic goals, it can easily become challenging or unchallenging for learners if introduced improperly.

4. Teacher autonomy: dealing with conflicting concepts of teaching and learning

Addressing learner autonomy can pose a challenge to many teachers. Not only one's own teaching and learning concepts, but many other different concepts have to be re-evaluated and harmonized. Figure 2 shows some of the concepts that need to be considered (see Feldmeier 2010; La Ganza 2008; Little 1995). These are the teaching and learning concepts in:

- the official curriculum (e.g. of the government)
- the „philosophy“ of your school (e.g. own school curriculum)
- the teaching materials (i.e. of the developer of a textbook)
- the tests (e.g. a standardized B1-test)
- the head of a teacher
- the head of a learner.

Therefore, a teacher has to overview all concepts that somehow affect his teaching and bear in mind that some of these concepts do usually conflict with each other. Take, for example, the Common European Framework of Reference of Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe 2001). One very important pillar of this framework is the concept of mediation that suggests connecting any competences in different languages in a systematic way. After its publication in 2001, many editorials published new teaching materials based on the CEFR, but omitted mediation as a major goal. This is an example of differing concepts: the CEFR, an official curriculum based on it and the concept of the teaching materials conflict with each other. Such divergences are quite usual and are a source of problems in class. One might think that the most important concept is the one inside the head of the teacher, since he is the one who will decide what happens in the classroom. But, if we think about the reactions of learners, who could lose interest and eventually drop out of class, we see that the concept inside the learner's head is also very important. While working with a textbook in the classroom, a teacher might decide to skip some pages or units because these pages conflict with his or her own concepts of teaching and learning. He then imposes his own concepts over the concepts of the textbook. Inexperienced teachers might, on the other hand, rely too much on the concept of a textbook, forgetting about the goals described in an official curriculum. Another example is the conflict that may exist between the concepts of tests and a curriculum, leading to wash back effects (Aldersen & Wall 1993; Shawcross undated).

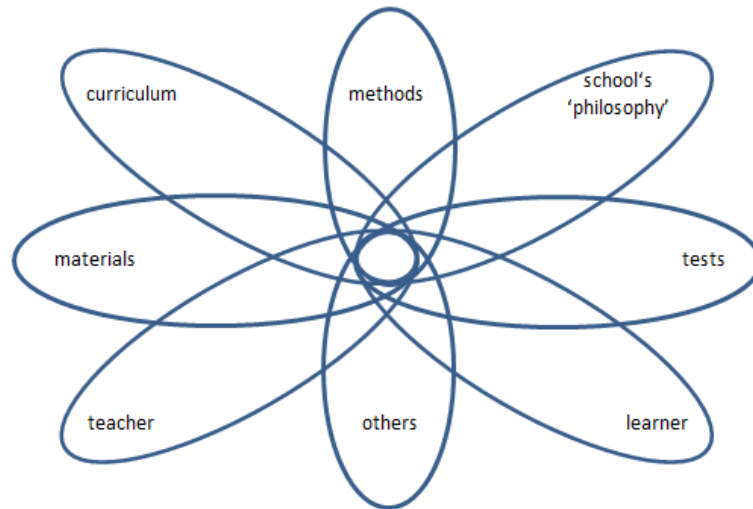


Figure 2: *Different types of concepts that affect teaching*

Figure 2 shows a classroom situation pictured by the inner circle. Professional teaching is expected to enable to balance and counterbalance these concepts in a way that it leads to an optimized teaching and learning in classroom. Such a reflecting teacher reminds of the concept of teacher autonomy as described by Little 1995:

Genuinely successful teachers have always been autonomous in the sense of having a strong sense of personal responsibility for their teaching, exercising via continuous reflection and analysis the highest possible degree of affective and cognitive control of the teaching process, and exploiting the freedom that this confers. (Little 1995: 179)

In the same vein, dealing with the different concepts in classroom depicted in Figure 2 also applies for learners. Developing or promoting learner autonomy thus depends on teacher autonomy as Little points out: “[...] if [...] learner autonomy and teacher autonomy are interdependent then the promotion of learner autonomy depends on the promotion of teacher autonomy.” (Little 1995: 179; see also La Ganza 2008). With respect to the use of a portfolio, this means that learner and teacher autonomy are necessary. Using a portfolio in a systematic way will lead to a change of many concepts, predominantly the teacher’s and the learner’s concepts of learning and teaching, and is thus a challenge for both. Therefore, it is better to ease into using a portfolio than to introduce it in the classroom.

