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Chapter 7

What do I need to know about quality and equity in the assessment of plurilingual, intercultural and democratic competences and the use of portfolios?

Claudia Borghetti and Martyn Barrett

Introduction

Assessment plays a major role in education. At the very least, it is essential for understanding whether instructional practices have resulted in the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. In addition, assessment is important for identifying learning outcomes that have not been achieved, and obstacles or difficulties that learners may be encountering. This in turn helps teachers to monitor and improve their methods and practices, as well as learners to become aware of their own learning difficulties and strategies. Assessment is also a key tool for educational systems and societies at large, as it provides evidence that their values and principles are being passed on to younger generations.

Assessment can also impact seriously on equity in access to quality education. In some educational systems, results in tests or exams are used in streaming practices, which separate learners into different classes based on their abilities and achievements. In cases where the streaming is accompanied by a different curriculum, the consequence can be the introduction of significant educational inequities.[i] In addition, poor results in assessment are one of the principal reasons why many learners drop out of education. Assessment, being an interface between school and society, thus potentially represents a major social barrier for many learners.

While in many of these cases assessment is possibly more a visible manifestation than a cause of inequalities in education, it can itself also be a further source of educational discrimination when it fails to recognise (and encourage) learners’ distinctive personalities, social needs, and learning diversities. This may happen for example when assessment tasks presume a specific background knowledge that only majority-group learners have or when it ignores the difficulties of taking a test in a second language. In this sense, we argue, pursuing equity in assessment is a vital way to ensure both equity and quality in education more generally.

Based on the considerations above, this chapter focuses on how developing plurilingual, intercultural, and democratic competences in schools, colleges, or universities, when viewed from the perspective of quality and equity in education, requires the use of responsible and

ethical ways to assess such competences. In this respect, it will be argued that portfolios represent a highly suitable method for assessing plurilingual, intercultural, and democratic competences, because they can help to ensure that assessment practices are not only accurate, but also mindful of the consequences of assessment, respectful of learners' differences, and attentive to the value of everyone's background, learning, and personal and social needs. Portfolios owe most of these features to their being ideal methods to use for formative assessment. Even though they can potentially be employed for summative purposes (when 'assessment *of* learning' finally prevails over 'assessment *for* learning'), their optimal use is formative, as their main scope is providing learners 'with the opportunity to reflect on their competences, to collect data and documents which support and stimulate their reflections, and to think about how they will further develop their competences in the future' (Council of Europe, 2021a: 5). In other words, portfolios link assessment to learning, by focusing on learners' awareness, critical reflection, and self-evaluation.

This chapter starts by outlining some key features of assessment that, in education at large, can foster or inhibit quality and equity. It then shifts the focus to the specific cases of plurilingual, intercultural, and democratic competences, whose specificities cannot be ignored and require a competent use of portfolios as a primary assessment tool. The following section is dedicated to the description of two portfolios, developed by the Council of Europe, which can be used to assess these competences. The final section draws some general conclusions.

Quality and equity in assessment

Regardless of the specific learning outcomes being assessed – whether these are related to language skills, disciplinary knowledge, or indeed plurilingual, intercultural or democratic competences – assessment is a complex activity. This is for at least two reasons. First, the basis of any form of assessment consists of gathering enough evidence of learning (in terms of quantity and variety of data) to make sound inferences about the learners' actual competences (Pellegrino et al., 2001; Wiliam, 2020). However, while it is important to ensure that any collection of evidence is conducted accurately, there is always a certain amount of approximation in the conclusions one can draw from it in terms of what the learner's *real* competence is. Second, the inference processes are themselves challenged by a number of constraints, linked to the nature of the competence to be assessed, the assessment method, and the interpretation procedures. For example, what does mastering a topic in geography mean? What specific items of knowledge or abilities are essential versus secondary? What method of collecting evidence is the most suitable for detecting them? And how can we make sure that our inferences about geographic competences are not influenced by other factors, such as the learners' communication style or (lack of) background knowledge?

These inherent properties of assessment can affect the *quality of assessment*. For this reason, a series of principles can be used as parameters to limit the intrinsic drawbacks of assessment. The Council of Europe uses six principles which are most relevant in thinking about quality: validity, reliability, transparency, practicality, equity, and respectfulness (Council of Europe, 2018c, 2021c; see also OECD, 2013, and Siarova, Sternadel & Mašidlauskaitė, 2017). These principles will be briefly described here, because applying them – and thus pursuing quality in assessment – is a crucial way to strive for quality in education *tout court*, given the prominent educational and social role occupied by assessment within the overall schooling system.

Validity is the extent to which an assessment actually assesses what it has been designed to assess (e.g., an attitude, a set of skills, a body of knowledge) instead of some other unintended characteristics of the learner. For example, if writing processes are under investigation, one needs to ensure that the key writing components are being assessed (e.g., generating ideas, planning, transcribing or reviewing texts) rather than external factors (e.g., degree of familiarity with the topic, level of motivation to write); if learners know little about the topic they have to write about, they may have problems in both generating ideas and planning their texts. In other words, in an assessment which has a high level of validity, the inferences that are drawn from the assessment evidence are influenced only by the capacities which are of interest and not by incidental characteristics of the learner.

