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European Language Portfolio for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People

TEACHER'S SUPPLEMENT TO THE USER'S GUIDE



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TEACHER'S SUPPLEMENT TO THE ELPDHH USER'S GUIDE

The purpose of this supplement is to take account of the teacher's/tutor's or other person's perspective on supporting the DHH user in adopting the ELPDHH in conjunction with their study of a language. Because the main User Guide has been written specifically for the needs and circumstances of the DHH learner, it is appropriate that it should also be the main reference document for their teacher, and therefore this supplement should be read in conjunction with the user guide, its focus being on pedagogic and administrative aspects of ELP use.

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1. The purpose of the ELP

The European Language Portfolio was introduced with the support and encouragement of the Council of Europe to enable individuals to build a record of the sum total of their language skills. The resulting document might be described as a 'language curriculum vitae', which may be presented to anyone with a need to know (e.g. a prospective employer) to demonstrate the owner's level competence in a range of language skills.

It is hoped that the use of the ELP will support such desirable outcomes as increased mobility of labour and tolerance and respect for diversity in languages. Indeed, it is also hoped that its use will promote 'plurilingualism' – the ability of increasing numbers of Europeans to speak several languages other than their mother tongue.

The ELP is expected to perform both a **reporting** and a **pedagogic** function. Not only does it provide a record of the owner's proficiency in languages other than his/her own, it is also intended that it will support the teaching and learning process in various ways:

- ❖ By using the CEF assessment framework (see below) it promotes a common awareness of a standardized scale of proficiency.
- ❖ It encourages the learner to reflect on his/her progress and preferred learning styles and achieve a measure of autonomous self-criticality.
- ❖ It stimulates an informed dialogue between learner and teacher, enabling them to discuss progress in relation to the assessment criteria.
- ❖ It validates intercultural experience and recognises intercultural competence as a skill that may often be further developed.

2. A very brief summary of the contents of the ELP

The User Guide explains fully the workings and rationale of the ELP, but there follows an outline of these for quick reference.

The ELP consists of:

1. **A Language Passport**, which is in effect a summary of all the linguistic attainments of its owner (the student), each attainment recorded using the six levels (A1 –C2) of the Common European Framework of Reference for Modern Languages. (CEF), applied to five skills, Listening, Spoken Interaction (conversational skills), Spoken Production (e.g. prepared talk), Reading and Writing. Both the Global Scale (broad summary across the five skills) of the Council of Europe and a Self-assessment Scale (providing descriptors of competence for discrete skills) are included for reference in the Language Passport. *(Please see the note on which languages are eligible for inclusion – Appendix 2)*
2. **A Language Biography**, in which the user records experiences of **informal** language learning (e.g. mother tongue or language skills acquired through personal contacts such as acquaintances or work colleagues), as well as **formal** language learning (e.g. in a school or training institution). It allows for the recording, not only of levels, times and dates, but also of reactions to the experience of language learning and of perceptions of how he/she learns best. It contains a task **checklist**, which is a breakdown of descriptors in the Self-assessment Scale into five tasks that meet the criteria for the level and should be the basis for tasks set for continuous assessment and against which both the learner and teacher may initially record what the former can do at any given point. There is finally a section in which the learner records his/her experience of **intercultural** encounters and how effectively he/she is able to interact with people of different cultures from his/her own.
3. A **Dossier** section, which contains the **evidence** of the learner's ability to perform language tasks at the levels recorded in the other two documents. The evidence may fall into three broad categories, **Simulated** evidence, such as is generated in a learning situation, **Witnessed** evidence, in which a suitably placed and qualified person attests to the learner's performance of language tasks in a real-life situation and **Certificates or Diplomas**, relating to qualifications awarded, nationally or by recognized institutions. The Dossier notes suggest a way of organizing and cross-referencing the evidence generated by the learner, though the teacher and learner may come to any mutually agreed system that makes the evidence easy to find. The final section of the Dossier is a **Language Learning Journal**. Here, it is suggested that the learner keep a log of learning experiences which will substantiate the Learning Experiences section of the Language Biography.

