
Piloting the Swiss Version of the European Language Portfolio
May - November 1999

Evaluation Report

December 1999

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1. Overview

Only a minority of the participating teachers started using the ELP before the summer break (July/August 1999). Most of them introduced it into their classes after the beginning of the school year (year of study) 1999-2000.

Around December 10th the introductory phase was finished in most classes.

The main instrument of evaluation in this phase was a set of teacher and learner questionnaires. The results of several regional meetings of pilot teachers were also collected and analysed. Additional information was gained from a questionnaire for cantonal coordinators, and from direct feedback from regional coordinators and other persons involved.

The teachers and learners using the ELP were asked to fill in a questionnaire containing not only the common European questions but also a catalog of "Swiss" questions (for a summary of the teacher questionnaires see appendix). The questionnaires were rather extensive, particularly the teacher questionnaire (~ 100 questions, some of them open). The teachers were asked to answer all questions to the best of their knowledge only a few weeks after first using the ELP in class. The questions focussed on several important aspects of the ELP and its use (the ELP as a product; kind and quality of teacher preparation; working with the ELP; compatibility of ELP and teaching practice; how the ELP was introduced; uses and quality of descriptors, grids and scales, etc.). This procedure was chosen in order to open up the field, i.e. to direct the ELP-users' attention also to those features which may be less obvious to somebody who is not very familiar with the ELP yet. Therefore the questionnaire was quite a challenge for the teachers. While it inspired many teachers, it obviously frustrated some. Generally, it may have added to the impression of some teachers that using the Portfolio in class was (too) time-consuming.

Some numbers concerning the survey:

Questionnaires were returned from teachers/classes in 18 cantons from all parts of Switzerland.

A return rate cannot be determined since in some cases the questionnaires were not sent to individual teachers and classes but to schools with the request to make photocopies and to have them filled in.

Learner questionnaires returned	~ 1270
Teacher questionnaires returned	101
Lower secondary	23
Upper secondary	47
Higher Education	23
Adult education	8

The Swiss pilots were originally planned to start at the beginning of 1999. Due to problems concerning the finalisation of the Portfolio in four language versions, the shipping of the first ELPs was delayed until the end of April and was finished during the month of June. Therefore only few teachers started using the ELP before the summer break. As a result a total of 31 teacher questionnaires was returned during the June campaign.

2. Results

2.1. "European questions"

The presentation of the results will be organised around a few **central issues** which were raised during the introductory phase.

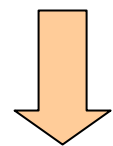
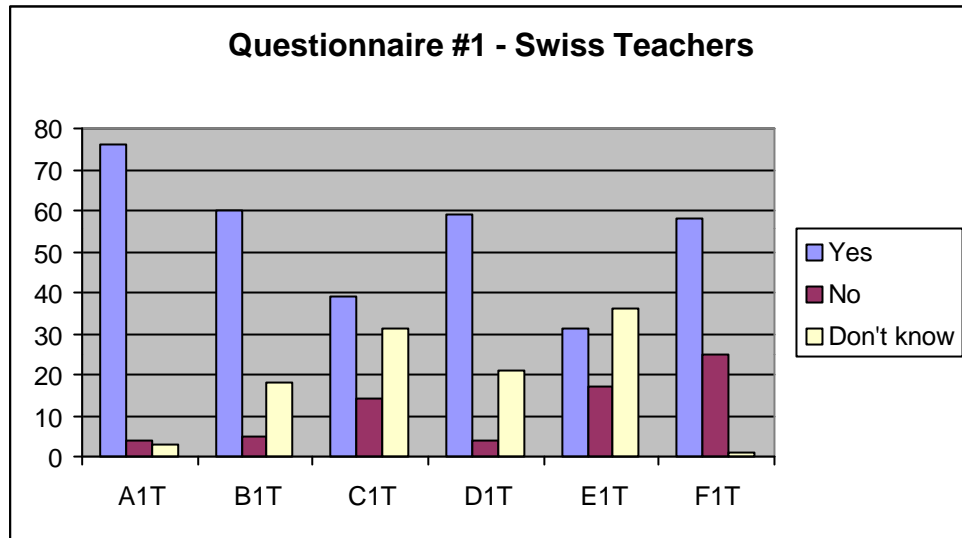
A first part, however, is dedicated to the presentation of the **summaries of the answers to the "European questions"**. The standard summary sheets will be used for this purpose. The (quantitative) standard summary of the learner answers is followed by an interpretation of explanations given by the learners concerning their respective answer to the question E1L "Should building up a Portfolio be part of regular class work?" The learners were asked to explain this answer because the results from the French and Russian projects had shown that the learners' answers to this question were generally not very positive.

Summary

Teacher Questionnaire #1

Swiss Teachers

Today's date 6/12/1999



	A1T		B1T		C1T		D1T		E1T		F1T	
Yes	76	91.5%	60	72.2%	39	46.4%	59	70.2%	31	36.9%	58	69.0%
No	4	4.8%	5	6.0%	14	16.6%	4	4.7%	17	20.2%	25	29.7%
Don't know	3	3.6%	18	21.6%	31	36.9%	21	25.0%	36	42.8%	1	1.1%

Contact address **evaluator: Peter Lenz**, Lern- und Forschungszentrum Fremdsprachen, University of Fribourg/CH

Number of teachers involved **>200¹**

Number of questionnaires returned **101**

Number of schools involved **~170**

Educational sector(s)/ type(s) **Lower secondary to higher and adult education**

Portfolio model(s) used **Swiss**

Target languages involved **French, English, German, Italian and others** (in this order of frequency)

Any special comment(s) **There is an unknown number of teachers and learners working with the ELP in the Ticino. Until November around 10'000 ELPs /Swiss version were sold. A few questionnaires could not be taken into account in the statistics of this report because they arrived too late.**

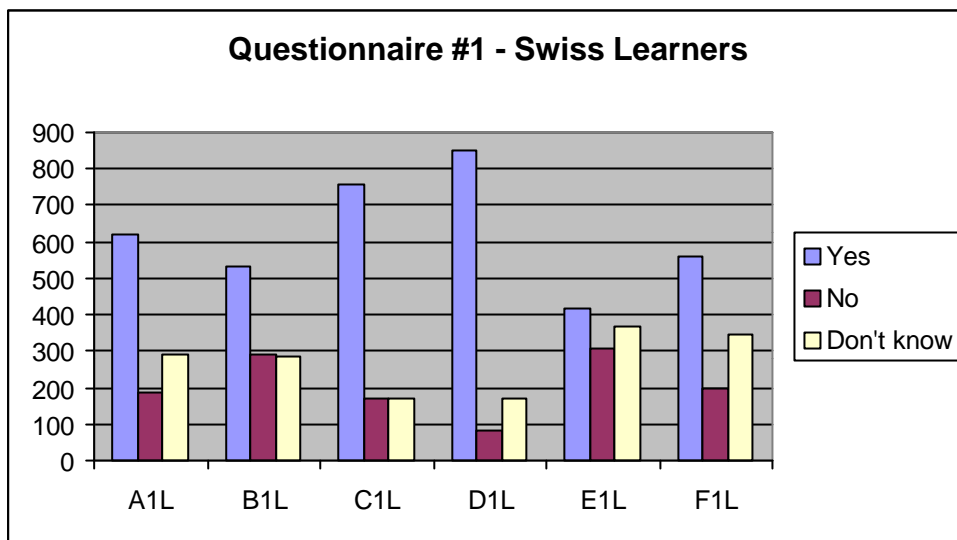
		Yes	No	Don't know
A 1T	Is the Portfolio useful in assessing the language competence of your learners?	76	4	3
B 1T	Does the Portfolio help you make the learning objectives clear to your learners?	60	5	18
C 1T	Does the Portfolio help you involve your learners actively in the learning process?	39	14	31
D 1T	Are the learners able to assess themselves with the help of the Portfolio?	59	4	21
E 1T	Does the Portfolio help develop sensitivity concerning the cultural diversity of Europe?	31	17	36
F 1T	Do other teachers in your school also use a Language Portfolio?	58	25	1

¹ Possibly many more. The number of teachers using the ELP in the Ticino is unknown.