Reliability pertains to the consistency of assessment outcomes. Since the main purpose of assessment is making sound inferences about the learners' competences at a given time, ideally conclusions drawn from evidence of learning should be the same regardless of the person in charge of interpreting the results or the precise set of circumstances (e.g., time of day, location) under which the assessment takes place. Thus, efforts need to be made to minimise the risk that random factors (e.g., an inexpert assessor, or some loose scoring/interpretation criteria) affect the outcome of the assessment process. Among the actions which can be taken to enhance reliability is to use rubrics, which provide explicit descriptions of the expected outcomes as well as of different levels of achievement, so that different assessors can make similar - ideally identical - judgements on the basis of the descriptions.

Rubrics can also make a difference in terms of *transparency*. This third quality principle refers to the need to make learners aware of the assessment modes: What will be assessed? How? According to what criteria? Moreover, a transparent procedure is one where learners fully understand the purposes and uses of the assessment. For example, they are informed in advance whether the results will be used to sustain their learning further and improve teaching (formative aims) or to verify their level of achievement after a period of time (summative aims). They also know what is at stake, that is, whether the assessment results will have no or minimal impact on their educational and professional future (low-stakes assessment), or the opposite, whether their levels of performance in the test/task may affect their lives in the future, for example allowing or preventing access to better educational and employment paths (high-stakes assessment). Overall, within a schooling system, transparency can be guaranteed by involving the learners themselves in assessment practices as much as possible. For instance, they can be invited to read the rubrics in advance, comment on the scoring system, and share their queries about the overall process. Ideally, the learners could even help the teacher develop the assessment tools or, as happens with self- and peer-assessment, use the rubrics themselves – which is also a way to promote their learning further.

Sometimes, transparency may collide with the principle of *practicality*, which concerns the feasibility of the assessment in terms of the amount of time and the (human and material) resources needed to carry out the assessment. While involving the learners in the assessment processes is a highly valuable practice in terms of transparency, this same practice can increase the teachers' workload, slow down the curricular pace, and even be difficult to manage for the learners, thereby compromising practicality. Therefore, a good balance between these two quality principles is crucial to guarantee that the assessment processes are both comprehensible for the learners and feasible for all actors involved (the learners, the teacher, and the institution). Likewise, there may sometimes be a tension between practicality

on the one hand and validity and reliability on the other. Once again, in these situations, some compromise might be necessary in order to ensure that the assessment is not only accurate (i.e., has an acceptable level of validity and reliability) but is also practically feasible.

Crucially, *equity* is a major criterion for quality in assessment. According to this principle, a fair assessment practice is one which does not favour some learners or groups of learners and penalise others. In other words, when approaching a test or a task, everyone should have equal opportunities to fully manifest the relevant competences and to have these recognised, regardless of personal and social factors such as low proficiency in the language of schooling, special learning needs, scarcity of material resources (e.g., technological equipment), family support (for socioeconomic or education-related reasons), or lack of background knowledge. In the case of the latter, for example, some learners may have cultural knowledge which differs substantially from that of learners who are members of the majority cultural group (e.g., knowledge of national historical facts or popular TV programmes). This means that, if an assessment explicitly or implicitly relies upon the majority cultural reference system, it breaks the criterion of equity by discriminating against learners who are members of minority cultural groups. Given its gateway role in education and society, assessment can then lead to the educational and social exclusion of minority group learners. Interestingly, transparency can be important for equity. Without transparency, learners will have to guess what is required in an assessment and some may make better guesses than others; this will in turn introduce inequities into the assessment outcomes.

In addition to being fostered by transparency, equity is also closely linked to *respectfulness*, which refers to the need for assessments to respect learners' dignity and human rights. Thus, learners should be allowed the freedom to express their own ideas and values (e.g., about ethical or socio-political issues) even when such opinions conflict with or differ from the expected ones; this principle also encompasses learners' rights to privacy. Furthermore, *respectfulness* includes the right of learners to be encouraged in their learning path through motivating feedback, regardless of their actual performance in assessment. Feedback should focus on learners' achievements, not solely on their deficiencies, so that the assessment experience is a positive rather than a negative experience overall, with any deficiencies instead being treated as learning opportunities. Poor performance in assessment should never lead to learners being dismissed as unworthy of further attention.

Generally speaking, assuring respectfulness implies being aware that assessment always has some impact on learners and thus making efforts to monitor its repercussions. First, the outcomes of assessment have consequences on individuals' learning, for example, poor results may have demotivating and frustrating effects as much as good results may foster further development and autonomy. Second, especially in the case of high-stakes assessments, as noted earlier, the results may have a considerable influence on learners' future lives. A respectful and ethical assessment cannot overlook these effects. Interestingly, the impact that assessment has on teaching also raises issues of respectfulness and ethical responsibility. For example, there is much evidence that assessment produces a 'washback effect' on teaching, as teachers tend to prioritise those curriculum contents and competences which are subjected to summative assessment over others, especially when the assessment is high-stakes. While this tendency can contribute to the promotion of dimensions of learning which might otherwise risk being neglected in curricula (and underestimated by the learners themselves), it may also lead teachers towards forms of 'teaching to the test' and thus prevent them from focussing on objectives and contents which, despite being excluded from assessment, would better serve their pupils' needs. When this happens, assessment is neither

respectful nor fair, since it does not meet, value, and cultivate the learners' own developmental, personal, and social needs – which in the end is another way to discriminate against diversity.