3. Introducing the ELPDHH to students

It is important that the ELP is **integrated** with a language learning and teaching course. It should not be seen as a separate aspect of the course which is artificially introduced, but rather as:

- (a) a reference point to which teacher and learner can go when there is a need for clarification as to the level of competence at which the learner is performing.

- (b) a record which is constantly at hand for noting important developments in the learner's proficiency, experience and perceptions of his/her learning process.
- (c) a focal point for stimulating a dialogue between teacher and learner so that there is a common understanding of how each feels about the on-going process.

Time should be allowed for the use of the ELP, but this should be managed so that it does not unduly interfere with the flow of teaching and learning. For example, to timetable a regular, whole-period 'ELP session' could be obtrusive. It is better if a few minutes are set aside regularly, with perhaps a longer session from time to time for general advice and questions and answers arising from the ELP. A teacher may also find that different time allocations suit different groups.

It is important that the moment for introducing the ELP to the classroom is well chosen. It is better to introduce the overall concept early on, so that it is perceived as part of the course and so that learners are aware of its purpose and general workings.

The order in which documents are first introduced, will depend on the patterns of assessment and recording of progress you adopt. Because the Passport contains a summary of attainment to date, it may be that this is left till later, unless learners already have past attainments, (e.g. certificates awarded) to record. The Language Biography, on the other hand, contains background information about the learner, such as his/her mother tongue or past contacts with other cultures, which could be recorded early in the process.

From your viewpoint, the first indications of progress and attainment will be in the form of tasks carried out in a learning situation and these may originate from the checklist of tasks in the Language Biography and be filed, when significant, in the Dossier.

All of the above suggests that you should (a) have a provisional strategy that is likely to work with your teaching approach and (b) be prepared to modify the strategy in the light of course parameters and students' preferred learning styles and rates of progress.

4. Assessing the learner, with reference to the ELP

Once you have introduced learners to the idea of the ELP and they have recorded any information that they have at this stage (e.g. previous languages learned or acquired and/or prior qualifications), the first actual use of the document in a language class is likely to be to record their first achievements.

Assessment might be:

- ❖ **Continuous.** Any language performance arising from a class activity or homework that is judged to satisfy a CEF level descriptor might be recorded against a task in the Language Biography checklist or, when the learner can, in your opinion, achieve this level consistently, in the language profile of the Passport (with evidence kept on file in the Dossier once the level achieved is confirmed).
- ❖ **Periodic.** Your teaching programme might be punctuated by pre-planned assessment points (e.g. a monthly test). Performance in such a test that meets a checklist requirement could be recorded and filed as evidence in the same way as for continuous assessment.
- ❖ **Summative.** Where the course culminates in an examination in which the performance on completed papers and/or an oral test demonstrates a checklist competence for the candidate, this can likewise be recorded and filed.

Of these three approaches, continuous assessment is perhaps the most recent and the most controversial, on the grounds that it is not always subject to the controlled conditions that apply to formal testing. Yet its very informality has the advantages that (a) the learner may perform more spontaneously if the stress associated with formal testing is not present, and (b) if judgment is based on a series of informally set tasks, a performance can result that is more representative of the learner's real proficiency than on the single occasion of a formal test or examination.

It is recommended that a recorded attainment for continuous assessment should be based on the learner's being **able to perform consistently at this level**. The **checklist** in the Language Biography allows for three levels of recording. The learner may record himself/herself as being able to perform a task (a) 'a little' (b) 'fairly well' or (c) 'really well (task achieved)'. As the teacher, you are invited to enter your agreement or disagreement with their self-assessment.

The point of having five checklist tasks for skill at a given level is to ensure that the learner's performance is properly sampled. Once the learner is satisfied that they have shown competence in four of the five tasks and you feel able to endorse their self-assessment, he/she may be considered to have achieved the targeted level for that skill. The 80% success implicit in this arrangement provides for some margin of error, while ensuring that the criteria are very largely met.