Summary

Learner Questionnaire 1

Swiss Learners



All Educational Sectors

Today's date: 06/12/99

	A1L		B1L		C1L		D1L		E1L		F1L	
Yes	621	56.5%	532	48.0%	760	68.9%	848	77.0%	415	37.9%	560	50.7%
No	187	17.0%	292	26.3%	172	15.5%	82	7.4%	309	28.2%	199	18.0%
Don't know	291	26.4%	283	25.5%	171	15.5%	171	15.5%	370	33.8%	344	31.1%

Contact address evaluator: **Peter Lenz**, Lern- und Forschungszentrum Fremdsprachen, University of Fribourg/CH

N° of learners involved > **2000**² N° of questionnaires returned ~**1240**³

N° of classes involved > **250** N° of regions **all regions (18 cantons)**

Number of schools involved ~**170**

Educational sector(s)/ type(s) **Lower secondary to higher and adult education**

Portfolio model(s) used **Swiss**

Target languages involved **French, English, German, Italian and others** (in this order of frequency)

Comment: **There is an unknown number of teachers and learners working with the ELP in the Ticino.**

		Yes	No	Don't know
A 1L	Does the Portfolio allow you to show what you can do in foreign languages?	621	187	291
B 1L	Does the Portfolio help you understand the learning objectives?	532	292	283
C 1L	Does the Portfolio help you to assess your language skills?	760	172	171
D 1L	Do you find it useful to compare the teacher's assessment of your language competence with your own assessment?	848	82	171
E 1L	Should building up a Portfolio be part of regular class work?	415	309	370
F 1L	Do you like having a Language Portfolio?	560	199	344

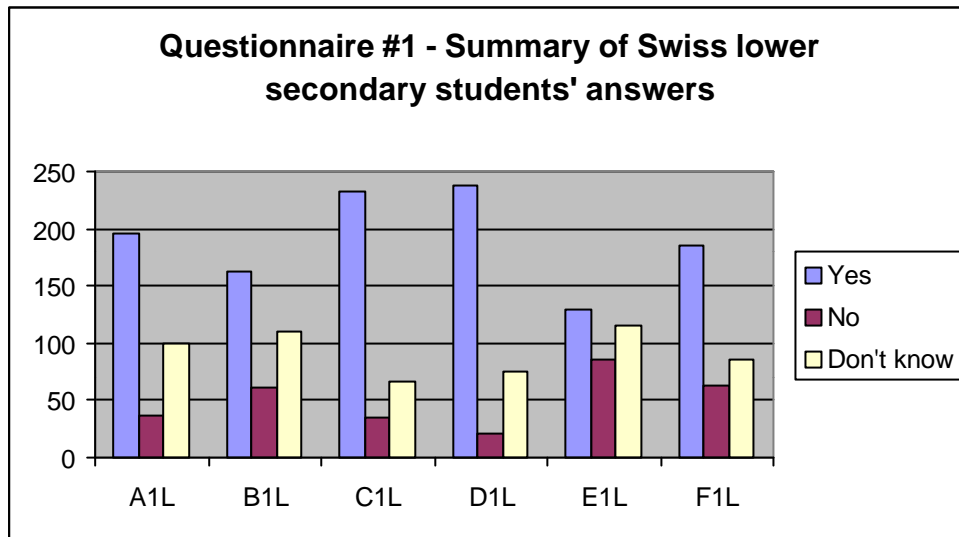
² There must be many more, especially in the Ticino, but their teachers never entered the piloting scheme. Close to 10000 ELPs have been delivered to users all over Switzerland.

³ Only ~1115 students are included in this overview; some 125 more questionnaires have been sent in too late for this report.

Summaries by Educational Sectors

- a) Lower Secondary
- b) Upper Secondary
- c) Higher Education / Adult Education

a) Lower Secondary (~337 questionnaires⁴)

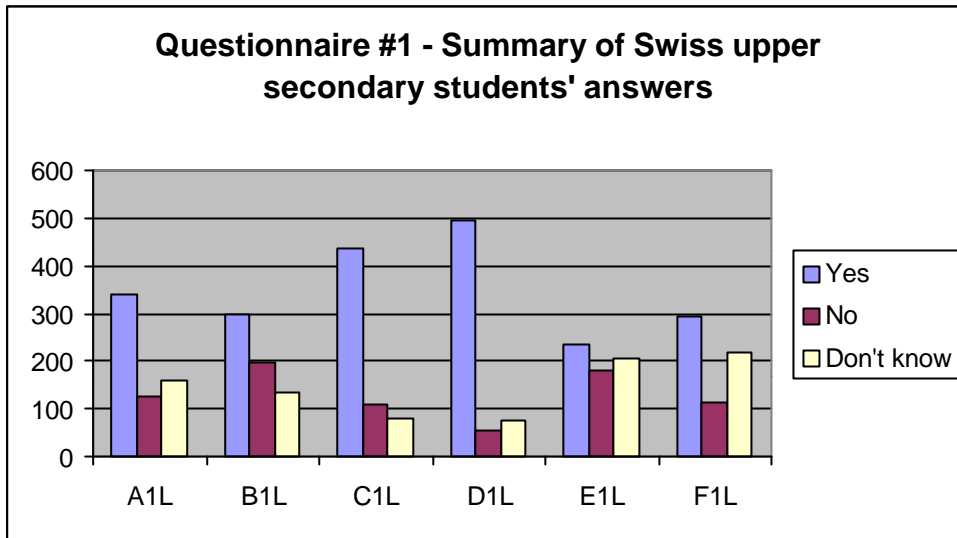


	A1L		B1L		C1L		D1L		E1L		F1L	
Yes	196	59.0%	163	48.6%	232	69.6%	237	70.9%	130	39.2%	185	55.5%
No	37	11.1%	62	18.5%	35	10.5%	21	6.2%	85	25.6%	63	18.9%
Don't know	99	29.8%	110	32.8%	66	19.8%	76	22.7%	116	35.0%	85	25.5%

		Yes	No	Don't know
A 1L	Does the Portfolio allow you to show what you can do in foreign languages?	196	37	99
B 1L	Does the Portfolio help you understand the learning objectives?	163	62	110
C 1L	Does the Portfolio help you to assess your language skills?	232	35	66
D 1L	Do you find it useful to compare the teacher's assessment of your language competence with your own assessment?	237	21	76
E 1L	Should building up a Portfolio be part of regular class work?	130	85	116
F 1L	Do you like having a Language Portfolio?	185	63	85

