

## **Zita Mažuolienė**

*Institute of Foreign Languages  
Vilnius University  
Universiteto g. 5, LT-01513 Vilnius, Lietuva  
Tel.: +370 676 46882  
E-mail: zmaz@takas.lt*

*Research interests: language testing, English language teacher training, learner training, ESP*

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## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO IN LITHUANIA: PROBLEMS AND IMPLICATIONS**

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*The European Language Portfolio (ELP) has been one of the biggest language education projects of the last decade in Europe. Lithuania has invested considerable finances and effort to exploit the benefits of the ELP. There have been a number of Portfolios designed for the Lithuanian system of education followed by piloting projects and seminars for language teachers run on a large scale at all levels of education. However, the implementation of the ELP in Lithuania seems to be very slow. The article looks into the reasons for the reluctance of language teachers to employ the ELP in the classroom practice and the possible ways of promoting the ELP implementation. The role of school authorities is emphasized and some possible solutions for stimulating stake holders' interest in the ELP suggested.*

*KEY WORDS: European Language Portfolio, ELP implementation, integration, syllabus, ELP dissemination.*

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The European Language Portfolio, developed alongside with, or as a “by-product” of, Common European Framework of Reference, is the subject receiving the most attention from language policy authorities, theoreticians and practitioners in the language acquisition area not only in Europe but in many other countries of the world as well.

With the first portfolios piloted in 15 European countries in 1998-2000, and 30 portfolios under piloting in 2001, at present the European Portfolio site of the Council of Europe numbers 113 validated portfolios for different age groups (from young learners to adults) and different purposes

(vocational education, language teachers, translators and interpreters, migrants and others). Quite a number of portfolios exist or function in Europe without validation, so the number of portfolios created is considerably larger.

Lithuania got involved into the activities related to the European Language Portfolio right at the beginning of the century, and in the year 2000, a team of teachers started developing the Portfolio for senior classes of secondary education. At present, there are the following Portfolios designed:

ELP for learners in upper secondary education (or 15+), validated in 2006;

ELP for learners aged 11 to 15, validated in 2010;  
 ELP for adults;  
 e-portfolio (for 15+).

The electronic Portfolio for upper secondary education is interactive and the other portfolios in their digital format are also placed on the same site.

At present, designing the *European Language Portfolio for young learners* is commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Science and recommendations for *an ELP for immigrants* have been worked out.<sup>1</sup>

To help teachers in understanding and application of the ELP, a manual for the teachers working in the upper classes of secondary education (*Teacher's guide for ELP*) has been worked out and published and an extended *Teacher's book*<sup>2</sup>, mainly focused on the Portfolio for learners aged 11 to 15, has been placed on the site of the Ministry of Education and Science.

The implementation of the ELP, however, its practical application and popularity in the Lithuanian system of education does not seem to match the effort that has been put into its design, dissemination and teacher training. The aim of this article is to review the implementation of ELP in Lithuania and look into the problems related to its employment for the purpose of achieving better results in language learning.

The benefits of the European Language Portfolios have been clearly indicated in various documents of the Council of Europe, reports on numerous seminars (Hughes 2000; Little 2006, 2009; Schärer 2000, 2004),

manuals for teachers and designers (Schneider & Lenz 2001; Little & Perclová 2001) and discussed in international seminars.

The value of the Portfolio is inherent in its principal functions: pedagogic and reporting.

The pedagogic function is aimed at enhancing the motivation of learners, improving their ability to communicate in different languages, helping learners to reflect their objectives, ways of learning and success in language learning, plan their learning, and motivate them to learn autonomously. It can also encourage learners to enhance their plurilingual and intercultural experience through contacts and visits, projects, reading or use of the media. (Schneider & Lenz 2001, p. 5). The reporting function of the Portfolio is performed by registering the results of relevant summative evaluation, diplomas, certificates, attestations/descriptions of schooling in a language other than L1, participation in student exchange programmes, attestations/descriptions of regular private contacts with speakers of other languages, selected written products, audio and video recordings of oral production, etc. (ibid).

This list of functions clearly implies that by working with all three component parts of the Portfolio, i.e. **recording** intercultural experience, **reflecting** on one's learning to learn, and **assessing** ones' own skills with the help of descriptors, the ELP can be a powerful educational tool, since by evidence of achievement, it motivates learners to extend and diversify their language skills at all levels.