5. Choosing suitable assessment tasks

When assessing language proficiency, the teacher may use many tools, not all of which, however, are well suited to making a judgment against the CEF scale. You will see that the descriptors in the CEF Self-assessment Scale (Passport) always relate to the performance of a credible task, whether real-life, or, as in a classroom, simulated.

One may call such a task a **communicative** task. In real communication, several factors come into play: **Note the mnemonic 'PIFCO'**

- ❖ **Purpose** We do not normally communicate unless we are wishing to ask for goods and services, help or information or to share our feelings or opinions with another.
- ❖ **Information gap** When we do communicate, we do not ask questions to which we already know the answer. Nor do we supply information which the other person already knows. This 'gap' between A and B is a prime motive for using language and underpins 'Purpose' (above).
- ❖ **Feedback** In an interactive communication, e.g. dialogue, correspondence, we constantly receive responses that may alter what we say or write next. If told at a store that a product is unavailable, we do not persist in asking for it, but seek alternatives.
- ❖ **Choice and Context** In real interactions, what we talk or write about is not necessarily prescribed, as in an examination rubric. We have our own agenda, even if options are limited by, for example, a menu or list of goods. Furthermore, all manner of parameters, such as social context, weather conditions, our relationship with the other person, the solemnity or urgency of an occasion, etc, influence what it is appropriate to say or write.
- ❖ **Outcome** A successfully performed language task has a result relevant to its purpose. This does not always of course mean we always get what we had hoped for, but we would at least expect to show our awareness of this and react suitably. If the person we ask does not know where the nearest chemist's is, we thank them for their trouble and try someone else.

While the above may seem obvious, there can still be much reliance in language teaching assessment on evidence of attainment which is not 'communicative'. Various extremely useful activities used for verifying a learner's understanding of linguistic points are non-communicative. These might range from spelling and grammatical tests to check accuracy and understanding of tense-formation to cloze tests to check lexical knowledge or familiarity with the idiomatic language. Other assessment types, such as multiple-choice comprehension tests, do not actually mimic real life, but at least reveal whether the learner can listen or read with understanding.

Some test items begin to resemble communicative testing, but lack key features. In one actual oral examination, a candidate has to use prompts from a role-play card to simulate a conversation with a café waiter. What the candidate actually receives is a series of requests in his/her mother tongue which he/she must make in the language examined. If the candidate cannot request an item specified on the card, the examiner eventually gives the answer he/she would have given if there had been a request. We are already aware of three things that are non-communicative. (1) The candidate is being asked to translate a series of requests into the target language (which is not what happens in a real café); (2) The waiter miraculously reads the mind of the customer to confirm the as yet un-requested item; (3) In a real café, the customer would have a menu to refer to and choose from.

The checklist of tasks in the Language Biography has been derived from the (CEFR) descriptors in such a way that you, the assessor, may devise specific assessment tasks whose successful completion would be consistent with the relevant level of attainment in the skill assessed. These tasks are the starting point for actual communicative tasks which you, the teacher would devise, using appropriate contexts. (e.g. where the learner is imagined to be, to whom he/she is talking/writing, what the expected outcome is etc).

Let us see how a Language Biography task might be presented as a **communicative** assessment task.

Example:

Spoken interaction, level B1:

(a) I can exchange information with one other person about a simple and routine task where topics and activities are familiar.

This is a very generalised situation, so we might **contextualise** the task.

Learning context

On his/her business-related language course the learner has already gained some vocational insights into current office practice through the medium of the language learned. You, as the teacher/assessor will have prepared the role they are to play and you will not know in advance any of the information they will give.

Here is an example of how you might brief the learner for the assessment task. ('You', below denotes the learner).