5. Individualized learning with a portfolio

One of the most important steps in dealing with heterogeneity is – as noted above – the necessity of individualized learning. Heterogeneity hence has to be understood as a resource and not as a problem. The point is therefore not to rely solely on the comparison between learners, but to accept learners in their diversity and to work with this diversity from the beginning. This also means that the effectiveness of learning must also be defined by the learners' own personal development: the success of learning should logically be done by a comparison with oneself. Especially when learners differ in a strong way from a group this way of teaching is needed (e.g. teaching „students with limited or interrupted formal education“ (SLIFE) in a mainstream classroom; see DeCapua & Marschal 2011; De Capua, Smathers & Tang 2009; Freeman & Freeman 2002).

Those learners who start with a very low level of competences compared to the rest of the group run the risk of being demotivated. Whatever their development might be, it would hardly match with the level reached by the rest. Thus, compared to the group, the development of these learners would seem to be very small. Making all learning processes visible during literacy classes, even those not related to linguistic goals, is the potential that the use of a portfolio bears. It is one possible way to be fair to learners, recognize and value their accomplishments in class.

When implementing a portfolio in class, it is important to work with it at the beginning of class consistently and regularly. Learners need to be eased into this didactic instrument in a very slow way (for problems in the use of portfolios in the German Integration Course system see Ballweg 2009; Benndorf-Helbig 2005; for similar observations about the counselling program, see Berndt 2011). It is noteworthy that some practitioners will prefer to work with a portfolio at a higher level of oral and writing competence, as a portfolio could otherwise be too challenging. This way of thinking, though, shows a shift in priorities concerning teaching goals, leaving the development of learner autonomy behind other goals: normally, the development of writing and oral competences.

6. What is a portfolio?

Since the publication of the European Language Portfolio (ELP; see Schneider et. al 2001) this didactic instrument has been discussed widely among scholars and practitioners. The portfolio is also important in the nationwide curriculum for literacy classes in Germany (BAMF 2015: 139-140), which emphasizes working with it as a way of individualizing teaching and fair testing (in the Netherlands

a portfolio was also used in the final tests; see the Red Book, Nuwenhoud this volume). There is a wealth of portfolios, so that at this point some descriptions and a classification are necessary. A proposal for a systematic description of portfolios is delivered in Winter (2012: 56). Winter considers two parameters to be relevant: the degree of standardization and the narrowness / width based on the subjects for which a portfolio is applicable. Figure 3 shows these parameters as a vertical and a horizontal dimension. The vertical axis describes the width or narrowness of a portfolio and refers to the variety of areas (including, for example, school subjects or topics) that are to be focused on with it. For example, a portfolio can be used in schools in a single subject (e.g. in biology classes) to address and document the learning progress during a two-week project (e.g. an experiment). In this case, it is limited to the theme of this temporary project. On the other hand, it also could be used to address and document the learning progress of different, related school subjects during the whole year (e.g. math, biology, physics and chemistry). The horizontal dimension describes the degree of standardization. There are portfolios that are designed without any standardization and thus will have a different structure and a different content for each individual learner (for a good example of this, see Nuwenhoud, this volume). In contrast, strongly standardized portfolios are characterized by predefined structures and contents (a good example is the ELP).

As Figure 3 shows, there are different kinds of portfolios currently being used in Germany:

1. *Portfolios for projects*, which are closely modelled on a generic theme and lead to a documentation of project results. They draw heavily on specific content that could be taught during one lesson.
2. *Portfolios for a school subject* can be set up to document the learning progress in one specific subject (e.g. mathematics). This kind of portfolio is used over the period of an entire course (e.g. one term). With it, the learning progress can be documented in the respective subject, using a portfolio as an instrument for summative diagnosis. Therefore, these portfolios can stimulate individualization teaching in that specific subject.
3. *Portfolios for different school subjects* that focus on the learning processes of several subjects. They document inter-subject learning processes and therefore may contain learning examples of every subject that is addressed with the portfolio (e.g., math, biology, physics). They also reflect personal developmental improvement alongside a curriculum.