To apply it effectively, both teachers and students should be well aware of all the constituent parts of the Portfolio, understand their aims, and be willing to cooperate.

<sup>1</sup> The realization of the latter very much depends on the Institution which will be willing to take the responsibility for its implementation.

<sup>2</sup> Kaip praktiškai taikyti „Europos kalbų aplanką“ mokant užsienio kalbų.

## Integration of ELP into educational process

As noted by seminar reporters (Little 2004, 2006, Schärer 2004) the functions of the Portfolio can be performed and it can produce tangible results in language learning only if it is used on regular basis and is integrated into the process of education.

The ELP piloting teachers (Thérèse L'Hotelier and Elizabeth Troisgros 2003, Evagelia Kaga-Giovoussoglou 2003, Hans Ulrich Bosshard 2003, Asta Jonauskienė, Marija Brezgina, Nijolė Stankarienė, Valentina Semeniuk, Marija Bagdanavičienė, Virgilija Bobinienė, Loreta Šernienė 2006, and many others), while unanimously acknowledging the benefits of the Portfolio, stressed the necessity, first of all, to familiarize all the teachers with the aims, the structure, and the possible activities of applying the Portfolio and especially with the way of relating the ELP to General curriculum framework, the syllabus and the textbooks.

One of the most sensitive problems in applying the ELP in Lithuania is harmonizing the Portfolio with the syllabus, the textbook, and the teaching materials used by individual teachers. The easiest link to be established in this respect is that between the **ELP** and the **syllabus**, since in terms of the abilities to be developed, they both have the same basis – the description scales of the Common European Framework of Reference.

Concerning the link between the **ELP** and the **textbook**, in a seminar on digital ELP in Bergen (2006), Alessandra Corda quoted the following implications of a group discussion at Luxemburg seminar (2002): There are “... **three possible relations between the ELP and the textbook:**

**(i) entirely external, (ii) entirely embedded, (iii) the ELP extends language learning beyond the textbook.”**

The evidence coming from teachers who either piloted the Portfolio or have been implementing it suggests that the best way to achieve effect in the process of developing communicative skills is by completely integrating the Portfolio in the whole process and using it regularly. In this respect, the experience of one of the designers of the Lithuanian Portfolio for basic school, Irena Budreikienė from Utena's Shapoka gymnasium, might be of great value. The lesson planning practiced by the teacher is an excellent example of embedding the Portfolio into teaching/ learning activities.

The detailed plan of the teaching process contains the **aims** of a lesson as prescribed **by the syllabus** (expressed in terms of the topic, language knowledge and language skills), and the **abilities** of the ELP for self-assessment. According to the teacher, **the guiding element in the detailed plan for her is the Portfolio**. It directs and sets the aims and development of certain skills, since the competences presented in the General Curriculum Framework are of more general character, whereas the ELP permits to specify the GC Framework requirements and to plan the development of communicative skills in consecutive order. As can be seen in the table on pages 114–115, the numbers of the Portfolio descriptors of the abilities being developed are indicated<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The descriptors in the Lithuanian ELP 15+ are numbered to help teachers use them in planning and indicate them to students. Unfortunately, following the requirement of the ELP Validation Committee, the numbering system has been removed in the *ELP for 12–15* on the grounds that “the numbering system... erroneously suggests a progression” (Language Policy Division, Strasbourg, 5 December 2008).

Table 1

Fragment of a detailed plan with an integrated ELP, form 11, B2  
Unit 1 (16-22 hours)