Task context

'You are on a work-experience visit to an office, during which you will briefly interview a number of employees to find out what their roles and responsibilities are. Your teacher will play the role of one of those employees.'

Task outcome

You are expected to:

(a) Make satisfactory use of appropriate courtesies, form of address, greeting, leave-taking, etc

(b) Write a short report (100-150 words) in which:

1. You identify the person played by your teacher and note anything else they tell you about themselves (e.g. training or qualifications, length of service with the company)
2. Note their job title and what the job involves – routine tasks, key colleagues etc

Comments on the task

In this example, the task has a credible learning context (business language training). It is communicative in that the learner is given a situation (**context**); needs to find out unknown facts to achieve the report-writing outcome (**purpose** and **information gap**); will receive meaningful **feedback** during the conversation; and will demonstrate their understanding of what is said by writing a brief report (**outcome**). You will have seen that although the task lists things to find out, it does not provide a script for this and the learner is therefore not tempted to *translate* into the language used.

Additional outcomes

The learner not only demonstrates his/her comprehension of the answers given in the interviews, (by writing the report) but could also be asked to write the report in the language assessed, thus providing evidence for another competence (Writing).

Use of published courses

Most teachers use course books which provide assessment tasks and it would be wrong to suggest that you should not have recourse to what is available. However, it is well worth the trouble of asking yourself whether a textbook task is as authentic as it might be. Often the slightest modification of a task suggested may improve its realism greatly. For example, textbooks eventually become out of date: you might consider replacing a textbook reading assessment task about an item that was newsworthy at the time of publication with a similar item from a contemporary newspaper.

6. Recording attainment

Once learners begin to produce evidence, they should be encouraged to look at the Self-assessment Scale (Passport) and the corresponding item in the checklist (Language Biography) and reflect on which descriptor best fits the task they have performed. This is one of the many situations in which they may be motivated to discuss with you, the teacher, how their performance of the task meets, or does not yet meet, the level descriptor they are working towards.

At this point, they may be ready to record their success (one of three stages of progress) against the checklist item and here you may confirm, upgrade or downgrade their self-assessment. You are both entitled to disagree at this point, but it is advisable to wait till there is firm agreement before recording a level of attainment in the Passport.

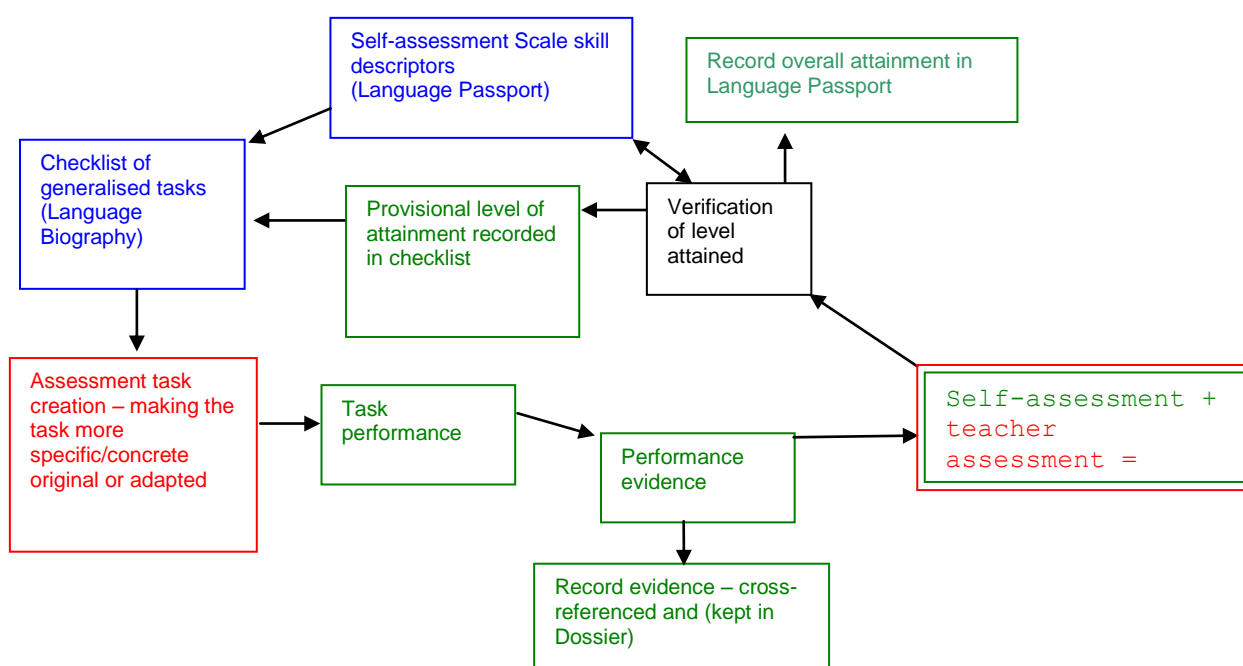
This may also be the moment at which they begin to reveal what it is that they most, or least, enjoy about their learning experiences to date. This might also lead to their wishing to record these feelings in the Learning Experiences sub-section of the Language Biography. Note that there is a questionnaire on learning experiences. Both you and the learner have the key to this (in the learner's Language Biography, after the questionnaire and as an appendix to this

