

To What Extent Can a Language Portfolio Support Foreign Language Learning?

A Field Study of German Language Students at Reitaku University

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1. Introduction

Language portfolios were developed by the Council of Europe (CoE) as a tool to implement the principles of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) in foreign language learning. The CEFR aims for intercultural awareness and mutual understanding among the various cultures in Europe in order to foster a European identity. For this purpose the CEFR emphasizes an action-oriented and multilingual approach (Nagai et al. 2011 : 142). Language portfolios therefore set communicative actions as learning goals, aim at making the learning process more transparent, coherent, internationally comparable, acknowledge efforts of the learners inside and outside of the classroom, help to see progress in learning, and make it easier to set, evaluate and reflect on personal learning goals (CoE 2016).

Japanese university students often seem to have only vague ideas about foreign countries and languages, especially in case of a third language like German, and no clear goals concerning what they want to learn, why and how. Thus many become demotivated with the increasing complexity of language tasks, and it gets harder to see the reasons why one should put effort into understanding those complex structures and the general goal of the language class. The author believes language portfolios can help to overcome those hurdles by dividing a complex task into smaller units, evaluating how well the learner can perform each one of those units and decide on ways to work on their goals. This approach stresses the responsibility of the learner for his/her learning progress and, in the long run, fosters learner autonomy. But in order to use language portfolios effectively the learning

context, i.e. the curriculum and teaching materials, must support its basic principles, and teachers need to understand the principles of the CEFR to be able to make their students understand the value of the language portfolio. Time is needed to get used to this method and, of course, the language portfolio has to fit the syllabus and has to be easily understood by learners (Schärer 2000, Schärer 2004, Little et al. 2011). Therefore one cannot simply apply one of the European Language Portfolios (ELPs) or one of the Japanese portfolio versions. It would be best to create a new one matching the needs of learners and the policy of the educational institution.

There has been no attempt to use a language portfolio at Reitaku University so far, so the author created a new prototype and tested the possibilities it proposes over the period of one semester, April to July 2016. This article describes the thoughts underlying the creation of the new portfolio, explains its implementation and research results and how both the implementation and the design of the portfolio can be developed further.

2. Format of the Language Portfolio used at Reitaku University

Language portfolios consist of three parts: a language passport, a language biography and a dossier. The language passport gives an overview of the language learning experience and intercultural experience, it is meant to give others a quick insight into the abilities of the user. The language biography contains “can-do” statements, learning strategies and learning plans to help organize language learning: goal setting, supervising and evaluation. The dossier is to collect materials to document achievements and illustrate the learning progress (CoE 2016).

For the new portfolio the following references were used: the language passport section of the *Europass*, a document to present language skills Europe-wide (European Union 2016), *Gaikokugo Pōtoforio*, 2009 version, from Kokushikan University (Kokushikan Foreign Language Support Team 2009), *Language Portfolio for Japanese University* by the JALT Framework & Language Portfolio Special Interest Group (FLP SIG 2013), *Europäisches Sprachenportfolio für Erwachsene* (ELP for adult learners) by Volkshochschulverband Thüringen (2008), *Europäisches Sprachenportfolio für die Mitteleuropäische Region* (ELP for the Central European Region) (Ischepp et al. 2004), *Profile Deutsch* (Glaboniat et al. 2005) and A1 to C2 level descriptors from Yoshijima et al. (2014) with slight changes in the wording to keep it closer to the English and German versions on the CoE homepage (2016).