⁴ Inaccuracies due to errors in the class summaries. And some learners didn't answer all questions.

b) Upper Secondary (~633 questionnaires⁵)

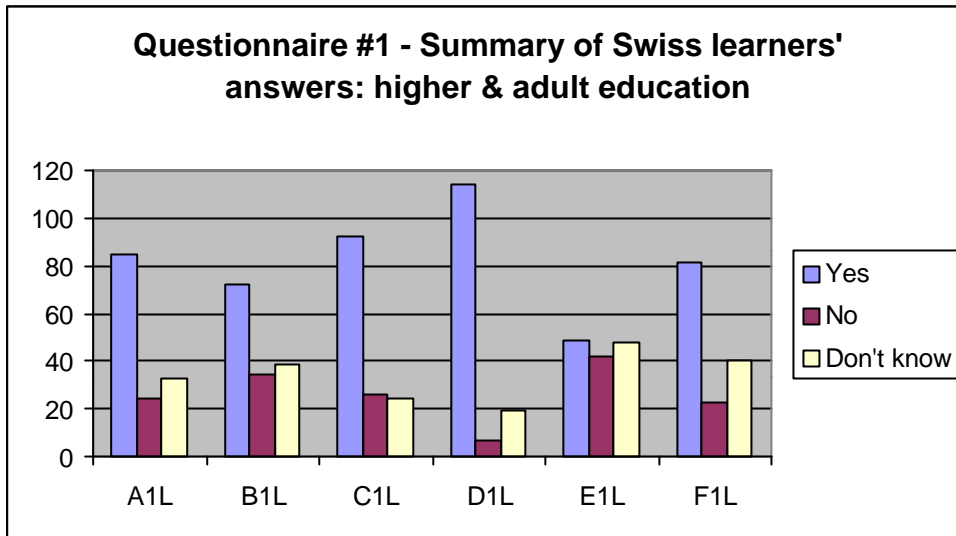


	A1L		B1L		C1L		D1L		E1L		F1L	
Yes	340	54.4%	297	47.3%	436	69.4%	497	79.2%	236	37.8%	294	46.9%
No	126	20.1%	196	31.2%	111	17.6%	54	8.6%	182	29.1%	113	18.0%
Don't know	159	25.4%	134	21.3%	81	12.8%	76	12.1%	206	33.0%	219	34.9%

		Yes	No	Don't know
A 1L	Does the Portfolio allow you to show what you can do in foreign languages?	340	126	159
B 1L	Does the Portfolio help you understand the learning objectives?	297	196	134
C 1L	Does the Portfolio help you to assess your language skills?	436	111	81
D 1L	Do you find it useful to compare the teacher's assessment of your language competence with your own assessment?	497	54	76
E 1L	Should building up a Portfolio be part of regular class work?	236	182	206
F 1L	Do you like having a Language Portfolio?	294	113	219

⁵ Inaccuracies due to errors in the class summaries. And some learners didn't answer all questions.

c) Higher and Adult Education (~88 questionnaires⁶)



	A1L		B1L		C1L		D1L		E1L		F1L	
Yes	85	59.8%	72	49.6%	92	64.7%	114	81.4%	49	35.2%	81	56.2%
No	24	16.9%	34	23.4%	26	18.3%	7	5.0%	42	30.2%	23	15.9%
Don't know	33	23.2%	39	26.8%	24	16.9%	19	13.5%	48	34.5%	40	27.7%

		Yes	No	Don't know
A 1L	Does the Portfolio allow you to show what you can do in foreign languages?	85	24	33
B 1L	Does the Portfolio help you understand the learning objectives?	72	34	39
C 1L	Does the Portfolio help you to assess your language skills?	92	26	24
D 1L	Do you find it useful to compare the teacher's assessment of your language competence with your own assessment?	114	7	19
E 1L	Should building up a Portfolio be part of regular class work?	49	42	48
F 1L	Do you like having a Language Portfolio?	81	23	40

⁶ Inaccuracies due to errors in the class summaries. And some learners didn't answer all questions.

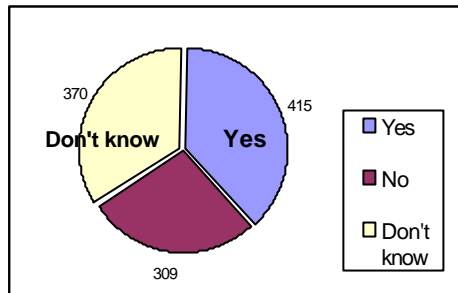
Learner Comments on E1L

(Should building up a Portfolio be part of regular class work?)

Swiss learners were asked to comment on their respective answers to E1L

- a) Comments on YES answers
- b) Comments on NO answers
- c) Comments on DON'T KNOW answers

The general picture presents itself as follows:



Concerning this point, there are only very slight differences between the educational sectors.

a) Comments on YES answers

(in normal type: examples of learner answers)

ELP is good and/or useful (various reasons)

- I think it's a good thing
- Makes sense
- Because it's useful
- It helps me learn
- Encourages reflection
- Good assessment of my knowledge
- Gives a good overview
- Comparable documentation for all languages
- It's important for the future
- I can find an apprenticeship more easily

Helps to see/assess/compare competence/progress

- I find it useful to know what else there is to learn
- I think it's important to see what one is doing
- I can compare myself with others, even from other countries
- Learners can see their present level and their progress
- Helps me learn better

Learners need a teacher / discipline

- There are things in the Portfolio that I don't understand
- I can take advantage of the teacher's help
- Without a teacher I wouldn't know if I keep it correctly
- Teacher's column [in the self-assessment checklists] useful
- Teacher can confirm my assessment
- I need to learn self-assessment

Teachers need to know about learners

ELP needs to be updated

- This way it's always up to date
- It's a more reliable document this way
- ELP might not be used outside class

Outside school pupils wouldn't use it / wouldn't work as well

- Working in school is more intensive
- I don't need to invest as much of my spare time
- Otherwise some pupils wouldn't care
- Pupils can be motivated to use it through regular use in class

It becomes more widely known

- If everybody has the ELP, everybody knows it
- The ELP is sth. that everybody should have in common

Yes, if it becomes more widely known

Why not?