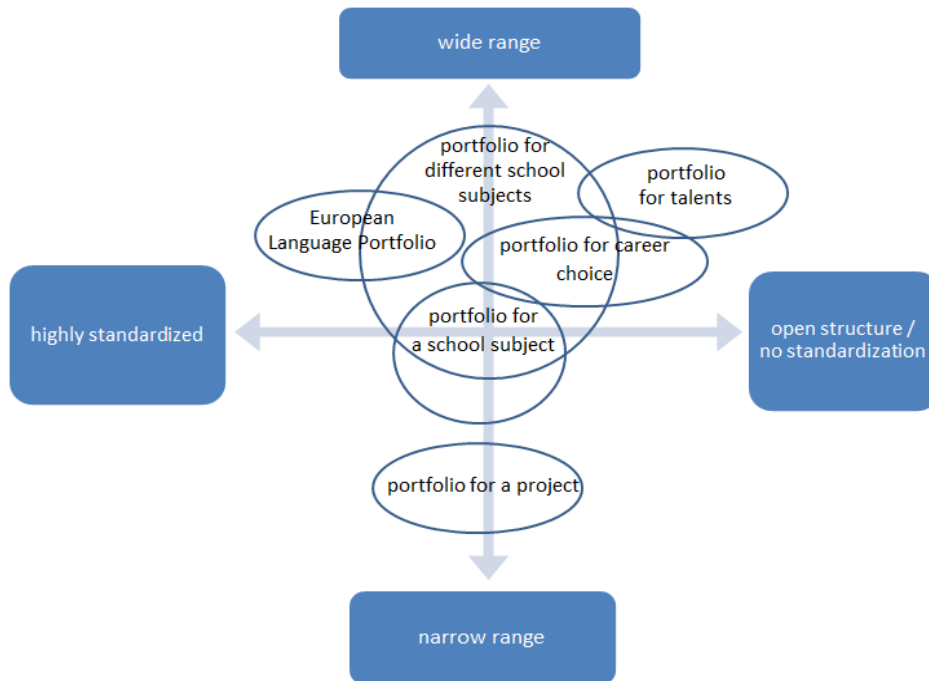


Figure 3: Examples of different portfolios that are currently used in Germany (see Dammers et al. 2015); figure based on Winter 2012.

4. *Portfolios for talents* are based on an open documentation of talents, abilities and interests. For this reason, a low degree of standardization is needed (see Winter 2012: 57).
5. *Portfolios for career choices* can be used as an application tool. They document professional interests and skills (for an example, see Pluzar & Haslinger 2005).
6. *The European Language Portfolio (ELP)*, which is based on the CEFR, focusses on learning progress and documentation of multilingualism. It uses standardized scales and competence descriptions of the CEFR and allows a documentation of formally and non-formally acquired language skills. It is therefore an example of a highly standardized portfolio.

7. Similarities of the ELP and the workplace-oriented Alphaportfolio

Using a portfolio in multinational learner groups makes standardization necessary. An orientation towards the ELP seems to be the right way to go, since it can be translated into different languages and used with different translations in class. Even with ten different languages in class a teacher will know what the learners are documenting if he/she looks at the original version of the portfolio. Since the workplace oriented Alphaportfolio was developed to be used in multilingual teaching settings, it has clear parallels to the ELP and portfolios for career choices. Figure 4 illustrates this.