The portfolio shall be understood by as many stakeholders as possible, and be adaptable to all languages the students of German language classes are learning. Since all of them have learned and often still are learning English as their first foreign language, the portfolio is written in Japanese, German and English. The language passport (section 1) is designed after the *Europass* to give a comprehensive, yet detailed overview of language and intercultural experience. It furthermore contains an approximate comparison of European and Japanese language examinations adjusted to the CEFR levels. The language biography (section 2) starts with a short profile of the learner, his/her experiences with different languages, both in formal education and in everyday life, to help him/her see how diverse our modern society is. Next are strategies for learning in general, concrete language activities, and the utility of the internet. This section is in Japanese only due to lack of space, but it is planned to create separate strategy lists in English and German for teachers who cannot speak Japanese well. The strategies are followed by pages to set individual learning plans, and finally can-do checklists for A1.1 and A1.2 levels. Since all descriptors from the sources above do not divide the level A1 further, *Schritte International 1* and 2 (Niebisch et al. 2006 a, b), and the textbook used in German language classes, *Szenen 1. Bamen de manabu doitsugo* (Sato et al. 2012), were used for additional references. Descriptors for A2.1 and A2.2 are

planned. Section 3 consists of a dossier to note and collect material that plays an important part in language learning, e.g. texts from outside of the classroom, websites, song and movie titles, class works written by the learner, and etc. The portfolio has 70 pages (35 sheets) in A4 size, bound in a plastic folder to add or reduce pages according to the user's needs.

3. Research Design

After finishing the prototype of the portfolio in March 2016, the upcoming spring semester was used to form a first impression of its usability. Two questions were central to the research project: 1) How useful would it be for the students? 2) What needs to be improved in order to increase usability? The second question includes two components: a) integration into the learning context and b) design of the portfolio.

The author decided to use the portfolio on a voluntary basis, since it was a prototype and difficulties were to be expected, and detailed, individual opinions were most important to answer the research questions. Plus, research in Europe has shown that the implementation of portfolios is more successful when used voluntarily and in smaller groups (Schärer 2000: 13, 28). In total, six to nine students from two classes participated in the project: three to six first-year students from a regular German language class (German as their minor subject), and three second-year students with German as their minor, taking an additional course in preparation for an exchange year at Jena University in Germany. The regular course had twenty three learners, two lessons per week, Tuesday and Friday, with one German and one Japanese teacher. The author was the teacher of the Tuesday class. Two textbooks were used: *Szenen 1* on Tuesdays and sometimes on Fridays, but mostly *Meine Deutschstunde. mit DVD. Auf geht's nach Berlin!* (Seino 2016) on Fridays. The contents of the classes were sometimes synchronized, but mostly they had separate progressions. At the end of the first lesson the author introduced the language portfolio to the students via PowerPoint presentation, outlining its most important features, and asked who was interested in joining the research project. At first, eight students volunteered, but due to busy

schedules and troubles finding a suitable time frame for everyone the number finally dropped to three students. Participants who continued using the portfolio until the end of the semester shall be referred to as Sr 1, Sr 2 and Sr 3, the students who stopped using the portfolio during the semester are Sr 4 to Sr 6.

The course to prepare for an exchange year in Jena ("Jena course") is for second-year students who have successfully finished their first year of German language classes twice or three times a week; it takes place every Thursday. No textbook was used; the teaching material was mainly self-made and focused on information about the university and the city of Jena available on the internet. The learners were still on A1, the context of the exchange year was used to both repeat contents of the first year and to extend vocabulary knowledge, phrases and grammar. The portfolio was introduced during the second period. Since this course had only three students, it was decided to use the portfolio during lessons together. Students shall be referred to as Sj 1, Sj 2 and Sj 3. Portfolios for each student were prepared and distributed after confirming the number of participants in both classes. The whole project was conducted in Japanese to help the students express their thoughts as easily as possible.

Research in the regular course was conducted as follows. There were six discussions about the general impression of the portfolio, learning strategies, learning plans and the can-do descriptors for conversation on 4/26, 5/17 (only with Sr 6), 5/24, 6/14, 6/28 and 7/26. The sessions were 19 to 25 minutes long, only the last one was longer (48 min). Furthermore, a questionnaire with open questions about learning attitudes and the first impression of the portfolio was sent to six students via e-mail between 5/3 and 5/15, from which three were returned. A final questionnaire with closed questions and some open follow-up questions was handed out to Sr 1 to Sr 3 on 7/26 and collected again right after completion. This questionnaire was anonymous and asked about students' attitudes towards the portfolio after using it for three months, the usefulness of different aspects, whether and how it helped them in language learning, time management, and the role of the teacher. Some of the questions were taken from Schärer's (2000) report about the pilot projects 1998-2000 in Europe, but most focused

on the concrete learning context of the students. Answers were measured on 5-point Likert scales.