The brief review above helps to highlight that the six principles which are advocated to guarantee quality in assessment also ensure *equity in assessment* (and, again, in education at large). First, as we have seen, equity is specifically one of the assessment principles. Second, equity is also implied in both transparency and respectfulness, which overall emphasise the need to recognise and safeguard learners' diversities against any risk of discrimination that may be implicitly introduced by assessment tasks, modes, or inferential processes. Third, equity in assessment is ensured when all the other five principles are met, since it is only when the assessment procedures are suitable at every level (e.g., in terms of their validity, reliability, etc.) that the risks of introducing biases against learners' diversities are reduced. In other words, one can say that *equity in assessment* is guaranteed by *quality in assessment*.

The case of plurilingual, intercultural and democratic competence

Meeting the quality and equity principles of assessment presents specific challenges in the cases of plurilingual, intercultural, and democratic competences, due to the type of learning they require. For example, while each of these competences requires items of knowledge (e.g., the grammatical structures of the languages in one's plurilingual repertoires), they are also characterised by the development of metacognitive abilities. This is because strategic reflection plays a major role in all three of these competences (e.g., in the case of plurilingualism, the ability to anticipate "as to when and to what extent the use of several languages is useful and appropriate"; Council of Europe, 2020: 127). Moreover, all of these competences encompass an affective dimension which pertains to the learners' attitudes, as well as to their values in the case of intercultural and democratic competence. Thus, as highlighted by Borghetti (2017) in relation to intercultural competence, assessing these kinds of learning also necessarily leads to the assessment of the learners' personal traits and identity-related characteristics.

Despite these and other challenges, it is nevertheless possible to assess plurilingual, intercultural and democratic competences in such a way that quality and equity are maximised according to the principles summarised above. As anticipated in the Introduction, we argue that portfolios can make the difference in this sense, especially when they are employed to serve low-stakes formative assessment purposes and provide ample space for both self-assessment and class collaboration.

Two portfolios have been developed by the Council of Europe which are specifically dedicated to supporting the development of, and assessing, learners' plurilingual, intercultural and democratic competences. Each of these portfolios is linked to a particular theoretical framework of the competences that are being supported and assessed by the portfolio (Table 1).

Competence	Portfolio	Theoretical framework
Plurilingual and intercultural	*European Language Portfolio*, ELP (Council of Europe, 2001b)	*Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001a) and the *Companion Volume*, CV (Council of Europe, 2020)[ii]

Democratic and intercultural	*A Portfolio of Competences for Democratic Culture*, PCDC (Council of Europe, 2021a, 2021b)	*Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture*, RFCDC (Council of Europe, 2018a, 2018b)

Table 1 The two portfolios and their respective theoretical frameworks.

The theoretical frameworks on which the *European Language Portfolio* (ELP; Council of Europe, 2001b) and the *Portfolio of Competences for Democratic Culture* (PCDC; Council of Europe, 2021a) are based are better than other alternative frameworks that are available in terms of their comprehensiveness, level of detail and conceptual clarity. They each offer detailed specifications of the core learning components (e.g., attitudes, knowledge, etc.) which need to be assessed. This specification in turn can be used to maximise the *validity* of the method of assessment, by ensuring that it assesses only clearly specified components, rather than other incidental characteristics of the learner.

Meeting the principle of *reliability* in assessing plurilingual, intercultural and democratic competences is more challenging, because evidence of learning in these cases is dependent on contextual variables. For example, flexibility and adaptability are critical for all three competences, because these are the skills needed to adapt one's thoughts, feelings or (language and other) behaviours to a given interlocutor or situation. However, what is effective and appropriate depends on the context (e.g., in the case of a language performance assessment, the communication task, the other speakers' moves), and the likelihood that different situations will activate the same attitudes, knowledge and skills is low. This challenges reliability in the strict sense, which ideally requires that "the same outcome would be obtained if the same assessment procedure were to be administered again to the same learner under the same conditions but at a different time and in a different place and with a different assessor" (Council of Europe, 2021c: 51). A portfolio offers a solution here, because it contains a purposeful selection of samples of a learner's work, collected over time and by means of different tasks. Its use therefore necessarily accepts that external factors influence performance and, thus, that conclusions about the learner's competence differ across assessment situations. Its reliability is instead guaranteed by the fact that, taken altogether, the portfolio tells the story of the learner's progression and achievements in a comprehensive way. In addition, involving more than a single assessor and employing explicit assessment criteria and rubrics – which accurately describe the levels of performance on each competence or component – are other useful ways to pursue reliability using portfolios.

Assessing plurilingual, intercultural and democratic competences through portfolios is admittedly time-consuming compared to other methods (e.g., obtaining written answers to open-ended questions). This lack in *practicality* is, however, considerably reduced as teachers become increasingly familiar with the principles and uses of portfolios. For this reason, teachers require assistance and training in the use of portfolios for assessing plurilingual, intercultural and democratic competences.[iii]