guide.) The profile that emerges of the learner's approach to learning is intended, not as a 'label' for the learner, but to stimulate constructive discussion between him/her and you.

7. Building a Dossier of evidence

The Dossier notes are very comprehensive and a reading of this section should make clear how the Dossier might be built. 'Might be', because although a workable system of cross-referencing is described, it should be regarded as a template, rather than as prescriptive. Local circumstances and available technologies may determine your preferred system.

The chart below illustrates graphically the key roles of teacher and learner in assessing and recording. **Entries in green** refer to the learner's role; **entries in red** to the teacher's contribution to the assessment process in which reference is made to criteria (descriptors) (**entries in blue**):



The **Dossier** is simply the storehouse of all evidence on which assessment and recording are based. The Dossier itself, as opposed to the guidance notes provided, will be in the form of a suitable storage container, such as a wallet file or ring-binder, suitably equipped to hold both paper and recorded evidence on e.g. cassette or CD. It is of course also possible to keep parts of the Dossier electronically.

Each sample should be identified by a reference (see suggested system in the Dossier guide) for rapid location. The sample should be labelled with this reference which should also should be entered on the Dossier summary sheets provided.

It has already been noted that evidence may include:

1. Language performance under simulated conditions (e.g. classroom tasks).
2. Witness statements authenticating performance in real-life situations (e.g. in the workplace) and relating both to language proficiency and to intercultural skills.

3. Certificates and/or diplomas issued by a national Ministry of Education or other recognised Awarding Body or institution.

8. Working with deaf and hard of hearing learners

The emphasis in this specially adapted ELP is on acknowledging the different needs of DHH learners in a positive light. While such learners are subject to undeniable constraints, when compared with hearing individuals, there are few linguistic goals beyond their grasp, where favourable conditions prevail.

There are various references in the ELP itself to the circumstance of DHH learners which we do not need to reiterate in detail. A short summary will suffice:

1. DHH language learners will need access to a range of DHH-specific devices and modes of communication, according their degree of aural impairment.
 - a. The available range of visual signing conventions comes instantly to mind. For the totally deaf learner, one or more systems of signing may be his/her sole means of 'speaking'. Key constraints arising from this necessity are speed of communication (sometimes) and the need for direct visual contact (always).
 - b. In the case of hard of hearing learners various enhancing technologies (hearing aids, assistive hearing devices) may play an important part in the learning process.
 - c. The use of most of the above may affect the speed at which the DHH learner can participate in a language task and this should not be prejudicial to the assessment process.
 - d. Similarly, use of DHH-specific devices and modes may slightly increase the risk of inaccuracies or misunderstandings occurring in productive and receptive skills. If inaccuracies do not invalidate the outcome and are clearly attributable to the DHH-specific support these should not be counted against the learner.
2. DHH learners will be at a disadvantage when involved in any communication process in which there is a lack of visual contact of support. (This is acknowledged in descriptors.)
 - a. In Spoken Interaction, DHH learners dependent on lip-reading or signing cannot be expected to respond to interlocutors who are not clearly visible face-to-face.
 - b. In Spoken Interaction, while one-to-one conversations (subject to (a) above) may be handled well, discussion in large groups may be more difficult, especially where lip-reading is the mode of comprehension. Hearing members of the group will need to avoid interruptions and simultaneous contributions to the discussion.
 - c. In Spoken Production, members of the audience should take care, as in (b) above during follow-up question and answer sessions.
 - d. When listening to broadcast items (including PA), DHH-specific support must be available, e.g. there is someone present and visible who repeats to the learner what has been said.
 - e. When watching screened items, the DHH learner can only be expected to follow speech where the speaker(s) are fully visible for lip-reading or where DHH-specific support is provided.

3. The above having been said, the DHH learner can have the advantage over a hearing learner of having learnt to interpret more expertly the facial expression, gestures and body language of a speaker.

While the criteria (CEF descriptors) that apply to the assessment process make some allowance for the 'DHH-specific support' and constraints that apply to the DHH learner, it should be clearly understood that no concessions should be made where a task is simply not successfully completed. If it takes longer for a DHH learner to reach a given level, this is quite acceptable and not unfairly discriminatory, just as any learner of a 'difficult' language (i.e. a language having contrastive features alien to the speaker's mother tongue) would take longer than any learner of an 'easy' language (e.g one that shared many features with the mother tongue) to reach level 'x'.

Where a DHH learner's shortcomings in performance are due to the limitations of available DHH-specific support, and **not** to his/her lack of linguistic proficiency, due allowance should be made. (See 1d, above.)

All of the above should be noted, not only in the context of assessment, but also in the learning (classroom etc) situation. The planning of lessons should take account of the DHH-specific modes of communication, such as lip-reading or signing and such DHH-specific technology, such as hearing aids, as will be necessary for the DHH learner to participate as fully as possible in the lesson. Such planning will include:

1. Seating arrangements that ensure optimum visual contact between teacher and learners and between the learners themselves.
2. Optimum visual strategies to support presentation and explanation of the linguistic content of the lesson.
3. How best to include and situate such auxiliary personnel as sign interpreters (where the teacher is not able to provide such support, as where a DHH learner is attending a class of otherwise hearing learners).
4. How to make best use of DHH-specific technology such as hearing devices in the context of the planned lesson.
5. What DHH-specific modes of communication will be used by learners and when switching between these modes is likely to occur.

This being the first ELP to be designed for DHH use, it is recommended that teachers pioneering its use should make a note of, and share with others their experience of what works well in classroom practice, especially the integration of DHH-specific support into the learning process.

Appendix 1

Key to the learning styles items:

The learner will have responded to the 21 items in the section 'My language learning experience' Below is the key to interpreting the answers given. Note that there are two categories of items in the questionnaire (see below). The learner adds up the score for each category. If he/she gives a high score to each of the (a) items ('risk-taker'), he/she may end up with an overall (a) score of 44-55. There is a learner profile that corresponds to this score range. The profile provides the basis for discussion between you, the teacher, and the learner.

The learner is given this advice, followed by the scoring key:

<<(The resultant profiles) will help you to get a deeper insight into what sort of a learner you are.

The comments on each score are not meant to 'label' you as a type of learner, but more to get you to reflect on how you have studied so far and how you may become more effective as a language learner. You may disagree with some suggestions and this is not a problem!

Most importantly, these comments can give you the basis for discussion with your teacher on your present strengths and ways in which you can try to develop further.>>

Add up the scores for column A. These items relate to activities that tend to appeal to the sociable 'risk-taker'.