The Jena course students had five discussions about the same topics as the other group on 4/28, 5/26, 6/9, 7/7 and 7/25. Unfortunately, there is no recording of the first discussion, the other four were between 30 and 40 minutes long. After the last session basically the same final questionnaire was handed to these students. Slight variations were made concerning the items 1) using and sharing the portfolio with others during an exchange year since the three students went to study at Jena University from September 2016, and 2) time management because the discussions took place during classes. Due to a lack of time the students took the questionnaire home and were asked to hand it in the next day. Unfortunately, only one out of three questionnaires was returned, even after repeatedly contacting the students and asking for cooperation.

4. Results

It must be emphasized that the study was based on a very small sample and does not try to generalize information. The foremost aim was to find out whether and how the portfolio would be accepted by the students to improve its implementation, make it adaptable to larger groups, and make better use of its potential value.

The general impression was positive. Since it was used voluntarily, all students took a closer look at their portfolios after they were handed out, and some made personal notes in the profile part. On the other hand, two students, Sr 2 and Sr 5, stated in the first questionnaire that the size of the portfolio surprised them at first. Sr 4 wrote: "It looks difficult and I don't know how to use it." During the first interview in the Jena course, Sj 1 stated: "The self evaluation was difficult. [...] In the language profiles section, you can color something in, right? The criteria for self evaluation are a little bit vague and difficult to understand" (16/5/24, 0:53). But even though it was difficult to use at first glance, the self evaluation was one of the parts the students were most interested in, as well as learning strategies [Sr 1, Sr 2, Sr 4, Sr 5], can-do descriptors [Sr 4] and the overview of language exams roughly adjusted to the CEFR [Sr 5]. Parts of the strategy list (app.1) and the can-do descriptors (app.2) are included below.

App.1 Language Portfolio, speaking strategies

外国語学習のストラテジー

Lernstrategien / Learning strategies

5 話す練習のこつ

Strategien zum Sprechen / Strategies for speaking

こつ Strategie / Strategy	[旧村]からやっている Mache ich seit [Datum] I do this since [date]	とても役に立つ Hilft mir sehr / Helps me a lot	少し役に立つ Hilft mir ein wenig / Helps me a little	役に立たない Hilft mir nicht / Doesn't help me	やってみたい Möchte ich probieren / I want to try this
外国語の好きな曲で歌い合わせてみる					
外国語で「独り言」をする					
語彙を練習するときに発音してみる					
表現・早口言葉・歌詞を暗記する					
聞いていることを繰り返す「シャドーイング」					
テキストを声を出して読む（そして録音する）					
大学で海外の人と会って話す					
クラスの友達と外国語でしゃべってみる					
町で外国人が集まるイベントに参加する					
歩きながら・動きながら話す					
間違いを恐れずに話してみる					
分からないことの説明を願う					
身振り・手振り・メモを使いながら話す					

□

それぞれのこつを使って思ったこと、気づいたこと、留意点

Was ich beim Nutzen der Tipps gedacht oder bemerkt habe, wichtige Punkte /
What I thought or noticed when using those hints, important notes

App.2 Language Portfolio, can-do descriptor for spoken interaction, A 1.1

3 チャットリスト：会話 Checklisten: An Gesprächen teilnehmen / Checklists: Spoken Interaction