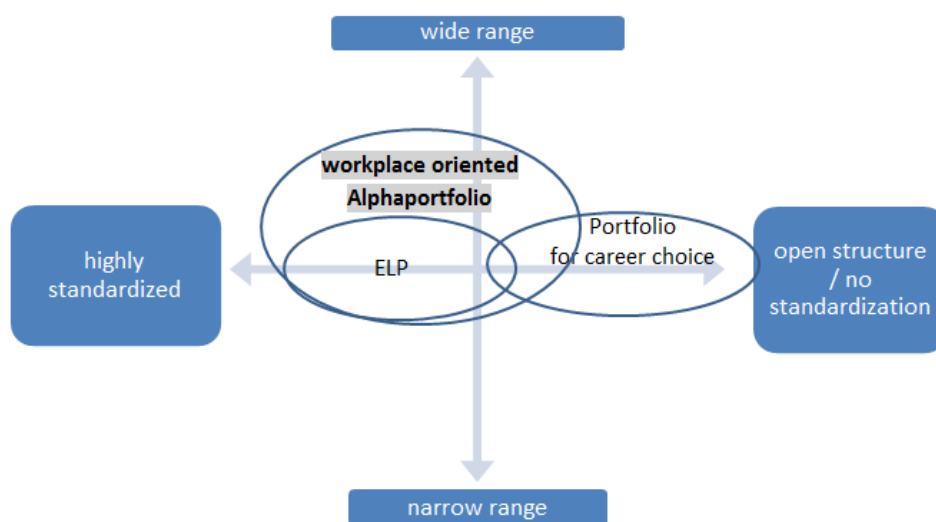


Figure 4: *The workplace-oriented Alphaportfolio within the dimensions width and standardization (see Dammers et al. 2015; figure based on Winter 2012)*

Figure 4 illustrates that the workplace-oriented Alphaportfolio shows similar features as those of a portfolio for career choice and of the ELP. Therefore, the Alphaportfolio can be used as a documentation of the professional experiences, skills and interests of learners. At the same time, its standardization allows the translation into different languages (Arabic, English, Greek, Kurdish, Russian, Tamil and Turkish) which makes it possible to use it in multilingual contexts. Since the main target group are illiterates it is oriented, but not based on the scales and descriptors of the CEFR. In addition to the documentation of professional experience, interests and skills it is also used to document formal and non-formal language skills (oral or written).

There are only a few portfolios for literacy classes on the market (e.g. Feldmeier 2012 for German; Stockmann 2006 for Dutch; see also Cito 2008) characterized by the typical structure of the ELP:

- the Language passport,
- the Language biography and
- the Dossier.

With the *Language Passport* learners can document their multilingual competences by a self-assessment. The focus lies in the linguistically relevant aspects of language learning as described by the CEFR: listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing (see levels A1 to C2 of the CEFR; Council of Europe 2001). Furthermore, the Language Passport is an overview of important steps in the language learning process, keeping records of intercultural experiences and acquired certificates. It thus serves as proof of multilingualism of a learner.

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The *Language Biography* focuses on the language skills and learning experiences in a much more detailed way than is possible with the language passport. For example, it reflects the development and use of learning strategies (see Bimmel & Rampillon 2000; Wolf 2006), of non-formal language related experiences or of personal learning goals. The language biography also allows setting and keeping track of individual learning goals.

The *Dossier* is a folder where the learner collects examples and products of his/her learning process. It may contain the best examples; used in this way it is similar to the portfolio of an artist and contains the latest and best productions. On the other hand, it may contain a chronologically arranged set of examples and products that reflect different developmental and learning stages (e.g. different versions of an application for employment); used in this way, the dossier can also reflect the individual learning progress. Within the workplace

oriented Alphaportfolio the Dossier is used to document in chronological order all Learning Agreements (for that see section The Learner Agreements) and exercises related to them. It also could contain the learner's own texts, spoken audio texts, video recordings, etc. It should be noted that like the other elements of the ELP, the Dossier shouldn't be used isolated from the Language Passport and the Language Biography. The Language Passport, Language Biography and Dossier must be used in interrelation to each other. The Dossier is not a folder for every worksheet done in class independently of the goals set in the portfolio.

8. Problems working with the ELP and other portfolios in literacy classes

Stockmann (2006: 152) points out that the ELP is not suitable for use in literacy classes. An important reason for this is the complexity of the language, and of course, the fact that literacy learners cannot cope with written texts like the competence scales of the CEFR.