- It's a good diversion
- There are fewer regular French classes that way

b) Comments on NO answers

Working with the ELP should be voluntary / left up to the individual

- This work should be voluntary
- Everybody should be allowed to use it in their way and under their own responsibility
- It's individual work
- It should be left up to the individual whether or not to use the ELP
- A private document should be worked with individually
- It shouldn't be obligatory

It doesn't need to be done in school

- Can do it on my own
- Everybody can do it in their own time
- It's perfect for working at home

It's not necessarily connected with school

- Some people learn languages outside school

Can do without the ELP / Don't need the ELP

- There are other methods of self-evaluation
- I know where I'm at without the Portfolio
- There are other ways to motivate students and encourage self-reflection
- A person who is motivated doesn't need the Portfolio

Time could be used better

- Time should be used for more important things like the language itself
- It doesn't have much to do with language classes
- PF takes up too much time at school
- A few hours were enough
- One could do better things, particularly in a funny and playful way
- It's a waste of time, pupils should be assessed with grades
- Writing texts neatly and classifying them is too time-consuming
- Wasting so many French classes doesn't make sense to me although I found those hours quite entertaining
- Learning should be our regular work, not evaluation

The ELP is not good enough / is not worth it

- PF is not useful
- Form and use should be clear
- It's too complicated (for pupils)
- It's boring
- It's unnecessary, it didn't bring me anything
- I threw my money out of the window

For occasional use only

- For taking stock from time to time – yes, but not for regular work

Not under the present circumstances

- It's useless as long as we're not a member of the EU
- I doubt its introduction in Europe
- I doubt that employers will know and appreciate it
- With so little time available we should use only parts
- It has to be developed further - then yes!
- In the present form it is in, I don't know what to do with it
- It should be introduced later, during vocational training

Various

- Teachers should fill it in
- I'll leave school soon
- I have no use for it, I'm 64 years old!

c) Comments on DON'T KNOW answers

Many arguments given here correspond to the reasons given for "no". They are not repeated in the following.

Don't know yet

- We haven't had time to pilot it
- Maybe it's not bad
- I haven't understood the purpose of the PF yet
- I'm not convinced that it is useful, but I don't know enough about it yet

What's „regular“?

- We need to check our level at the beginning and at the end of the year
- I think it would be very suitable as sth. like a final report but not for use in the language classes

The ELP is not quite convincing enough - there may be alternatives

- There are many positive and many negative things about the Portfolio
- Possibly it's useful but it's not the only way
- Could be used once or twice but there are more important things than a Portfolio
- It's important to know why you learn languages and to set goals but I'm not sure if this is the way to do it

Yes, but ...

- Maybe the self-assessment part, in contrast with teacher assessment
- Maybe it's not bad but I don't like languages
- Positive: PF gives you a clue - negative: not all aspects are covered (culture, knowledge of the country, connections)
- On the one hand it's quite interesting to work with it, on the other hand it's rather troublesome and complicated

Don't know whether the ELP / working with the ELP will function properly

- There's a danger of under- and overestimation
- What's self-assessment good for?
- Wouldn't know how it should be integrated into regular class work
- I'm not sure whether it is efficient or not

Tendency: Should be left up to the individual learner

- Using the ELP is a personal task
- I don't understand its purpose – one learns for himself, and I know just about where I'm at

Relevant for professional life?

- Is it relevant for jobhunting?
- Will it increase the chances to get a job?
- Will the employers pay attention to the PF?

2.2. Main issues raised by the Swiss evaluation

Overview

This section is based in the first place on information gathered by means of the teacher questionnaire and regional meetings of the teachers involved in the ELP pilots. The learner questionnaires have not been fully exploited, yet. The quantitative data of a few teacher questionnaires cannot be taken into account for this report because they arrived too late. However, some of the qualitative information provided will be used.

Globally, the teachers consider the Swiss ELP version a good and innovative idea. The analysis of the quantitative data shows largely positive results although there seem to be several problematic points. In quite a few cases the teachers apparently were not ready to decide whether a certain aspect was good or bad. The summary of the “European questions” above with its considerable number of *don't know* answers is a good illustration of that fact.

The following elements or aspects were particularly appreciated:

- a) descriptors, grids and scales (positively descriptive approach; usability for self-assessment and assessment by others; comparability of language competence; appreciation of partial competencies);
- b) the high importance of self-assessment;
- c) the ELP as a combination of the three parts *passport*, *biography* and *dossier*, each of them having specific functions;
- d) the European dimension of the ELP (common standards in CH and Europe facilitating comparisons and mobility).

The following elements or aspects were considered problematic:

- e) the physical appearance (size and volume of the file) and the complexity of the ELP;
- f) the integration of the ELP into regular teaching and learning (compatibility with regular teaching (and evaluation) practice; motivation of the learners);
- g) the unclear status of the ELP during the pilot phase (doubts concerning a Swiss- and Europe-wide dissemination; doubts about its future value on the labor market; uncertainty whether curricula, final exams, school policy etc. will be adapted or not);
- h) the use of the ELP on the lower secondary level (too demanding for 7th graders and non-academically oriented pupils; missing intermediate levels in the region A1 – B1; limited usefulness as a planning instrument when much is predefined by curriculum and textbook);
- i) the time pressure under which the introduction and the evaluation of the introductory phase had to be conducted.

Overall, the results from the different parts of the country and from the various school sectors are surprisingly similar although considerable variation can be observed between individual classes and teachers. However, the results obtained on the **lower secondary level** differ significantly from the rest in several respects.

In the following section most issues mentioned above will be presented and commented in more detail.

2.2.1. Positive aspects

Descriptors, grids and scales

The descriptions of language competence as contained in the Swiss ELP are the one element that was used in almost every pilot class during the introductory phase. The use of other parts (esp. Dossier) and instruments (e.g. forms) was often postponed. The self-assessment grid, and often the checklists, were used by most learners and the majority of the teachers.

In the teacher questionnaire many of the answers to the open question “What is in your opinion the **most positive aspect** about the ELP?” concern the descriptors and their uses:

- *the positively descriptive view of language competence*
- *the detailed description of language competence*
- *the common language of description*

- reliable scales and checklists
- reflection and clarification of present competencies and goals
- the transparency provided by the descriptions and the six levels
- the fact that language competence becomes measurable and comparable
- the comparability of language competence within Europe
- the checklists which can be used for self-assessment, assessment by others, and the planning of language courses
- the development of the pupils' ability to take responsibility through comparing and discussing self-assessment and assessment by the teacher

Some quantitative results obtained from closed questions in the learner and teacher questionnaires support this largely positive view.

Teachers:

A 1T	Is the Portfolio useful in assessing the language competence of your learners?	
B 1T	Does the Portfolio help you make the learning objectives clear to your learners?	
FL1-25	Does in your opinion a six level scale make sense?	

Learners:

C 1L	Does the Portfolio help you to assess your language skills?	
D 1L	Do you find it useful to compare the teacher's assessment of your language competence with your own assessment?	

While these results show a high appreciation of the descriptors and their uses, some other results show that their practical application seems to pose problems at least in some cases.

Teachers:

		all teachers	lower secondary school teachers
FL1-6	Is the language [of the ELP] comprehensible in general?		
FL1-79	Did your learners understand the descriptions of language competence (grids, checklists), and were they able to use them?		

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FL1-80	Were the learners able to assess themselves?		
FL1-81	Did the learners' self-assessment correspond to your assessment fairly well?		

Learners:

B 1L	Does the Portfolio help you understand the learning objectives?	
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Comments following these three questions as well as statements made at the end of the questionnaire and at teacher meetings yield more detailed information concerning difficulties in the concrete use of the descriptors.

It seems to be a fact that understanding the descriptors is a difficult task for pupils in **lower secondary** schools. Teachers report that (too) much time was needed for explanations and help. There seems to be a consensus among teachers that the Swiss ELP should not be introduced before the eighth grade when the pupils are around 15 years old. This opinion corresponds to what the creators of the Swiss ELP estimated. Some teachers doubt that it makes sense at all to introduce the Swiss ELP version into classes of weaker students on the lower secondary level.