レベル A1.1 Level A1.1				
インフォーマルやフォーマルな状況で適切な挨拶 (例：こんにちは、おはよう、さようなら、またね) を交わすことができる Ich kann in informellen und formellen Situationen eine passende Begrüßung (z.B. Guten Tag, Hallo, Auf Wiedersehen, Tschüs) sagen. I can exchange greetings (e.g. Good day, Hello, Goodbye, bye) appropriately in informal and formal contexts.				
自分と知り合いを紹介でき、相手に名前・身分などについて聞くこともできる Ich kann mich und meine Bekannten vorstellen sowie den Gesprächspartner nach seinem Namen, seiner Tätigkeit u.ä. fragen. I can introduce myself and others, and I can ask my dialog partner about his name, his occupation, and similar information.				
外国語のアルファベットと数字 (100 まで) を言うことができる Ich kann das Alphabet der Fremdsprache und die Zahlen (bis 100) sagen. I can say the alphabet and numbers (until 100) in the foreign language.				
理解できない時にそれを相手に知らせ、知らない単語の説明や訳語を頼うことができる Ich kann anderen mitteilen, wenn ich etwas nicht verstehe, und z.B. um Erklärung oder Übersetzung eines unbekannten Wortes bitten. I can tell my dialog partner if I don't understand something, and I can ask about an explanation or translation of an unknown word.				
人に物事をお願いしたり (例：～をください、～できますか、～ありますか) また相手のお願いを理解できる Ich kann andere nach Dingen fragen bzw. um Gefallen bitten (z.B. Bitte geben Sie mir ..., Können Sie ...? Haben Sie ...?) und Bitten an mich verstehen. I can ask for something or a favor (e.g. Can you hand me ...? Could you ...? Do you have ...?), and understand requests from my dialog partner.				
好きな簡単な表現 (例：～できる/できない、～好き/好きではない) を言うことができる Ich kann mit einfachen Redewendungen sagen, was ich mag und was nicht (z.B. Ich kann (nicht/kein) ..., Ich mache (nicht) gern ...). I can say what I like or dislike in simple phrases (e.g. I can/ cannot ..., I like/ don't like ...).				
相手が気長に聞いてくれたり時々手伝ってくれたりすると、自分の趣味や食習慣について聞いたり話したりできる Ich kann über bekannte Dinge wie meine Hobbys oder Essgewohnheiten fragen und sprechen, wenn der andere geduldig ist und mir manchmal hilft. I can ask and talk about familiar topics like my hobbies or eating habits, if the other sometimes waits patiently and helps me.				

One of the first impressions during the interviews was that all the students naturally and mainly used the strategies and the dossier to reflect on their English learning experience. This was to be expected, especially for the first-year students who had barely just started learning German that semester. But even they gradually included the German language into their habits and discussions, as a comment by Sr 2 during the second discussion shows: “Since I don’t know German at all, I write down words that came up during classes at the side of my exercise book, look up the Japanese translation and practice. I do this since I started learning German” (16/5/24, 10:34). Sr 2 later also used translations into English to learn both languages at the same time. A similar approach was taken by Sj 1, who tried watching a *Harry Potter* movie in German with English subtitles (16/7/7). This underlines the assumption that an open and flexible portfolio supporting multiple languages had more benefits for language learners than one that focused exclusively on the second foreign language.

Discussing learning strategies showed that each student had quite different preferences and sometimes new strategies that were not written in the portfolio came up, e.g.: “To get used to listening, I turn the speed [of an audio file] up a little bit and listen to it a couple of times. When I turn it back to normal, I can understand it clearly” (Sr 1, 16/4/26, 16:08). Sometimes strategies were discussed in more detail, like the concrete situations in which they were used: Sj 1: “At tourist spots, I also take pamphlets in the foreign language.” Sj 2: “I don’t.” Sj 1: “Really? If the waiting time is long, I take and read it. But if it’s only for a short time, I don’t bother taking one” (16/6/9, 2:50–3:01). Especially in the parts “Listening”, “Speaking” and “Using the Internet” the students had very lively discussions about their favorite foreign songs, artists, movies and opportunities for international exchange either at university or outside and what experiences they made. Talking with peers with a similar learning experience tended to be more interesting for the students than hearing examples from the teacher. This might strengthen friendships and bring additional benefits if these kinds of talks became an opportunity to lend each other materials like movies or magazines in the future.