Topic (according to GCF)	N of hours	Students achievements		ELP Self-assessment	Teaching aids and resources	Assessment and Evaluation
		Knowledge and understanding-Activity	Abilities developed according to GCF			
<b>Young people &amp; their life</b> (Personal characteristics moods, beliefs, views)	3 - 4	<p><b>Vocabulary:</b> talking about people, personality adjectives, comparisons with <i>as...as</i>,</p> <p><b>Grammar:</b> Past and Perfect tenses</p> <p><b>Listening:</b> (<i>multiple matching</i>)</p>	<p><b>Listening</b></p> <p>1) Can generally follow the main points of extended discussion around him/her, provided speech is clearly articulated in standard dialect.</p> <p>2) Can understand the main ideas of propositionally and linguistically complex speech on both concrete and abstract topics delivered in a standard dialect</p> <p>3) Can follow extended speech and complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar,</p> <p><b>Spoken production</b></p> <p>1. Can reasonably fluently sustain a straightforward description of one of a variety of subjects within his/her field of interest, presenting it as a linear sequence of points.</p>	<p><b>LC: B<sub>1</sub>.4.</b> (<i>I can understand when people express their opinions in a simple, clear way.</i>)</p> <p><b>LC: B<sub>2</sub>.4.</b> (<i>I can understand the main idea of linguistically complex speech on both concrete and abstract topics delivered in a standard dialect.</i>)</p>	<p>1. Solutions Upper-Inter. IA - B.</p> <p>2. 14 Topics. Personal Identity</p>	
<b>Life of prominent personalities:</b> writers, composers, scholars, politicians and state leaders.	2 - 3	<p><b>Speaking</b> (monologue): talking about people; describing personality</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> (<i>gap-filling, answering the questions</i>)</p>	<p><b>Reading:</b></p> <p>2. Can scan longer texts in order to locate desired information, and gather information from different parts of a text, or from different texts in order to fulfil a specific task.</p>	<p><b>SP: B<sub>1</sub>.1.</b> (<i>I can give straightforward descriptions in familiar subject areas</i>)</p> <p><b>R: B<sub>2</sub>.1.</b> (<i>I can understand in detail texts within my field of interest.</i>)</p>	<p>Solutions Upper-Inter. IC,</p>	

Topic (according to GCF)	N of hours	Students achievements		ELP Self-assessment	Teaching aids and resources	Assessment and Evaluation
		Knowledge and understanding-Activity	Abilities developed according to GCF			
(Outstanding examples of fiction, art, science and technology of target language country)			<p>3. Can understand articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular stances or viewpoints.</p> <p>4. Can read with a large degree of independence, adapting style and speed of reading to different texts and purposes, and using appropriate reference sources selectively. Has a broad active reading vocabulary, but may experience some difficulty with low frequency idioms.</p> <p><b>Listening</b> 5. Can understand the main ideas of propositionally and linguistically complex speech on both concrete and abstract topics.</p> <p><b>Speaking: expressing opinion</b> 6. Can enter unprepared into conversation on familiar topics, express personal opinions and exchange information on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life.</p>	<p><b>R: B<sub>1</sub>3</b> (I can understand articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints.)</p> <p><b>LC: B<sub>2</sub>2</b>. (I can understand the main idea of linguistically complex speech on both concrete and abstract topics delivered in a standard dialect)</p> <p><b>SI: B<sub>1</sub>9</b>. (I can have quite long conversations with friends about things that interest us.)</p> <p><b>SI: B<sub>1</sub>15</b>. (I can give or find personal views and opinions in an informal discussion with friends)</p>	<p>Texts about famous Lithuanian people</p>	<p><b>SP</b> Monologue: describing personality, expressing opinion. EKA ( B<sub>1</sub>1).</p>

LC – Listening comprehension; R – Reading; SP – Spoken Production; SI – Spoken Interaction

and the students know what their activities are directed at. According to Budreikienė, the Portfolio is a more effective tool for organizing the whole process of developing communicative skills and practical activities than the syllabus. The teacher also stresses that there is no contradiction between the three constituent parts of the plan.

It is frequently emphasized that the ELP moves the responsibility for the learning outcomes from the teacher to the learner. A detailed plan can contribute to this process. By familiarizing themselves with the aims and activities of the detailed plan, learners can themselves define the abilities to be developed, set their own aims and ask or search for additional activities. The ELP embedded in a detailed plan is an excellent tool for differentiating all the aspects of the educational process: setting the aims, organizing the activities, assessment and self-assessment. The ELP descriptors can also point both to the teacher and the student what additional materials must be used or developed to achieve the established aims.

Another question which regularly arises in discussions with the teachers implementing Portfolios is **“When can a student say that he/she has mastered a certain skill?”**. In the extended manual “How to work with the European Language Portfolio” (developed by Budreikienė, Mažuolienė and Skapienė in 2010), students are advised to

mark in their checklists the skill as mastered when they can perform a task for a certain ability successfully three times during a certain period of time, usually a term.

### Barriers for the implementation of the ELP in Lithuania

Lithuanian system of education has a considerable potential for integrating the ELP into the process of language teaching. All the Portfolios designed for different groups of learners underwent piloting and training stages. In the first stage of piloting the ELP 15+ in 2003–2004, 1200 copies were distributed in 35 schools with 11 teachers checking the comprehensibility of the checklists and the effect that the Portfolio produced on the learning process. Another 1000 copies were used by 260 consultants who had been trained in 1 to 3 day seminars at the Teacher Professional Development Centre. The Portfolio for 5th–8<sup>th</sup> forms was piloted in 2008 with 10 teachers, who were also responsible for disseminating information and the ELP methodology across Lithuania.