Other difficulties concerning scales and descriptors repeatedly mentioned by teachers are:

- finer levels are needed on the lower levels;
- some descriptors are not applicable to pupils/students because the corresponding tasks are never performed by them (adult life / professional domain);
- Self-assessment sometimes differs from the assessment by the teacher;
- “descriptor-specific” or level-specific tests are needed in order to be able to tell reliably whether the self-assessment is correct;
- teachers cannot possibly *know* about so many details of the language proficiency of every single one of their learners;
- it is well worthwhile but *very time-consuming* for a teacher to fill in the teacher’s column of every student checklist;
- some teachers and learners are uncertain about the interpretation of “I can”: whether it means “I can do it no matter how” or “I can do it appropriately and correctly”;
- there are vague elements in the descriptors like “*brief*”, “*of a certain length*”;
- checklists are too detailed.

Self-assessment

The consequent promotion of self-assessment is generally seen as one of the main positive features of the ELP. However, at several occasions, the feasibility, reliability and particularly the efficiency of self-assessment is questioned by teachers and learners.

Self-assessment still seems to be something out of the ordinary in most Swiss language classrooms – this at least is the conclusion which one tends to draw from the following result:

FL1-64	Did this class have some experience with self-assessment in foreign language learning prior to the introduction of the ELP?	
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It seems quite obvious that the ELP will be used more successfully within an environment where learners are in the habit of evaluating themselves.

The European dimension of the ELP

One of the initial motives for the creation of the *Common European Framework* and the ELP was to establish transparency and coherence in the field of language learning, teaching and testing. Many utterances by teachers and learners confirm that they support this endeavor. It seems to be particularly important to them to have a reference system which is known all over Switzerland and Europe. The answers to the respective questions in the questionnaires confirm this quite clearly:

Teachers:

FL1-49	Is it very important to you that the ELP is introduced in more European countries?	<table border="1"> <tr><td>Yes</td><td>58</td></tr> <tr><td>M/less</td><td>10</td></tr> <tr><td>No</td><td>7</td></tr> <tr><td>D/know</td><td>25</td></tr> </table>	Yes	58	M/less	10	No	7	D/know	25
Yes	58									
M/less	10									
No	7									
D/know	25									

Learners (mainly tertiary level):

FS1-30	Is it important to you that the Portfolio is made known and introduced all over Switzerland?	<table border="1"> <tr><td>Yes</td><td>44</td></tr> <tr><td>M/less</td><td>24</td></tr> <tr><td>No</td><td>38</td></tr> <tr><td>D/know</td><td>25</td></tr> </table>	Yes	44	M/less	24	No	38	D/know	25
Yes	44									
M/less	24									
No	38									
D/know	25									
FS1-31	Is it important to you that the Portfolio is introduced all over Europe?	<table border="1"> <tr><td>Yes</td><td>47</td></tr> <tr><td>M/less</td><td>22</td></tr> <tr><td>No</td><td>36</td></tr> <tr><td>D/know</td><td>23</td></tr> </table>	Yes	47	M/less	22	No	36	D/know	23
Yes	47									
M/less	22									
No	36									
D/know	23									

Moreover, the European dimension has always been an important argument for the national decision makers to support the Portfolio project. It seems that their continuing support depends largely on a successful Europe-wide implementation within the next few years.

2.2.2. Challenges and problems

The physical form and the complexity of the Swiss ELP version

The Swiss ELP is the most comprehensive of all pilot ELP versions. It consists of a file containing around 100 printed A4 pages plus a passport booklet as an insert. Most pages appear double, once as forms in the appropriate sections, and a second time at the end as originals for photocopying. This makes it rather bulky. A non-representative sample of 133 learners (mainly tertiary level) shows that they are not overly enthusiastic about the file and the passport but quite like the graphical design.

Learners (mainly tertiary level):

FS1-17	Do you like the Portfolio file?	<table border="1"> <tr><td>Yes</td><td>45</td></tr> <tr><td>M/less</td><td>65</td></tr> <tr><td>No</td><td>19</td></tr> <tr><td>D/know</td><td>2</td></tr> </table>	Yes	45	M/less	65	No	19	D/know	2
Yes	45									
M/less	65									
No	19									
D/know	2									
FS1-18	Do you like the language passport?	<table border="1"> <tr><td>Yes</td><td>53</td></tr> <tr><td>M/less</td><td>53</td></tr> <tr><td>No</td><td>16</td></tr> <tr><td>D/know</td><td>8</td></tr> </table>	Yes	53	M/less	53	No	16	D/know	8
Yes	53									
M/less	53									
No	16									
D/know	8									
FS1-19	Do you like the graphical design of the Portfolio?	<table border="1"> <tr><td>Yes</td><td>70</td></tr> <tr><td>M/less</td><td>46</td></tr> <tr><td>No</td><td>13</td></tr> <tr><td>D/know</td><td>2</td></tr> </table>	Yes	70	M/less	46	No	13	D/know	2
Yes	70									
M/less	46									
No	13									
D/know	2									

The bulkiness of the Swiss ELP version has been criticised by teachers more than any other single feature. Sometimes the file was also perceived as badly arranged and too complex, especially for younger learners. – A few typical comments: (Question: “What is in your opinion the most negative aspect about the ELP?”)

- the weight, the complexity

- too comprehensive
- systematics was overdone
- the file is somewhat bulky and therefore tends to be forgotten on the bookshelf
- the handling is very difficult for our pupils (lower sec.)

The critical attitude of the teachers towards the bulkiness of the file did not become evident from the merely quantitative results of the questionnaire survey. One reason may be that the questions did not clearly focus on the contested aspects.

Teachers:

FL1-3	Do you think the form (file + passport) is good?		
FL1-4	Do you like the graphical design?		
		all sectors	lower secondary
FL1-5	Is the systematics understandable?		

At the regional meetings of the pilot teachers, the physical shape of the ELP and possible alternatives were among the main points discussed. Some teachers signalled that they were willing to make concrete suggestions for alternatives before the end of the present pilot phase.

The integration of the ELP into regular teaching and learning

While most pilot teachers estimate highly the fundamental ideas of the ELP and also its suitability to perform most of its basic functions, the integration of the ELP into regular teaching often seems to pose problems of various kinds. Overall, only a minority of the teachers believe that the time and effort invested in Portfolio work are well spent:

		all sectors	lower secondary
FL1-94	Concerning the use of the Portfolio: do the returns outweigh the „investment“?		

Also, only a minority really like to teach with the ELP:

		all sectors	lower secondary
FL1-21	Do you like to work with the ELP in class?		
FL1-29	Is it important for you to keep the ELP as a regular element of your language classes even after the pilot phase?		

The results of the “European questions” to the learners give a similar impression: the question with the lowest percentage of positive answers by far is concerned with the use of the ELP in class: “*Should building up a Portfolio be part of regular class work?*” (see above, chapter 2.1.)