Judging from the discussions, singing songs

more often during classes or creating some time to introduce modern German artists or movies could enhance their interest in German culture. Many students also mentioned writing diaries as a helpful and interesting way to improve writing skills (Sr 1, Sr 2, Sr 3: 16/6/28, Sr 6: 16/5/17). The portfolio furthermore provided an opportunity to talk about the contents of *Deutsche Welle*, a government aided website promoting political awareness and German language learning, and *Goethe Institut*, the official institute for German language and culture, active worldwide. Among others it conducts classes and language tests aligned with the CEFR levels that are valid around the world. Both are very useful sources to practice German actively outside of the classroom.

Discussing the portfolio also created an opportunity that clearly showed how learning a second foreign language raised awareness of language varieties in society: Sj 3: “You wouldn’t know [what’s English and what’s a different language] if you haven’t learned German, right? Before, when I only learned English, I didn’t know any differences. Even if I heard people talking, I would not have known, I guess.” Sj 1: “True. Since I started learning [German], I became able to know what’s not English” (16/7/7, 12:00–12:15).

The students enjoyed the discussions with the portfolio. In the Jena course it was difficult to keep the time short, but this did not seem to bother the students. “We got so excited. [...] It’s difficult to stop”, was Sj 1’s final comment after the first interview (16/5/26, 27:00–27:08). Still, their enthusiasm seemed to somewhat decrease in the second half of the semester. Forgetting their own portfolio became more common in both classes and not a single student read and filled in the sections planned for the upcoming session. When discussing the dossier in the Jena course, the teacher suggested that both students and teacher collect learning materials like homework, essays, and vocabulary lists to have a concrete look at their learning progress in the last discussion. Although the students agreed very enthusiastically, nobody brought their own materials in the end (Sj 2 was absent the week before and did not know about it). Sj 1 and Sj 3 forgot their portfolios entirely.

This episode gave the impression that the students, at least in the Jena course, lost interest in the portfolio towards the end of the semester, but

another explanation could be that they were simply too busy with their final examinations. Compared to this, the results from the final questionnaire were better than expected. Three out of four students who had handed it in rated the portfolio as “very interesting” (5 points), one student as “interesting” (4 points). The results of all questions together to the students’ general impressions were: Q(uestionnaire) 14.00 points, Q2 4.17, Q3 4.67, Q*4 (Jena course) 4.41. “The portfolio is interesting”, “It helped me to grasp my own learning strategies (habits) better”, and “I was able to see my learning progress better” (4.75 each) were followed by “I am learning foreign languages more seriously now, compared to before using the portfolio” and “Due to the portfolio I took (more) responsibility for my language learning” (4.5 each). Among all sections, the learning strategies, which were discussed in most detail during the meetings, were rated most positively as “very useful” (4.75), and all four students agreed that the discussions made them easier to understand (5.0). To “Is there a part in the portfolio that you like most?” two students wrote “the strategies”, one explaining further that they included some new methods. Even though there was just enough time to talk about one of the can-do checklists (oral interaction), the students found them “very easy to understand” (4.75) and felt that they became more positive towards their learning progress (5.0). One student suggested that the checklists could be more detailed, underlining that they are somewhat difficult to handle without proper examples and discussion.

The language passport was also perceived as “useful” (4.25) but difficult to grasp (one student: “not easy to understand at all”, three students: “somewhat easy to understand”, 3.25). The opinions about the usage of three languages were mixed: While three students found it “good” or “very good”, one found it “slightly inconvenient” (4.0). Similar was “I would like to compare my portfolio to other learners” (3.75), which might be influenced by the fact that there were no portfolio users besides the project members. The results also showed that students would have welcomed a little bit more participation by the teacher in the discussions, talking about her learning experience, too (4.0).