Equity, *respectfulness*, and *transparency* are all quality and equity principles that can be challenging to achieve in the case of plurilingual, intercultural and democratic competences. For example, for the assessment of values and attitudes, it may be necessary to limit transparency to reduce the impact of 'social desirability' meaning that learners display the expected values and attitudes because they know that these are expected from them rather

than because they really hold such values and attitudes. Moreover, these competences are sensitive to assess because attitudinal dimensions (such as openness and curiosity) and values (such as valuing cultural diversity) can easily raise issues of fairness towards learners' diversities in terms of their sociocultural background, personal characteristics, and beliefs. For example, a learner may be shy about engaging with a specific cultural group, or a she/he may be uninterested because of her/his cultural and family background. This raises questions about whether it would be fair and respectful to assess her/him negatively compared to others or against a set of given standards (Borghetti, 2017).
The use of the ELP and the PCDC help to address these quality- and equity-related challenges in assessment. First, these portfolios are particularly suitable for low-stakes formative purposes, where learning, instruction and assessment are inseparable. The compilation and analysis of a portfolio at a given time is a way to check ongoing achievements, plan future instruction, develop learners' awareness of their development, and nurture their self-directed learning and autonomy. In general, portfolios are criterion-referenced, where a learner's outputs are judged only against specified levels of proficiency and compared with her/his own previous performance, rather than judged against the performance of other learners (norm-referenced assessment). In the case of the competences considered here, this is a crucial feature since learners complete their own portfolios over a period of time (the school year or even the whole school cycle) and, at every instance of compilation and analysis, compare their new understandings, attitudes, and value-related reflections only with the expected standards of performance and their own previous dispositions and ideas. Crucially, since the main purpose of this type of assessment is reflection and further development, a learner may even keep her/his portfolio private and decide – as happens with diaries – whether and when she/he wants to give permission to teachers (and perhaps parents) to read (parts of) it. All these features help portfolios to satisfy the assessment principles of equity, respectfulness, and transparency.

These principles are also satisfied by a second possibility provided by the ELP and the PCDC, which is that they can be profitably used (and adapted) collaboratively. In class, teachers and learners may, for example, adopt one or more of the following collaborative practices:

- developing assessment tasks, commenting on the core abilities to be elicited;
- designing the rubrics, agreeing on the procedures to be adopted to conduct teacher-, peer- or self-assessments;
- reflecting together on the conclusions that the relevant "assessor" (the teacher, a classmate, or the learner her/himself) has drawn from reading the portfolio and applying the relevant rubrics.

Among the numerous advantages offered by these shared procedures, there is the contextualisation of the assessment of plurilingual, intercultural, and democratic competences within the class environment, where a certain degree of familiarity and mutual trust among all the actors involved can further help pursue equity and respectfulness.

The ELP and the PCDC

There are evident and necessary overlaps among plurilingual, intercultural and democratic competences. To mention just a few of them, the *Companion Volume* notes that "CEFR [is] a vehicle for promoting quality in second/foreign language teaching and learning as well as in plurilingual and intercultural education" (Council of Europe, 2020: 21), while the *Reference*

Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture expressly conceives "intercultural competence as being an integral component of democratic competence" (Council of Europe, 2018a: 32). This is expressed in a way which links all three competences:

> The development of *plurilingual competence* thus favours participation in *democratic processes* and leads to a better understanding of the plurilingual repertoires of other individuals as well as a respect for language rights. It allows citizens' discourses to be heard beyond their national frontiers, at a European level. The development of plurilingual competence should go hand in hand with the development of *intercultural competence* since the latter promotes appropriate knowledge, understanding and attitudes for interaction with people of other cultures and social groups. (Council of Europe, 2009: 18 - emphases added)

Given these connections, it is not surprising that the respective portfolios often mention and cover the same or similar learning phenomena. However, these tools also present significant differences, which are worth commenting on in more detail, with the aim of indicating how both can be used to ensure quality and equity in the assessment of plurilingual, intercultural and democratic competences.

The assessment of plurilingual and intercultural competence

The *European Language Portfolio* (ELP) is an editable document which can be used to assess both plurilingual and intercultural competence. It is organised in three sections:

- Within the *Language Passport* section, the learner can record up to six non-native languages which she or he knows at any level of achievement, irrespective of whether they have been learned formally (e.g., at school or in private language courses) or informally (for example, by living abroad). The portfolio owner is invited to complete the passport periodically and, at every completion, to self-assess her or his progress in terms of five skills (listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, and writing), proficiency levels for which (A1 to C2) are defined by the CEFR 2001 scales and descriptors.
- The *Language Biography* provides a series of prompts (e.g., "Outside language classes, I use/have used the languages which I am learning or already know in the following situations:", "I would like to be able to do the following with the languages which I am learning:"). These prompts encourage the learner to record her or his intercultural and language learning experiences, and to reflect on these experiences and on her or his ongoing achievements and future objectives.
- The *Dossier* is used to collect materials which document and illustrate achievements and experiences that have been recorded in the Passport or Biography (e.g., short essays, video presentations, language certifications).

Consistent with the CEFR, the ELP encourages the learning of a range of languages. However, while plurilingual competence is expressly mentioned within the CEFR, the CEFR itself tends to conceptualise the assessment of proficiency in each language separately from the others. This contrasts with the more recent application of the concept of a plurilingual repertoire, which is the overall set of resources which an individual learner acquires in *all the languages* they know or have learned, irrespective of whether these are languages of schooling, regional/minority and migration languages, modern or classical languages (Council of Europe, 2016). Thus, in developing the early conceptualisation presented in the

CEFR, the later *Companion Volume* introduces several innovations, including the encouragement – in relation to assessment based on descriptors – of a vision of learners as social agents who draw on their plurilingual repertoire (including first languages and partial proficiency in one or more additional languages) to understand texts in other languages and to communicate effectively in multilingual contexts. These new inputs, which echo recent approaches to plurilingualism such as those of translanguaging (García, 2009) and intercomprehension (Doyé, 2005), represent a major innovation of the CV compared with the CEFR previous version. Three new scales have been introduced in the *Companion Volume*: "Building on pluricultural repertoire", "Plurilingual comprehension", and "Building on plurilingual repertoire". Overall, they present a view of an individual's languages and cultures as being interrelated and interconnected, as well as being valuable resources which all contribute to an individual's communicative competence, regardless of the level of proficiency in one particular language or familiarity with a particular culture. For example, these scales encourage learners to develop skills such as being able to participate effectively in conversations in two or more languages in their plurilingual repertoire, adjusting to the changes of language, and catering to the needs and linguistic skills of their interlocutors.