How did teachers introduce the ELP into their classes? In the questionnaire the teachers were asked to describe and evaluate the way they proceeded. By looking at the descriptions certain patterns emerge. Most often the introduction followed a pattern similar to this:

1. presentation of the ELP, its background and goals
2. presentation of / getting acquainted with the parts of the ELP
3. self-assessment (scale, grid, checklists)
4. language learning biography
5. Suggestions for documents which could be included in the Dossier

In some cases the language learning biography was worked on before the self-assessment parts, but it was hardly ever done *instead*. Apparently, self-assessment by means of descriptors was considered by most teachers as the core activity during the introductory phase. Quite a few classes did not go beyond that.

In many cases (60%) the Dossier was simply left aside during these first few weeks. Some teachers recommended to their learners to choose among existing “products” or tests those that represent their present knowledge of a language. In only 20% of the classes, documents were actually put into the dossier.

When asked to evaluate their way of proceeding, most teachers give the impression that their way of introducing the ELP was quite successful so that they wouldn’t proceed much differently a second time. Many of them mention, however, that they used up too much class time and/or would need even more.

Despite the fact that checklists were used in almost all classes, in less than 30% of the classes the ELP was *also* used for the planning or fixing of objectives. This is an interesting finding since it may be symptomatic of a tendency to separate regular language teaching/learning from the ELP.

Some other results support the impression that there is a compatibility problem between the ELP and regular language classes:

		all sectors	lower secondary
FL1-20	Does the ELP fit well into your global teaching concept?		
FL1-22	Did you get new ideas for your teaching while working with the ELP?		
FL1-27	Is the ELP a suitable planning instrument for language teaching		

At several occasions grammar school (*Gymnasium*) teachers criticised an allegedly purely **utilitarian character** of the ELP which reduces language learning to mere language training while socio-cultural competence and the knowledge of literary books and traditions are not taken into account. Such criticism is probably not quite justified: if one reduces the core of the ELP to descriptors and scales, then, in fact, those competencies may appear neglected because they are not mentioned. They don’t appear in any scales for the simple reason that they are not scalable in the same way language competence in a narrower sense has proven to be scalable. However, other parts of the ELP allow for entries which give evidence of socio-cultural and literary competence. Moreover, the creators of the ELP never had the intention to *substitute* curricula of language subjects in grammar schools but to help to clarify and improve certain aspects. If, however, grammar school teachers feel the need to complement the ELP with specific tools, it would be useful if they could do that during the pilot phase still.

It will be interesting to see in what ways and how well the ELP integrates into regular class work in the different sectors later in the school year.

Apparently the **learners are not overly motivated** by the ELP:

FL1-93	Has working with the Portfolio motivated your learners?	
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But what does “more or less” mean in this context? Is it enough for the ELP to be “more or less” motivating? Is working with the ELP just as motivating as regular language classes, or is it better or worse?

The teachers were asked to describe the learners’ reactions at the beginning and at the end of the introductory phase. Citing some of these descriptions might give a good idea of the situation:

At the beginning:

- enthusiasm, great
- very interested
- positive
- curious, sceptical, interested
- curiosity and mistrust
- some are very interested, others not at all
- ok but we don’t want more work
- not very interested – reasons: resistance towards languages, the system of levels, the high objectives
- even more paperwork?
- hesitating, wait and see, disapproving, few really positive
- sceptical, “We want to learn something, don’t we?”
- too expensive, too complicated

After a few weeks:

- noticeably better
- a sceptical student has become a fan
- those who have done everything have a very positive attitude
- positive, as at the beginning
- motivation intact
- some still sceptical, others delighted
- they would like to be sure that the ELP is recognised in the professional world
- they found the checklists repetitive, so they are a bit less enthusiastic
- so what?
- too difficult for some of them
- complicated, tiring, bureaucratic, design unattractive
- doubtful about the practical usefulness in the professional domain

While the range of learner reactions is very broad, the most *frequent* attitude towards the ELP - at the beginning as well as at the end of the introductory phase - seems to be a **positive interest**. The ELP was originally expected to increase learner motivation considerably. Apparently, in the case of many learners, the present version of the ELP used under the present conditions often fell short of these high expectations. It will be interesting to see how this aspect develops over the months.

The fact that the ELP is being piloted and not yet implemented seems to have a negative influence on the pilots. There are certain differences between the present pilot setting and a setting in which the ELP has been fully (and successfully) implemented:

- the ELP is now normally used by one teacher per class in one or two foreign language subjects only, so that the workload connected with the introduction of the ELP cannot be distributed;
- self-assessment may be new to class and teacher;
- the learning objectives contained in the ELP may compete with objectives which are explicitly or implicitly given by textbooks, curricula, final exams or entrance exams to higher schools;
- the ELP is not yet known well enough, neither in the educational nor in the professional domain.

Not surprisingly under these conditions, teachers and learners feel that they have to invest lots of time and at the same time doubt the usefulness of their effort. Many learners wrote that they would like to go on with the ELP, but only under the condition that it becomes generally known. At one higher professional school and also in certain university language courses some students reacted rather fiercely when they were obliged to buy an ELP mainly because they considered it a complete waste of time and money, given the still-experimental status of the ELP.

Many teachers feel that their curricula and exams should be harmonised with the ELP. However, in this respect not all of them have the same possibilities to become active. Lower secondary school teachers are usually bound to their textbooks so that only a revision “from above” could change the conditions. Upper secondary school teachers usually have more freedom of choice. Some grammar school teachers are almost completely autonomous as concerns the contents of their teaching; they can even adapt their final exams as long as they respect a few formal requirements (e.g. length; literature part plus language part, etc.). However, in the present situation, changes have been planned in very few cases only. It may be symptomatic that forms No. II. 1. 3.2 and II. 1. 4, which can be used to describe exams, are hardly known among the teachers.

2.3. Various issues and observations

Some institutions involved in the pilots have decided to integrate the ELP more fully despite its still uncertain status:

- At the recently re-organised professional colleges of the canton of Ticino all foreign language requirements were defined in terms of the Council of Europe scale even at an earlier stage; the ELP is being used in all language classes, and all students are obliged to buy it. Although the ELP is thus well-embedded in this environment, some students are very much opposed to its use. It seems that their resistance has only partially to do with the ELP and its lacking recognition in the professional world but mainly with the high foreign language requirements of their institution, described in terms of the European scale.
- Several language centers at Swiss universities are collaborating in an effort to develop university-specific calibrated descriptors, ELP-compatible course descriptions, attestations, exam certificates and requirements for university entrance exams. The work is still in progress.
- The People’s University of Berne set up a course program which uses the CoE system of levels – even for Swiss German and Latin. The clients’ reactions and the usefulness of this approach are not known, yet.

The Swiss ELP version is being piloted at more than ten European universities outside Switzerland. Most member universities of the European Language Council (ELC) who decided to enter the pilot scheme this fall chose to use the Swiss ELP version for their pilot projects. Most probably we will be able to profit from their experience later on this year.