The analysis of the final questionnaire should be treated carefully, since the whole project relied on close student-teacher-interaction and a good

relationship between both parties. It is to be expected that this influenced the students’ ratings. It is regrettable that the last two questionnaires could not be received from the Jena course-students and it remains open to speculation whether they simply forgot about them or could not find the time to fill in the answers, or if they hesitated to hand them in because their overall attitude toward the portfolio was rather negative.

Finally, even though five students from the regular course stopped using the portfolio within the first month, it was a good sign that eight out of twenty three students showed interest in the first place, only after a brief introduction and being clearly aware of the fact that the discussions would take place in their free time.

5. Thoughts concerning improvement

5.1 Implementation

The last point of chapter 4 showed one of the major problems of the project: If the portfolio is used outside of classes, it is impossible to find a time frame in which every student can take part in the discussions. Second, it becomes difficult to align the portfolio with the contents of classes. Therefore, the discussions stayed somewhat abstract and did not support learning as much as they could have. Even though language portfolios are easier to use with small volunteer groups, the author assumes there would be more benefits if they were incorporated into classes properly. For example, when introducing unit 4 (hobbies) of *Szenen 1*, refer to the can-do descriptor “Spoken Interaction, A 1.1: I can ask and talk about familiar topics like my hobbies or eating habits, if the other sometimes waits patiently and helps me”, have group discussions about the linguistic elements this descriptor includes, and look into the textbook unit to see which of these elements are covered. A similar approach was successfully used by O’Dwyer (2011). Strategies could be discussed in groups at different points of the semester: general learning strategies right at the beginning, vocabulary learning strategies after introducing a new unit and/or before a vocabulary test, speaking strategies a couple of weeks before an oral presentation etc. Students could be encouraged to give their opinions on which criteria should be used to evaluate written or oral performances (see

O'Dwyer, de Boer 2015:21–22). At the end of each unit short follow-up discussions could be included to help the students point out what they have learned and what they need to work on, and how, using learning plans. If the portfolio was used in a way that made the students see merits for the language classes, they could be prompted more effectively not to forget to bring it. With this approach the use of the portfolio could be divided into smaller units, too, each unit taking less time than the 20–40 min sessions of the project. Although students stated in the final questionnaire that frequency and length of the discussions were “just right” for them, the author got the impression that the long breaks between some of the sessions might have been one factor that led to the decline in interest towards the end of the semester.

The project showed further that internet-related sources should be introduced carefully as it cannot be said for certain that the students would welcome such sources with open arms just because they belong to the so-called “internet generation”. Surprisingly, all of the volunteer students had strong reservations over online social interaction: “First I meet someone, we get to know each other, become friends [on Facebook]. If it's a stranger, that's a little bit scary.” (Sr 2, 16/6/28, 14:45) or, Sj 2: “I don't use Facebook.” Sj 3: “Exactly.” Sj 2: “Well, I check it, but I don't use it [actively].” Sj 1: “[...] If it's someone I have met once before, I send him a friend request”(16/6/9, 26:26–26:35). Or they were restricted by their parents' concerns like Sr 6: “My parents don't let me, but I'd like to use Skype [to practice speaking]. [...] In social networks there are quite a lot of incidents, right? I think they don't like this”(16/5/17, 20:47–21:19).

Using the portfolio during classes could also encourage the students to take more notes. In addition, homework and other materials created by the students could be collected in the dossier right after the students made them. This way the portfolios would become more individualized and it might become more interesting for the students to use them outside of the German language classes, too.