The ELP can be easily adapted to this updated perspective. For example, within the *Language Biography*, learners are asked to keep a record of the ways in which they have engaged with the language. Here, it can be made explicit that the task does not exclude but instead actually encourages recording episodes where they switched between or combined different languages, used automatic translations to comprehend a text, or negotiated the language of interaction with their interlocutors. Similar adaptations can be easily made to reinforce the intercultural dimension of the ELP (see also Little & Simpson, 2003). For example, while engaged in recording and reflecting on their plurilingual experiences, learners can be invited to recall and think about how they and the other speakers reacted to the encounter: Did someone feel confused or annoyed? Was something in the conversation surprising or challenging to deal with? What action (if any) led to a remedy of the impasse? Moreover, if they now think back to the episode, how do they make sense of what happened? Do they have a better awareness of cultural differences and of the adjustments that are needed to prevent and/or repair misunderstandings and cultural incidents? Generally speaking, learners and teachers should feel free to modify and expand the contents of the ELP appropriately in order to accommodate their plurilingual and intercultural needs.[iv] An example of a possible adaptation for learners in secondary education is presented in Vignette 1.

Vignette 1

This vignette reports on a possible use of the ELP to foster learners' plurilingual and intercultural competences. It is intended for use by learners in secondary education, but some of the suggested tasks may also be employed with younger learners. In all cases, the individual teacher will need to adapt the teaching materials and procedures to their own specific educational context and learners.

Target group
Learners in secondary school (most suitable subjects: language education and foreign language classes).

Main learning objectives (adapted from *Companion Volume*, p. 124)

- Willingness to value all of one's own and others' developing language resources;
- Ability to exploit one's linguistic repertoire by purposefully blending, embedding and alternating languages at the levels of utterance and discourse;

- Capacity to deal with ‘otherness’ to identify similarities and differences, to build on known and unknown cultural features;
- Awareness of one’s own plurilingual and intercultural learning.

Languages used
Regardless of the tasks (personal use of the ELP, peer-to-peer feedback, class discussion, text reading, etc.), learners are encouraged to flexibly use any language in their plurilingual repertoire. When needed, the teacher and the learners can translate for the benefit of those who do not understand specific words or utterances. Moreover, each learner is invited to use (online) dictionaries.

Resources needed
- A projector;
- Connection to the Internet (if online dictionaries are needed in addition to hardcopy ones);
- Computers (to be used in pairs).

Teacher preparatory work
- Before Activity 1: Make sufficient copies of the ELP portfolio and of the *Companion Volume* scales and descriptors for “Building on pluricultural repertoire”, “Plurilingual comprehension”, and “Building on plurilingual repertoire” (see pp. 125-128 of the *Companion Volume*). If the teacher judges that the three full scales would make excessive demands of their learners, they may decide to only use one or two scales, or indeed to not use all six levels of descriptors within each of the three scales.
- Before Activity 2: Select extracts from the learners’ portfolios and design a document to be projected, and design some opening questions to stimulate class discussion.
- Before Activity 3: Make enough copies of the CV “Building on pluricultural repertoire”, “Plurilingual comprehension”, and “Building on plurilingual repertoire” scales and descriptors.
- Before Activity 4: Design a form that learners can easily use to compare the stories and reflections they have annotated in their portfolio at three different moments. Two example items are:

	Moment 1 (date: …)	Moment 2 (date: …)	Moment 3 (date: …)
How did I feel when I didn’t understand what others said? What resources and/or strategies did I employ to overcome my difficulties?			
Comparing my accounts and reflections at Moments 1-3, what do I learn about my communicative practices and about my learning?			

Estimated time
- Two or three classes (approximately 1 hour each) are needed to complete each activity.
- Approximately one month should pass between one use of the portfolio and the following (e.g., between Activity 2 and Activity 3), to boost the chances that the learners can envisage changes or progress in their attitudes and behaviours.

Procedures

<u>Activity 1: Designing the class portfolio</u>
1. The learners read the descriptors of the scales “Building on pluricultural repertoire”, “Plurilingual comprehension”, and “Building on plurilingual repertoire”. The teacher provides explanations when needed (e.g., they define what a repertoire is and clarify what

is meant by “pluricultural” and “plurilingual”), while the learners list the languages they know and recall/imagine in what circumstances they employ or have employed more than one language in their lives.

2. The teacher introduces the existing version of the ELP using a projector for the learners to get a concrete idea of its features. She/he explains that the ELP is a tool to develop self-awareness, monitor and support learning, and set future aims in relation to intercultural and plurilingual competences.
3. In pairs, using an editable file and a computer, the learners adapt the existing version of the ELP to their plurilingual and intercultural experiences and make it relevant for themselves.
4. The teacher guides a class debriefing, during which each pair introduces their revisions and the entire class progressively reaches an agreement on the core features of what will, at the end, become the class portfolio (e.g., what inputs are to be provided in the *Language Biography*: travel abroad, out-of-school language courses, films viewed in the original version, etc.).
5. The teacher (or a group of learners) edits the document and shares the final version with the class.
6. Individually, each learner completes the portfolio before the next meeting.