The ELP is becoming better known outside the pilot institutions and classes and has already had a certain influence on ongoing developments – a few examples:

- A working group of experts that elaborated a global language learning concept for the Swiss schools suggested the European scales and the ELP as core instruments for future innovations in language teaching and learning. Several decision-makers have expressed their view that the fate of the ELP within the public school systems will depend largely on how the global concept will be put into action.
- Several cantons are using the ELP and the European levels for the development of new curricula for English, which will be newly introduced as an obligatory subject into some sectors of their school systems. Also, in order to suit the needs of younger learners, they are expanding the levels between A1 and B1 by describing intermediate levels. Even if the ELP is never implemented as a whole, these authorities do not run a great risk by doing that since the European system of levels will most probably keep its relevance: since not only the most influential Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) has decided to make their levels compatible but also the EU apparently intends to adopt the Council of Europe levels.
- The most important Swiss employers were informed in May about the ELP and its potential. Most of them apparently showed interest but decided to wait and see. Meanwhile, one of the biggest employers, the Swiss Federation, asked for an additional presentation of the ELP to all of its head personnel officers.
- The heads of the Swiss schools abroad wished to be introduced to the uses of the ELP in a three-day workshop in July 2000.
- The (Swiss) authors of a CD-ROM that supplements “Moment mal”, a textbook for German used worldwide, included items for self-assessment so that the learners can decide whether they are ready to take the exam for the *Zertifikat Deutsch* which is located on level B1.

The availability of the persons involved in the ELP pilot scheme is a problem As usual in Switzerland, the participating teachers are volunteers. And most of them are expected to contribute to the project without being paid. Only in the canton of Geneva they are actually being paid for the work they are doing. They have to teach one hour less for the time of the trial phase. In return they participate in regular meetings with colleagues and with their cantonal co-ordinator, and they are also expected to pass on their experience to teachers who are interested in using the ELP themselves.

It is clear that volunteers cannot do an awful lot of work. For some participants the, admittedly, quite long teacher questionnaire was too long, they hardly found time to fill it in or did not do it at all. In many cantons teachers are not given the chance to attend regional meetings with co-participants because they are not allowed to cancel classes, and substitute teachers are not available.

This situation poses a serious problem to the further development of the Swiss version of the ELP. The teachers' expertise would be desperately needed for the various adaptations that should be made or at least planned before the end of the pilot phase. Fortunately, some teachers are ready to contribute their share but it is very well possible that this will not be enough.

The co-ordinators on the cantonal, regional or national level will not be able to fill the gap. First, they don't have the same practical background, second, their time available is also very limited; the Portfolio project is simply an additional workload for most of them. Again, the canton of Geneva is a positive exception.

The steering group formed by the Swiss National Conference of the Directors of Education (CDIP) consists of a representative of the CDIP, the European rapporteur général, the national and the regional co-ordinators, and the evaluator. Its members meet about three times a year. The meetings are mainly information exchanges. The steering group edits a newsletter which will appear three times altogether. Its purpose is to inform the participants and a more general public about the state of things on a European and Swiss level. The steering group has not made any concrete suggestions concerning its future policy, the revision and a possible new launch of the ELP in 2001. Especially questions concerning the future budget should soon be tackled.

The evaluation of the ELP pilots is designed as a formative project evaluation. The insights gained during the pilots are used to improve and to steer the ongoing process. In the case of the evaluation of the introductory phase, this meant that the project co-ordinators and at least some of the participants who started in fall knew already what had gone well and what had caused problems among those who introduced the ELP in spring. Such a procedure compromises the scientific value of the data obtained through the survey but may contribute to a more efficient piloting.

After the end of the introductory phase this fall, the Newsletter (and now this report) was used to inform about the most important results and to indicate what the pilot teachers should focus on in the remaining time until spring 2000. Thus, in our setting, there is no clear division line between the role of a co-ordinator and the role of the evaluator.

The Portfolio Web site at the University of Fribourg has attracted quite a lot of attention, not as much from the participating teachers (1/3 have visited it) as from a national and international public interested in the ELP, in self-directed learning or language teaching in general. The Portfolio Forum failed to become a relevant instrument of information exchange and discussion among all those involved in the pilots. For the remaining months, an e-mail discussion list should be considered as an alternative means of interaction among those who use e-mail. An e-mail list has the advantage over a forum that its users receive any new contributions to the list automatically via their mailbox while in the case of a forum, users have to go to a specified address (URL) regularly in order to check for new contributions.

The Portfolio Web site will be built up further; it will e.g. provide those who want to develop the ELP or ELP-related curricula with the necessary tools and information.

3. Continuation of the pilot phase

In view of the teachers' apparent lack of time and the postponed deadline for the final report, the pilot phase will be extended until the end of the school year 1999/2000.

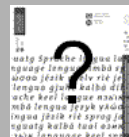
In the meantime the participating teachers will be working particularly on those aspects that have not been worked on sufficiently or posed problems during the introductory phase. They will:

- try out further instruments contained in the ELP;
- elaborate suggestions on how the ELP could be adapted to the specific needs of different target groups (lower secondary level, grammar schools, courses for language for specific purposes, etc.);
- develop tests that relate to specific descriptors;
- elaborate propositions for materials that help to introduce new users to the ELP;
- collect examples of good practice;
- use the ELP for special purposes like class or student exchange activities or other projects.

The evaluation efforts will continue. Various stakeholders will be contacted for evaluation purposes continuously. Towards the end of the school year the final evaluation will take place; in the second half of April a second set of questionnaires will be sent to teachers and learners for that purpose.

Appendix (next page)

Summary of the results of the first Swiss teacher questionnaire



Summary (closed questions only)

[English translation for this report only]

Part 2: "Swiss questions"

Questions for teachers involved in piloting the Swiss version of the ELP.

Part 2 contains two sections:

- **Section A** is concerned with teacher-specific and more general aspects;
- **Section B** relates to the specific experiences made with one class or group; it should be filled in once per class/group

Section A (teacher-specific questions)

		Yes	No
FL1-1.	Do your students use the original Portfolio file?	71	4
FL1-2.	If no: what do they work with? (1 started with photocopies; 3 misunderstandings).....		

	The ELP as a product	Yes	More or less	No	Don't know
FL1-3.	Do you think the form (file + passport) is good?	41	30	10	0
FL1-4.	Do you like the graphical design?	52	25	3	0
FL1-5.	Is the systematics understandable?	41	33	6	1
FL1-6.	Is the language comprehensible in general?	57	20	2	1
FL1-7.	Comments and suggestions:.....				
FL1-8.	In case you've discovered mistakes in the ELP, please note them here:				

	Preparation	Yes	No
FL1-9.	Are you participating voluntarily in the pilots?	69	6
FL1-10.	Have you filled in the ELP for yourself?	30	51
FL1-11.	Did you consult the Information Brochure for preparation?	66	14
FL1-12.	Did you take part in an information meeting?	56	19
FL1-13.	When and where (ca.)?		
FL1-13a	Did you prepare yourself in any other way?:.....		