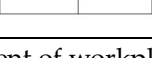








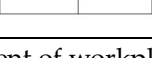





































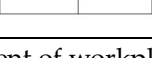














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Figure 5: Example for self-assessment (p. 61, workplace-oriented Alphaportfolio A1/A2; Feldmeier et al. 2015)

The use of portfolios in literacy teaching, therefore, implies is a strong linguistic and literary simplification (see Noack et al. 2013). Grammatical simplification is necessary: "I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and

people I know.” (see European Council 2001: 26) could be simplified to “I use simple phrases and sentences. I describe my home and my people.” In addition, it should be ensured that sufficient visuals are included. Whenever possible, visuals should replace language or at least complement it (for an example, see “Alphaportfolio von A bis Z”, Feldmeier 2012). One example of this in the workplace oriented Alphaportfolio are the self-assessments of language skills that are based on simple visualizations symbolizing three command levels (“thumbs up”, “thumbs centred”, “thumbs down”; see Figure 5).

The probably most important problem to be pointed out is that using a portfolio in the classroom – as mentioned before – will ultimately change the teaching in the long-term (Volkwein 2010). Working with a portfolio while trying to keep the rest of the teaching unaffected by it makes its use unnecessary. If a learner sets a goal in the Learner Biography, for instance “I drive a car.” the teacher has to react to this goal. He/she has to find or develop suitable teaching materials for the learner, so that if one month later the learner reassesses this goal, he will have a chance to see a progression. Thus, setting goals without any pedagogical reaction of the teacher is pointless. Defining individual goals leads to a lot of work for the teacher if the needed teaching materials are not available.

9. The workplace-oriented Alphaportfolio, the learning agreements and the learning stations

The problems described above made the development of further materials essential, since just offering a workplace oriented portfolio to teachers wouldn't be enough. Most teachers would be overwhelmed by the workload that would follow after implementing the portfolio. Therefore, adequate teaching materials apt for individualized learning were also developed (see section about the Learning Stations). The materials form a system and are composed of three components: the Workplace oriented Alphaportfolio, the Learning Agreements and the Learning Stations. In principle, it is possible to use these components individually in class, but this could hinder or reduce the development of learner autonomy (see Schmenk 2014). In the following section, these three instruments are described (see for more information about the materials <http://www.uni-muenster.de/Germanistik/alphaportfolio/download.html>).

9.1. The workplace-oriented Alphaportfolio

As mentioned before, the structure of the Alphaportfolio resembles the structure of the ELP or similar portfolios (Schneider et al 2001; Milestone portfolio 2003a; 2003b; Language and Qualification Portfolio 2005a; 2005b; DVV 2006; see for a portfolio for teachers Newby et. al undated). For this reason the Alphaportfolio consists of a Language Passport, Language Biography and a Dossier. Within those parts different sections can be identified, such as "Me", "My Languages", "My Class" and "My Learning" (see Table 1).

Table 1: Sections contained in the "Alpha Portfolio A1/A2" and in the ELP (see Feldmeier et al. 2015).

„Me“	personal data, e.g., family, important experiences, physical and personal traits, personal interests
„My Languages“	information about the language command, e.g. domains, learning dates and time, degree of command for different language activities
„My Class“	important organizational data about the attended class, e.g., other learners of the class, personal attendance list
„My Learning“	information about learning strategies, communication strategies and use of media
„Dossier“	examples of the learning process

In distinction to the ELP, the Alphaportfolio contains other sections that were added to allow an orientation towards the workplace. Table 2 show these:

Table 2: Sections contained in the "Alpha Portfolio" in addition to the sections contained in the ELP

„My Work“	information on past and present experiences in working life, e.g. needs and future goals, organizational information on past and present (work) life, important aspects concerning employment, second language and bilingual skills, interests and goals in second language and multilingual learning, domain-specific goals and interests and strategies for job-searching
„My Goals“	Information about job-related interests and goals, corresponding procedure plans and self-assessment grids

A glance at the Tables 1 and 2 could lead to the impression that 110 pages of the Alphaportfolio build a too extensive tool that could not be used in class. That interpretation would be misleading: it consists of templates that can be copied or

printed in order to compile an individual portfolio. The portfolios of every single learner will vary depending on individual experiences, skills and goals. It is definitely not meant to be worked through as this is usually done with a textbook. Thus, for instance, it would be wrong to share out one single page of the portfolio for all learners of a class to work on. Not every learner wants to work with a set of portfolio-pages and not all learners working with a portfolio want to do so in the same way, the same time and at the same pace.¹



9.2. The learning agreements

The Learning agreements (see Figure 6) represent the instrument that connects the Alphaportfolio and the learning stations. Learners define their Learning agreements based on their own portfolios (or/and based on a previous Learning agreement). It is important to note that after defining the Learning agreements, the learner has to work them off (for a more detailed explanation of how to use the Learning agreements, see section The learning agreements). Since Learning Agreements should be defined regularly, the working period is set initially. Additionally, the name of the learner is added (see Figure 6).