<u>Activity 2: Experimenting with the portfolio</u>

1. [Before the class]. The teacher asks each learner for permission to read their entire portfolio and to share anonymised extracts with the class.
2. [Before the class]. The teacher selects some extracts according to a given topic (e.g., episodes and reflections related to Internet plurilingual experiences, to family plurilingualism, or to intercultural face-to-face encounters) and shows them through a projector.
3. A class discussion is stimulated about the extracts. Some questions could be: What cultural similarities and differences are reported in the extracts? What cultural assumptions, preconceptions, stereotypes, and prejudices (if any) emerge from the learners’ stories? How has switching between or combining languages fostered or limited mutual understanding? What (language) behaviours would have helped? During the discussion, learners are invited to write down the core ideas in their notes.
4. In pairs, learners write a report where all the main ideas and positions are commented upon. Texts are then read aloud in a plenary session.

<u>Activity 3: Using the portfolio for peer-to-peer assessment</u>

1. [Before the class]. After approximately one month, the learners use the portfolio again.
2. [Before the class]. The teacher asks each learner whether one classmate can read her/his portfolio, comment on it, and share selected extracts with the teacher and the class.
3. The learners divide into pairs. Each member uses the three sets of descriptors about pluricultural and plurilingual competences to explore and make sense of their classmate’s portfolio: they read it carefully, try to match the reported skills and manifested attitudes with the scales, and formulate recommendations.
4. Each learner shares her/his considerations with the portfolio’s owner, and together they prepare a brief oral/written report to be presented to the class in which they comment on each other’s actual level of competence and support their assessments with extracts from the two portfolios.

<u>Activity 4: Using the portfolio for self-assessment</u>

1. [Before class]. After approximately one month, the learners use the portfolio again.
2. [Before class]. The teacher designs a form, which allows the learners to compare their own accounts and reflections across the three compilation moments (Activities 2-4). Some possible questions that may be included in the form are the following: Have you changed your mind about the practices that can better foster your communicative effectiveness? What has changed (if anything) in your language learning targets? Re-read the early

plurilingual and intercultural episodes you reported in the portfolio and reflect on what you think now of your past behaviours; what would you do differently and how?

3. Each learner re-reads their own portfolio and fills in the form.
4. Each member uses the three sets of descriptors about pluricultural and plurilingual competences to explore and make sense of their own learning trajectory: they read their three portfolio entries and try to match each of them with the scales.
5. Each learner writes a page of diary to describe and comment on her/his learning path.

Activity 5: Debriefing

- In a plenary session, the teacher guides a class discussion on the experience and stimulates reflections on how to better use the ELP to foster plurilingualism and interculturality.

As illustrated by the example in Vignette 1, once the ELP is clearly linked to plurilingualism via the descriptor scales provided by the *Companion Volume*, it can be used for assessing both plurilingual and intercultural competence through self- and peer-assessment (and through teacher assessment as well, if required). The use of these validated scales and explicit criteria helps to ensure the *validity* of the assessments that are made. *Reliability* in assessment is also supported because all assessors use the same explicit criteria for drawing their inferences about the learner's performance. Furthermore, as long as teachers provide sufficiently clear guidance to learners in advance and allow learners to draw upon any evidence of their proficiency in the use of the specified competences which they themselves choose to provide, *transparency, equity and respectfulness* are also assured. Finally, the practicality of using the ELP is enhanced by having step-by-step procedures like the ones provided in Vignette 1. In short, the ELP satisfies all of the key quality and equity principles, not least because it is focused on the learners themselves rather than on the teacher: the ELP enables learners to record their own experiences, to keep track of their own plurilingual and intercultural learning, and to make responsible choices about their further development.

The assessment of democratic and intercultural competence

As noted earlier, the RFCDC conceptualises intercultural competence as an integral component of democratic competence. This is because acting as a democratic citizen in a culturally diverse society requires the capacity to interact and communicate with one's fellow citizens who often have different cultural affiliations from oneself. For this reason, the RFCDC proposes that all of the competences shown in Figure 1 are required by citizens within culturally diverse societies; these include all of the components of both democratic and intercultural competence. All 20 of these competences are described in detail in Volume 1 of the RFCDC (Council of Europe, 2018a), while Volume 2 of the RFCDC provides validated and scaled descriptors for all of the competences (Council of Europe, 2018b). These descriptors provide examples of the concrete observable behaviours which a person will display if they have achieved a certain level of proficiency in a given competence, and they can therefore be used for assessing the proficiency of learners in the use of the competences.

In order to support teachers in promoting the development of these 20 competences in learners, the *Portfolio of Competences for Democratic Culture* (PCDC) (Council of Europe, 2021a, 2021b) has been developed. The portfolio provides learners with a means through which to compile documents demonstrating their developing proficiency in the use of the 20 competences. It is also designed to help them reflect critically on their achievements and on how they can develop their competences further in the future. Because the contents of the

PCDC provide evidence about how a learner's proficiency is developing, it can be used for both formative and summative assessment purposes.