If your score totals 0-11 on these items:

You may:

- ❖ invariably 'play safe' when learning a language.
- ❖ always expect vocabulary and grammar and structures to have been formally presented and explained before they are either introduced for listening or reading or used for speaking or writing.
- ❖ always tend to prefer working alone and feel uncomfortable working in a pair or group.
- ❖ always favour formal, written exercises over informal, oral activities, unless these are highly structured and focused on linguistic points.

If your score totals 12-22 on these items,

You may:

- ❖ usually 'play safe' when learning a language.
- ❖ tend to expect vocabulary and grammar and structures to have been formally presented and explained to you before they are either introduced for listening or reading or used for speaking or writing.
- ❖ usually tend to prefer working alone and feel uncomfortable working in a pair or group..
- ❖ usually favour formal written exercises over informal, oral activities, unless these are to some extent structured and focused on linguistic points.

If your score totals 23-33 on these items,

You may:

- ❖ like to feel formally prepared for activities (e.g. some prior vocabulary and grammar input) but not be afraid of making the occasional mistake.
- ❖ while expecting some prior explanation, be prepared to draw occasional inferences in listening and reading and take informed chances in speaking and writing.
- ❖ be equally at home with private and individual work and interactive learning activities, though may want help from reference sources in the latter. Quite enjoy games as a learning activity.
- ❖ be equally at home with simple written and oral tasks as long as these relate to recently learned linguistic points.

If your score totals 34-44 on these items,

You may:

- ❖ be moderately adventurous about performing tasks in which you draw on prior knowledge that is not always recent. You are not normally deterred by the risk of error.
- ❖ be able to tackle receptive and productive language tasks without preparation on topics that are fairly familiar.
- ❖ tend to prefer interactive, lifelike tasks and activities to individual work focusing on grammar. Enjoy games.
- ❖ tend to prefer lifelike written and oral activities, in which you must rely on a wide range of linguistic knowledge acquired over some time.

If your score totals 45-55 on these items,

You may:

- ❖ be very adventurous in performing tasks, often with high risk of error. (You are a compulsive risk-taker who is excited by trying out communicative possibilities.)
- ❖ be willing to take part in all manner of communicative tasks needing a knowledge of unfamiliar language and subject matter
- ❖ much prefer interactive, realistic pair and group tasks over individual and grammar-focused work. Respond very well to games, entering into them in a competitive spirit.
- ❖ much prefer realistic written and oral tasks, in which you must rely on a wide range of linguistic knowledge acquired over some time.

Add up the scores for column A. These items relate to activities that tend to appeal to appeal to the quiet 'safe-player'.

If your score totals 0-10 on these items

You may:

- ❖ invariably take risks rather than check sources when using the language
- ❖ attach no importance to mastering vocabulary and grammar when you learn a language
- ❖ always tend towards outgoing learning behaviour, e.g be impatient to get on and conduct a conversation or play a language-related game, but dislike working alone with a textbook.
- ❖ always prefer e.g. informal, oral activities to formal, written exercises

If your score totals 11-20 on these items,

You may:

- ❖ usually take risks rather than check sources when using the language.
- ❖ attach little importance to mastering vocabulary and grammar in the learning of a language.
- ❖ typically tend towards outgoing learning behaviour, e.g be impatient to get on and conduct a conversation or play a language-related game, but be less inclined to work alone with a textbook.
- ❖ typically tend to prefer e.g. informal, oral activities to formal, written exercises .

If your score totals 21-30 on these items,

You may:

- ❖ only occasionally take risks when using the language, and feel a little insecure there is no reference source to help you.
- ❖ be aware of the value of mastering vocabulary and grammar when you learn a language.
- ❖ like to combine different ways of learning, e.g. you see the value of 'social' activities that simulate real situations, but also want the activity to be supported e.g. based on recent formal learning or closely directed. Quite enjoy games as a learning activity.
- ❖ have no particular preference for either e.g. informal, oral activities or formal, written exercises.