Another measure could be including diary pages in the language biography. Many students already mentioned that they liked writing short diaries to improve their writing skills, and research

conducted by other teachers like Murata, Washizu, Kamiya, Asai, Iwasa, Yokomichi, Tanaka and others from Kokushikan University (Kokushikan Foreign Language Support Team 2009) or Tamaki (2008) showed very positive results. The diaries were useful tools for learner-teacher-communication, stimulated students to reflect upon the contents at the end of each class, encouraged them to use the foreign language for communication, helped everyone to see the learning progress more clearly, to review contents at the end of the semester and to prepare for examinations.

5.2 Portfolio design

The portfolio is not yet complete. A general introduction explaining the language portfolio, its merits and how it is used has to be inserted at the beginning, checklists for A 2.1 and A 2.2 shall be added, and checklists until B 1.2 would be even better to cover a broader part of the students' English learning experience. Clearer explanations have to be added in the dossier in the sections titled “Texts in foreign languages I encounter in my daily life”(add “e.g. books, magazines, news articles; words or phrases on products, descriptions on foods or drinks”) and “Materials in the foreign language that I have created” (add “e.g. homework, e-mails, letters, vocabulary lists, posters, presentations”), and one or two examples should be added generally in each section of the dossier. Page numbers will be included in future. Not having page numbers so far made skipping back and forth between different sections difficult. Another idea is to split the learning plans into two designs: the current one for general learning goals, and another one in the style of the learning plans used by O'Dwyer (2011), which are especially useful when working on a certain can-do descriptor. The downside is that this would make the portfolio even bulkier, which could discourage more students from taking a closer look and bringing the portfolio to each lesson. It should be checked whether other parts could be shortened or removed. A smooth solution to this problem would be converting the portfolio into an e-portfolio the students could access via internet. At the same time this would solve the problem of how to finance more portfolios for larger learner groups.

Concerning wording, some amendments need to be made in the checklists and descriptors. For example, Sj 3 had a lot of questions during the group

discussions that helped to make various items more clearly understood, such as using “*tango nōto*” instead of “*tangochō*” for vocabulary notebook, “*gaikokugo no uta wo kiku*” instead of “*gaikokugo de uta wo kiku*” and similar adaptations.

6. Conclusion

Using the language portfolio with two groups of volunteers was a lot of fun and had merits for both teacher and students. The teacher was able to develop deep insights into the students’ attitudes towards language learning and their learning habits. Furthermore, the students learned from each other about different learning strategies, materials, special classes, international events at their university and elsewhere, and even shared experiences from studies abroad. The group discussions helped everyone to understand the items in the strategy section, dossier and checklists more thoroughly. Students began to see their language proficiency more positively and to track down the vague feeling of “I cannot do xy” to its concrete elements, i.e. “if the other one speaks too fast” or “if there are no visual elements to illustrate the text/the situation”.

On the other hand it was a huge challenge to keep the discussions as short as possible, especially in the Jena course, so as not to take away too much time from the contents of the classes. It would have been nice if there was more time to work with the learning plans in more detail to see whether they helped the students to overcome the dilemma of wanting to learn more frequently, but delaying in favor of other things. Since the project will take a break until the new version of the portfolio is finished and the question of how to finance bigger samples for a whole class is solved, it can be assumed that the students most likely will not continue working with the portfolios by themselves. One reason is that social interaction, which is a crucial element of the portfolio, cannot be enhanced during the break. The other reason is the missing connection to the contents of the classes. If strategies, the dossier and some descriptors in the can-do checklists are discussed with concrete examples from the lessons, the students might develop a feeling of how to use the portfolio for concrete learning contents over time. Since this connection was missing in the described project,

understanding the can-do descriptors, learning plans and the dossier and their interconnections remained somewhat vague, thus right now the language portfolio is presumably nothing more than an interesting but rather difficult extra document for them. The author is eager to launch another project based on the findings of this first one to ascertain whether the improved design, new implementation methods and preferably a longer research period have some long-term effects on the motivation and performance of the students and the time devoted to the portfolio outside of the classroom.

People interested in the portfolio can contact me at nancy.yanagita@gmail.com and I will gladly send you the file.

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