		Yes	More or less	No	Don't know
FL1-14.	In case you did take part in an information meeting – was that event useful for you?	41	19	2	1
FL1-15.	Do you think the information brochure is useful?	55	14	2	8
FL1-16.	Do you feel yourself sufficiently informed about the ELP?	49	27	4	1
FL1-17.	Are you personally motivated to pilot the ELP?	65	16	1	0
FL1-18.	Did the delayed delivery change your attitude towards the ELP towards the negative?	21	13	38	2

FL1-19.	Comments and suggestions:.....
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	Working with the ELP	Yes	More or less	No	Don't know
FL1-20.	Does the ELP fit well into your global teaching concept?	42	33	5	1
FL1-21.	Do you like to work with the ELP in class?	24	43	6	6
FL1-22.	Did you get new ideas for your teaching while working with the ELP?	34	16	27	3
FL1-23.	Is the ELP a suitable instrument to give an overview of one's own language learning history?	71	4	1	4
FL1-24.	Is the ELP as a whole a suitable instrument to document one's present competences in foreign languages?	60	16	0	5
FL1-25.	Does in your opinion a six level scale make sense?	62	14	2	3
FL1-26.	Has it become for you any clearer thanks to dealing with the ELP what objectives language teaching may have?	45	19	13	3
FL1-27.	Is the ELP a suitable planning instrument for language teaching	25	30	21	5
FL1-28.	Is the ELP a suitable planning tool for the private use of learners?	38	25	7	11
FL1-29.	Is it important for you to keep the ELP as a regular element of your language classes even after the pilot phase?	34	20	13	13
FL1-30.	Comments and suggestions				

	The PF in your school	Yes	More or less	No	Don't know
FL1-31.	Does your headmaster support the use of the ELP	54	8	3	11

		Ja	Nein
FL1-32.	Have you presented the ELP to colleagues who are not involved in the project?	48	28
FL1-33.	In case you teach on the upper or lower secondary level: did you get to talk to the parents of your students in the context of the ELP?	1	57
FL1-34.	Comments and suggestions:.....		

		Ja	Nein	Weiss nicht
FL1-35.	Are there arrangements between the teachers of different subjects concerning the use of the ELP?	36	38	1
FL1-36.	Have exams been modified based on the ELP?	4	63	6
FL1-37.	Are such modifications planned?	10	37	24
FL1-38.	Do think the ELP is a suitable basis for modifying entrance or final exams?	35	9	28
FL1-39.	Would you support the idea to introduce the ELP mandatorily in all public schools?	30	24	18
FL1-40.	Comments:.....			

	The Portfolio in the Internet	Yes	No
FL1-41.	Do you know that a Swiss ELP Web site exists?	65	10
FL1-42.	Have you ever visited that site? (http://www.unifr.ch/ids/Portfolio/)	28	46
FL1-43.	Do you have access to the Internet?	64	11
FL1-44.	Comments and suggestions:.....		

	Log book	Yes	No
FL1-45.	Do you keep a log book in order to document working with the ELP?	26	49

	Global questions	Yes	No	Don't know
FL1-46.	Do you think that the ELP will be useful to your learners when they go on to other schools?	46	4	31
FL1-47.	Do you think that the ELP will be useful to your learners in their job or profession?	41	4	35

		Yes	More or less	No	Don't know
FL1-48.	Do you think that the ELP is an important innovation?	56	20	4	1
FL1-49.	Is it very important to you that the ELP is introduced in more European countries?	58	10	7	6

FL1-50.	What is in your opinion the most positive aspect about the ELP? In what respect?
FL1-51.	What is in your opinion the most negative aspect about the ELP? In what respect?
FL1-52.	What's missing in the ELP?.....
FL1-53.	What is unnecessary in the ELP?.....
FL1-54.	Comments, wishes, suggestions for improvements (concerning: ELP, piloting, questionnaires):

Section B: class or group-specific questions

[...]

Information on class and teaching	
FL1-55.	In what subject(s) do you use the ELP?
FL1-56.	# hours per week:
FL1-57.	What year of learning is the class in in each of these subjects?
FL1-58.	Special characteristics of your teaching (e.g. immersion, class exchange, intensive course – be as precise as possible):
FL1-59.	How many other teachers use the ELP with this class?
FL1-60.	In which subjects do they use the ELP?

The ELP and your teaching	
FL1-61.	With what materials (textbooks etc.) does this class normally work?

		Yes	More or less	No	Don't know
FL1-62.	Is the ELP compatible with your regular teaching materials?	38	24	6	2
FL1-63.	Is the ELP compatible with the way you usually evaluate and give marks?	32	26	4	7

		Yes	Partially	No	Don't know
FL1-64.	Did this class have some experience with self-assessment in foreign language learning prior to the introduction of the ELP?	12	21	34	5
FL1-65.	Comments:				

The introduction of the ELP	
FL1-66.	When did you first use the ELP with this class? (date)
FL1-67.	What language version did your learners work with?
FL1-68.	Please give a brief account of how you proceeded when you introduced the ELP. (What information did you provide? Which parts did you use? order? methodology used etc.)
FL1-69.	Please comment on how you proceeded; any consequences?
FL1-70.	How did your class react spontaneously when they received the ELP?.....
FL1-71.	What is now the attitude of the class/group towards the ELP?.....

FL1-72.	Which parts were worked with?	Passport <input type="checkbox"/> Biography <input type="checkbox"/> Dossier <input type="checkbox"/>
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Biography		Yes	No
FL1-73.	Have plurilingualism and cultural diversity been discussed in the context of the Portfolio?	48	22
FL1-74.	Have your learners <i>during your classes (or as a regular homework assignment)</i> had the chance to add to their language learning biography information about their competences and intercultural experiences in other languages than those taught by yourself?	33	37
FL1-75.	Have you encouraged your learners to add <i>on their own and outside the classroom</i> to their language learning biography information on additional language competences and intercultural experiences?	50	19
FL1-76.	Have you read language learning biographies of your learners?	35	32

		Yes	More or less	No	Don't know
FL1-77.	If you have read biographies: Did you learn relevant things about your learners by reading the biographies?	14	14	7	1
FL1-78.	Comments:				

Descriptors / grids / checklists		Yes	More or less	No	Don't know
FL1-79.	Did your learners understand the descriptions of language competence (grids, checklists), and were they able to use them?	48	25	1	2
FL1-80.	Were the learners able to assess themselves?	45	22	4	4
FL1-81.	Did the learners' self-assessment correspond to your assessment fairly well?	31	21	1	18
FL1-82.	Comments and suggestions:				

		Yes	No
FL1-83.	Has the Portfolio been used to plan or set objectives?	23	54
FL1-84.	Have (former) formal language learning experiences been discussed in the context of the Portfolio?	28	46

Dossier		Yes	No
FL1-85.	Have any learner products been added to the Dossier?	15	52
FL1-86.	Have any products been planned which could be added to the Dossier?	26	41
FL1-87.	What types of product for the Dossier would that be?		

Other issues	
FL1-88.	Where do your learners keep their Portfolios? (in your classroom, at home etc.).....

FL1-89.	Why just there?				
FL1-90.	How much time has been spent in class for working with the Portfolio (hours)				
FL1-91.	How much time have the learners spent all in all for working with the Portfolio (class, homework, individual work etc.)? (hours as an average):				
		Yes	More or less	No	Don't know
FL1-92.	Can your learners handle the Portfolio independently, now ?	22	32	11	11
FL1-93.	Has working with the Portfolio motivated your learners?	14	34	5	21
FL1-94.	Concerning the use of the Portfolio: do the returns outweigh the „investment“?	9	26	8	30
FL1-94a	Comments:.....				

	Special activities	Yes	No	Don't know
FL1-95.	Have you used the Portfolio in the context of special activities (exchanges, projects, immersion etc.)?	18	19	4
FL1-96.	Are you planning to use the Portfolio in such a context?	23	11	6
FL1-97.	Description/comments:			
			

Thank you very much for your co-operation!