If your score totals 31-40 on these items,

You may:

- ❖ very rarely take part in a language task unless fairly sure of most of the vocabulary and grammar needed to complete it.
- ❖ be committed to mastering vocabulary and grammar when learning a language.
- ❖ tend towards studying on your own, clearly preferring formal individual rote learning of vocabulary or grammar exercises to trying out your knowledge in a simulated real life task. Not respond particularly to games.
- ❖ tend to prefer e.g. formal, written exercises to informal, oral activities.

If your score totals 41-50 on these items,

You may:

- ❖ always insist on researching all vocabulary and grammar needed for a task before being willing to embark on it.
 - ❖ be utterly absorbed by mastering vocabulary and grammar, often finding this as satisfying in its own right as using it in practical tasks
 - ❖ always rather learn vocabulary by heart and do grammar exercises than apply your knowledge to simulated real life tasks. Find games irritating.
 - ❖ Much prefer e.g. formal, written exercises to informal, oral activities.
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Appendix 2

Languages eligible for inclusion in the European Language Portfolio – specific issues for the deaf and hard of hearing.

There is an Appendix to the User's Guide in which Frequently Asked Questions are posed and answered on this topic. You should consult this. However, here are some general thoughts on the topic.

This Portfolio model does not specifically address Sign Language issues, which are highly specialised and might best be dealt with by a further ELP model.

The ELPDHH assumes that the user/learner will generally record competence in dealing with both hearing and DHH people. Indeed, he/she is more likely to encounter and wish to communicate with hearing people, unless he/she is attending an institution or event expressly destined for the use of DHH people.

It is therefore normally assumed that he/she will be communicating (subject to necessary DHH-specific support and constraints) in what is effectively a spoken language or its written form.

As you will know, if you specialise in teaching DHH learners, there is a wide spectrum of deafness and hearing impairment to consider. This in turn entails wide variations in the ability of a DHH person to produce speech, depending, for example on whether their deafness is pre- or post-lingual. Such variations tend to determine whether the DHH person favours speech or sign language as their principal mode of communication.

'Oral deaf' people may have only minor constraints when assessed in speaking skills, and provided the conditions are favourable to lip-reading, or suitable devices are available, can also perform listening tasks.

Profoundly and pre-lingually deaf people can only 'speak' by using sign language, or perhaps on the odd occasion, by reading/writing messages. One may have to accept in this case that the performance of certain oral-aural tasks is outside their scope for assessment purposes.

Because the performance profile for a language does not require the same level of competence across all skills (indeed, an ELP record may omit completely one or more of the five assessable skills and still be valid) no DHH learner is excluded from using the ELP.

The only instance in which a DHH person using the sign language customary in their language community (e.g. British Sign Language,) can be said to speak a 'foreign' language (a language other than his/her mother tongue) is if he/she has learnt the sign language customary in another language community (e.g. Bulgarian Sign Language). While a sign language user may legitimately claim their adopted sign language as their mother tongue, they cannot claim to have understood the text of a radio broadcast where this sign language has been used by another to interpret its meaning for them. They would, however, be allowed to make such a claim, were they able to read the sign language associated with the spoken language of the broadcast, but we must accept that we would rarely meet this situation.

A unique characteristic of sign languages is that they have a vocabulary and syntax of their own which relates directly to the concepts - notions and functions - they refer to, 'by-passing', as it were, the words of spoken languages.

It is the same for the signing of individual words. Only by using finger-spelling can one convey an exact 'foreign' word, rather than a concept. This strategy can prove useful in clarifying an utterance, but is obviously too slow for communicating other than very short utterances. (And the 'speaker' would have to know how to finger-spell, so would be an exceptional – usually a DHH - interlocutor.)

As a teacher of DHH learners, you will profit from prior thought, in the light of these notes of any assessment task you are thinking of setting your students.