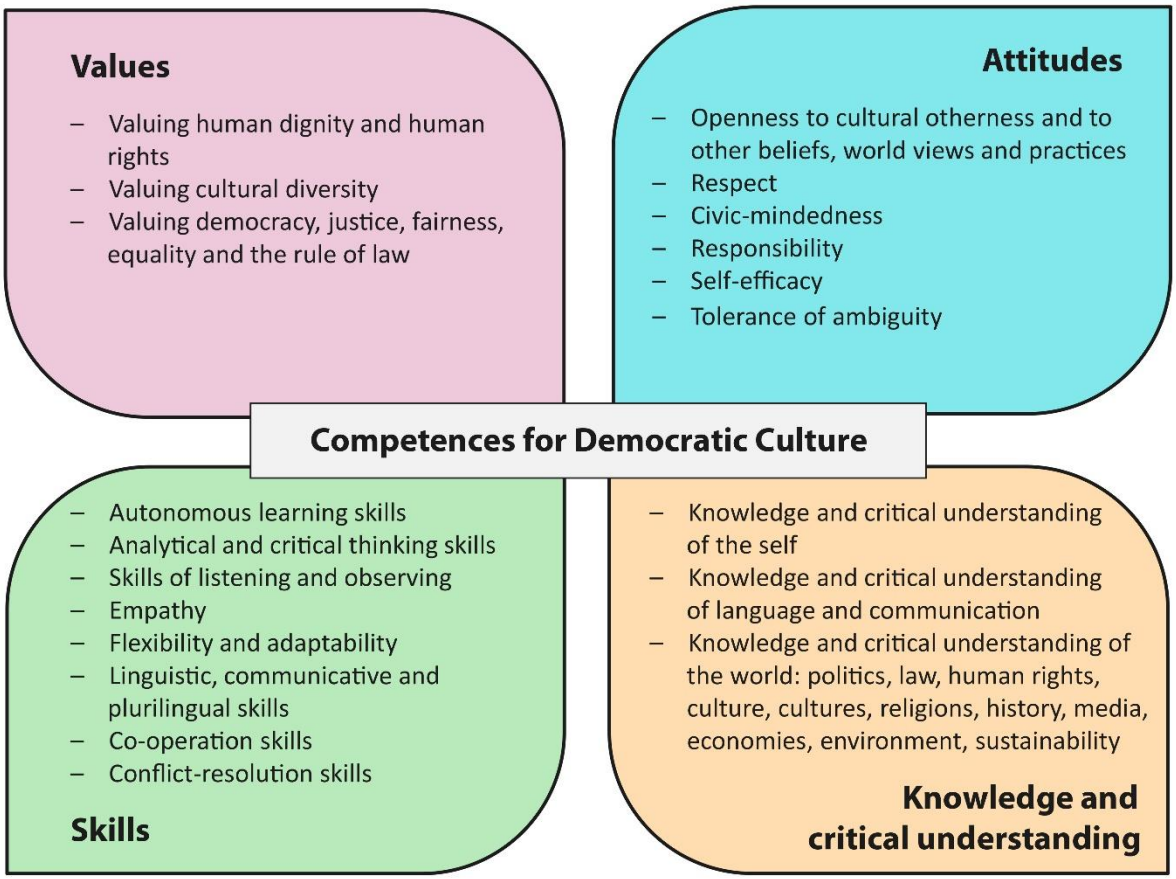

Figure 1 The 20 competences required for democratic culture proposed by the RFCDC. Figure adapted from Council of Europe (2018a), © Council of Europe, reproduced with permission.

Two versions of the PCDC have been developed: a standard version for learners from approximately 10-11 years of age upwards (Council of Europe 2021a), and a younger learners version for children aged up to approximately 10-11 years (Council of Europe, 2021b). Both versions are accompanied by a guide for teachers. The portfolios can be compiled in hard copy (e.g., using binders, folders or box files) or digitally as an e-portfolio. The standard version contains the following sections:

1. A title page;
2. A contents list;
3. A statement of purpose;
4. A personal statement;
5. A collection of descriptions of activities, documents and reflections that describe the learner's performance, learning progressions, achievements, and proficiency in the use of their competences across a wide range of situations, both within and beyond the classroom;

6. A logbook in which learners can record some of their specific experiences that they may wish to think more about;
7. A general reflections section, which reviews experiences and changes over a longer period, for example, a school term or a school year;
8. A summarising list of the competences that have been demonstrated in the portfolio.

The younger learners version contains similar sections with the exception of the logbook which is omitted. Teachers are free to adapt these suggested contents to make them more suitable for their own education context and learners. However, when they do so, two features of the PCDC always need to be retained because of the role they play in facilitating the development of learners' competences: learners should always provide documentation on their uses of competences, and they should always provide critical reflections on their uses of these competences.

Vignette 2 presents an example of how one group of teachers has successfully used the standard version of the portfolio for teaching, learning and assessment purposes.

Vignette 2

In this example, the standard version of the PCDC was used in a secondary school with a class of 18 learners who were aged 16-17 years old. The teacher who coordinated the portfolio work was a teacher of Geography, and she was assisted in implementing the portfolio by a teacher of Sociology and a teacher of Religious Education. Both the school management and the parents of the learners who were going to use the portfolio were informed in advance about how the portfolio was going to be used. The learners wrote and compiled the contents of their portfolios using computers. The activity proceeded through the following steps.

1. The learners were first briefed about how to compile their portfolios. The learners, none of whom had previously compiled a portfolio, initially found some aspects of the process difficult to understand. However, with further explanations from the teachers, and additional support where necessary, they began to find the compilation process easier as time progressed.

2. The learners began by producing a statement about the purpose of the portfolio as well as a personal statement about how they saw themselves, about the things they liked to do, what citizenship meant to them at the local, regional, national, and international levels, and what other people thought about their citizenship values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding.