Wochenplan für die Woche vom _____ bis zum _____

Vorname: _____

Nachname: _____

Datum	Station	Fertigkeit	Aufgabenebene	Stufe	Aufgabe	Wie lange?	Leicht oder schwer?
_____. 2014				<input type="radio"/>		_____ Minuten	□ □ □ □ □
_____. 2014				<input type="radio"/>		_____ Minuten	□ □ □ □ □
_____. 2014				<input type="radio"/>		_____ Minuten	□ □ □ □ □
_____. 2014				<input type="radio"/>		_____ Minuten	□ □ □ □ □
_____. 2014				<input type="radio"/>		_____ Minuten	□ □ □ □ □

Figure 6: Learning agreement for the A1 level (see Alphaportfolio Wochenplan A1)




Date 	Station 	Skill	Exercise level	Degree of difficulty	Exercise number	Time? 	Easy or hard?
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Figure 7: Header of the Learning agreement for the A1 level

Figure 7 shows the different parameters that can be defined by the learner. In the beginning, the name of the “Learning station” (e.g., kitchen/activities) is noted. Then the skill (i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing) and the level for the exercise (i.e., phonemes, syllables, words, sentences, texts, grammar, cards or games) are defined. Finally, a degree of difficulty (i.e., easy, middle and hard) is marked. With this information, the learning agreement is set and can be worked off. In the remaining columns the learner documents the date, the page number of the exercise, the time needed and assesses the difficulty after he/she finishes every single exercise. It should be noted that just like the Alphaportfolio, the learning agreement is a tool for self-direction and self-evaluation. It is not the right place, for example, to learn spelling (that place would be the learning stations and/or the rest of class). Thus, at this point it doesn’t matter if the spelling of the name of a station is orthographically correct (“ktchn/acvteis” for “kitchen/activities” would be fine). It is also conceivable that a learner notes the name of a station in his/her first language (with a wrong spelling) or defines the station by gluing a photograph or drawing it. The only important thing is that the learner can interpret his/her own learning agreement, so that he/she can take the right exercises out of the learning stations.

9.3. The learning stations

The workplace oriented goals (with four learning stations per goal and level) for the levels A1, A2 and B1 represent the most extensive materials in the project “Alphaportfolio”. The total number of exercise templates excels 7000 (see Table 5). Table 3 shows the different workplaces that are addressed by the project.

As Table 3 shows, the levels A1 and A2 contain only jobs (workplace oriented goals) that typically are done by formally unskilled people. The goals 11-14 in the B1-level (still in development) are on the other hand some that require a formal education in Germany. Table 3 also shows that the workplaces in A1-level are contained in the A2-level and these are contained in B1-level. Every one of these workplaces consists of four stations shown below in Table 4.

Table 3: *Workplace oriented stations for the levels A1, A2, B1*

A1 level	A2 level	B1 level
1. garden	1. garden	1. garden
2. kitchen	2. kitchen	2. kitchen
3. warehouse / factory	3. warehouse / factory	3. warehouse / factory
4. sewing	4. sewing	4. sewing
5. cleaning	5. cleaning	5. cleaning
6. selling	6. selling	6. selling
	7. construction (help)	7. construction (help)
	8. care (help)	8. care (help)
		9. child care
		10. taxi driver
		11. goal (with vocational training)
		12. goal (with vocational training)
		13. goal (with vocational training)
		14. goal (with vocational training)
		15. generic workplace-oriented competences

Table 4: *Learning Stations within every single workplace in the levels A1-B1*

			
activities	hardware	places	labels

This is important, since every Learning Station has exactly the same exercise structure based on only one text. So, the text of any learning station at the A1 level is contained in the text of the same learning station at the A2 level and this one is contained in the text of the same learning station at the B1 level. This enables to work on one workplace but at different levels. A learner could work on the workplace “kitchen/activities” for the skill “writing” with syllables at the A2 level and for the same workplace on the skill “listening” with sentences at the A1 level. The differentiation of every single text is based on stations (activities, hardware, places, labels), skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), on levels (letters, syllables, words, sentences, texts, grammar, cards and games) and degrees of difficulty (easy, middle and hard). Table 5 displays the number of learning stations and pages learners could work with.

Table 5: *Learning stations and templates for the CEFR levels A1-B1*

CEFR level	Number of texts (= learning stations)	Number of templates in every learning station	Total number of templates for all workplaces
A1	24	84	2.116
A2	32	66	2.212
B1	40	46	1840
B1	16	46	736
B1	4	46	184
Total number of templates:			7.088

For the workplace oriented goal “garden” and its learning station “hardware” the text on the A1 level has 58 words in a talk between three persons. The equivalent text on the A2 level is extended: it has one more interlocutor and the interlocutors already appearing in the A1 level talk more. Table 6 shows an example for one possible way to extend the A1 level text.

Table 6: *Extension of the A1 level text to the A2 level text*

A1 level	Milan:	Hi Fatih! We will clean up the warehouse.
A2 level	Milan:	Hi Fatih! This house is Mrs. Meiers’ house. We will clean up the warehouse behind the house. Helene, we will check if all gardening tools are in place. That will be your assignment for today.

9.4. Three Steps to learner autonomy

As noted before, the Alphaportfolio, the learning agreements and the learning stations build an interrelated system. By using these instruments together, learner autonomy can be developed. The most important aspect is hereby reflective learning.

As mentioned before, the learning agreement is worked off. The learner notes the date, the number of the exercise and evaluates its difficulty. After that, there are two options:

- A new learning agreement is defined based on the former learning agreement. If, for example, one exercise was evaluated as hard the next

learning agreement could define the same exercise, but with an easier degree of difficulty (alternatively an easier skill or a lower level).

- The learner can return to the Alphaportfolio and reassess his development concerning the targeted workplace and learning station. This would then lead to a definition of a new learning agreement that has to be worked off (as described above).

10. First results

Very quickly, it became clear in the project that the literacy classes in an individualized teaching setting (e.g., working with a portfolio) was quite new territory for learners and teachers. This was expected, since many learners in the classes have little or no schooling experience (see also Ballweg 2009; Benndorf-Helbig 2005; Feldmeier 2010; Noack et al. 2013; Vogler 2011). However, the teachers seem to play the crucial role in the project. They were easily overwhelmed by the use of the materials. Leaving one's teaching patterns behind and letting learners take responsibility for the learning process was hard for teachers. It seems that teachers, more than learners, need to grow into using a portfolio and individualized materials (see also Dammers in press). Nevertheless, the results are considered to be positive: some of the students and cooperating teachers could make clear progress towards learner and teacher autonomy, while other learners' and teachers' adherence to usual teaching methods was observed. Workplace-oriented topics could be implemented in literacy classes.

After completion of the project, the materials are planned to be uploaded. At the moment, software is in development simulating the learning agreement and allowing printing of the defined exercises. Printing the materials in advance would be unnecessary. The project's results will be presented in September 2015.

Looking into the future of literacy training in Germany, further investigation into the possibilities of self-directed and self-evaluated learning is needed. This should expand the methods and individualized materials developed in this project (e.g., counselling systems for literacy classes as done by Markov et al. 2015; Markov & Scheithauer 2013).

Note

- 1 The workplace-oriented Alphaportfolio is available as a specimen copy for the levels A1/A2 and A2/B1 in German as a second language (the differences between the A1/A2 and A2/B1 portfolios primarily relate to the layout and linguistic complexity). Due to the overlap of these two versions at the A2 level, learners may decide whether to work with the A1/A2 or A2/B1 version. So far, the portfolio for the levels A1/A2 has been translated into Arabic, English, Greek, Kurdish, Russian, Tamil and Turkish. For the German versions there are also audio tracks available, containing the head information of every page (e.g. "This is me. This is how I see myself: My physical traits", see workplace-oriented Alphaportfolio: p. 5).

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