3. The learners then moved on to compiling descriptions of concrete situations in which they were actively using and applying their competences. The range of situations upon which they drew included classroom lessons in Geography, Sociology and Religious Education, and situations that had arisen in the wider school context, as well as situations in other contexts outside the school including online activities, sporting clubs, volunteer organisations, a children's city council, free time at home, and a foreign language school. Each situation that was described was numbered for referencing purposes. The learner had to describe her or his own behaviours within the situation, and then reflect on the specific competences which they had used, whether they had been successful in achieving their goals in the situation, whether they had enjoyed the situation and if not, why not, and what they might do differently in the future if they encountered that same situation again. In doing so, they referred to and used the descriptors from Volume 2 of the RFCDC to identify their levels of proficiency in the use of the competences. In addition, the learners compiled logbooks containing reflections on situations and competences which they felt they needed to think further about.

4. This process of documenting and reflecting on the use of competences lasted for a period of approximately three months, at the end of which the learners wrote more general reflections about their portfolio as a whole, using the following questions as prompts:

What do I remember most?
What is most striking in 'My Activities and Reflections' and in 'My Logbook'?
What could I have done differently?
What got in the way of me doing something differently?
What made me change over time?
What have I learnt about myself?
What describes me best where I am now?

5. The learners also completed a table in which the 20 competences from the RFCDC were listed. They were asked to indicate the reference numbers of the activities in which each individual competence had been exhibited. Some of the learners also used this table to introduce some final reflective comments on their use of individual competences (e.g., 'I would like to know more about that', 'I love getting to know new cultures and interacting with people', 'Sometimes I am not happy with my success and I always want to make more progress'). At the very end of the process, the learners compiled a contents list for their portfolio and produced a title page.

The teachers commented afterwards that what they appreciated most about the portfolio was that it helped to inform the learners about their own citizenship behaviours and their competences. The portfolio had provided the learners with a valuable opportunity to consolidate information about what they had been doing over the previous three months. It had also given them the chance to reflect on the progress that they had been making and on what they still needed to develop in the future. In addition, the descriptors had enabled the teachers to assess and understand the learners' levels of proficiency in the use of the various competences, and to discover where each individual learner still required further development.

As in the case of the ELP, the availability of not only clear and detailed descriptions of all 20 competences but also validated and scaled descriptors helps to ensure the *validity* of the assessments that are made using the PCDC. In addition, because the assessors (whether these are learners themselves, peers or teachers) use explicit descriptors to draw their inferences about learners' proficiency, the *reliability* of these inferences is strengthened. Furthermore, because learners themselves are in control of the contents of their portfolios and have the right to withhold any materials they do not wish to disclose through their portfolios, the PCDC is high on *respectfulness*. Moreover, the process of compiling the PCDC is both *transparent and equitable* as long as the teacher provides sufficiently clear guidance to all learners right at the outset of the process, and as long as this guidance provides the scope for all learners to document the full range of their competences and proficiency in their portfolios through whatever examples and means they themselves wish to use. Finally, the *practicality* of using the PCDC has been confirmed through extensive piloting in multiple countries and educational contexts. For all of these reasons, the PCDC satisfies all of the key principles for quality and equity in education.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have argued that, in order to ensure quality and equity in education, when assessments of learners are being made, those assessments need to satisfy six principles: validity, reliability, transparency, equity, respectfulness and practicality. We have also argued that portfolios offer the optimal means to satisfy these six principles, especially in relationship to assessing plurilingual, intercultural and democratic competences. Two

examples of portfolios that may be used for assessing these competences have been described and illustrated: the ELP and the PCDC.

In addition, it should be noted that because portfolios are typically embedded in everyday classroom practices where learners and teachers may discuss and use them to promote further learning, and because the behaviours which are documented in portfolios may be drawn from any context – the classroom, the wider school environment, the home environment, the local community or indeed the wider world beyond – portfolios are arguably the most suitable tool to use for learning-oriented assessment because they contain descriptions of learners' behaviour that has occurred within real-world situations which are chosen by the learners themselves for their personal relevance and significance. For all of these reasons, we believe that portfolios offer a solution to many of the challenges that are associated with assessment in general and with assessing plurilingual, intercultural and democratic competences in particular.

Notes

[i] There is also good evidence that, despite the widespread use of streaming, this practice has negligible effects on educational outcomes (unlike setting, where learners are divided into separate groups *within* the classroom for a specific subject based on their abilities in that subject, which does have significant benefits for outcomes) (Steenbergen-Hu et al., 2016).
[ii] Despite being published twenty years after the *ELP*, the *Companion Volume* can be conceived as part of its conceptual framework, because a substantial portion of the latter is intended to complete the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* precisely in relationship to the concept of 'plurilingual competence'.
[iii] Detailed guidance for teachers is also available from the Council of Europe on how to use the ELP (see https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio/templates-of-the-3-parts-of-a-pel and https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio/elp-related-publications) and the PCDC (see Council of Europe, 2021a, 2021b).
[iv] N.B. The Council of Europe has developed an additional set of tools, the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* (AIE), to support learners' critical reflections on intercultural encounters, reactions to cultural differences, and intercultural communications (see also Chapter 2). As such, the AIE may be used by learners for inclusion within the *Dossier* section of the ELP (or in the documents section of the PCDC). For further information about the AIE, see www.coe.int/autobiography.

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