According to the information provided by Justinas Bartusevičius, senior methodologist of the Teacher Professional Development Centre, there have been 25 three-day seminars run in the period of 2005–2007 and over 80 seminars (lasting from one to three days) given in the regional centres of education with over 2000 teachers of foreign

Table 2. Teacher training for ELP implementation

Year	Teacher Professional development Centre			Regional Educational Centres		
	seminars	days	participants	seminars	days	participants
2005	7	3	143			
2006	7	3	283	10	3	318
2007	11	3	310	10	2	196
				61	1	1449

languages participating (these numbers also include teachers of Lithuanian as state language in non-Lithuanian schools). See table 2 for exact figures.

However, in spite of the involvement of teachers in piloting stages of the Portfolios and a substantial number of seminars given for teachers from different areas of Lithuania, it must be admitted that teachers attempting to incorporate the ELP in their educational activities are very few. Discussions with the most active teachers of the country have revealed that the ELP is not as widely accepted and used as it deserves for the following reasons:

- 1) Despite the huge effort made to introduce the ELP into the educational system, not all teachers are well aware of the meaning, benefits, and ways of working with the Portfolio;
- 2) School authorities, even those familiar with the concept of the Portfolio, do not quite understand its philosophy and acknowledge its benefits<sup>4</sup>;
- 3) Those teachers who are familiar with the Portfolio do not have sufficient motivation to apply it in their classes. The most frequent reasons presented by teachers are as follows:
  - it's additional work, teachers are overloaded with a lot of paper work and different activities, there is no time for starting new ambiguous ways of teaching and preparing for their implementation;
  - there is no extra time allotted for the ELP in the school curriculum, since most of the activities are directed

- towards preparing for examination;
- no external motivation exists in any forms of encouragement, the authorities are indifferent or unsupportive.

The principal reason expressed by most teachers (as noted by Stanevičienė at a 2006 ELP seminar in Vilnius) is “It’s just another experiment, it’s not obligatory”.

It must be noted that the problem is not Lithuania-specific. In the latest report (2008) on the development of ELP in Europe, Rolf Schärer, having acknowledged a tremendous impact that the Portfolio has produced in many European countries acting as “a catalyst for change”, also admits that “not all the ELPs produced are distributed and not all ELPs distributed are being used”, “not all learners and teachers favour a learner-centred approach which shifts responsibility to the learner”, and that “a gap too wide between the demands of the curriculum and the ELP principles is difficult to manage” (Schärer 2008, p. 3–4). Schärer accounts the cases of failure to implement the portfolios as initially planned for “shifts in policy and priorities, insufficient clarification of ELP status, diffuse expectations and objectives, imbalance between goals and allocated resources, tensions between the official curriculum and the underlying concepts of the ELP, (e.g. only few curricula so far define their goals in “can do” terms that correspond to the “I can” descriptors in the ELP checklists), etc.” (ibid. p. 5).

The estimation of the situation in 2008 is still valid today for many European countries. Though there has not been any formal evaluation of Portfolio implementation in Lithuania, the evidence coming from school teachers at seminars and workshops reveals that the Portfolio is not accepted by everyone; it is not part of the teaching /

<sup>4</sup> There has been a case when a school administrator considered imbedding the ELP descriptors into planning as aberration from the established norms and demanded to remove them from the plan.

learning process, it has not become “a tool to trigger changes”.

Though implementation of the Portfolio has received a considerable support from the Ministry of Education and Science in the phase of designing the portfolios and disseminating information among teachers, further steps should be taken to help school authorities understand the ways the ELP can be employed on a larger scale.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> International seminar on the ELP implementation the working groups were encouraged to consider in their discussions the following propositions:

1. The systematic collection, screening, reflection and transfer of know-how and experience will support ELP implementation.
2. Whole-school language policies are needed if ELP implementation is to achieve critical mass.
3. School principals should be targeted as key stakeholders.
4. Good ELP practice should be rewarded.
5. The ELP has to evolve in order to remain useful.
6. Political support and guidance need to be maintained. (Little 2006, p. 6)

In the Lithuanian context an extensive in-depth investigation into the follow-up of the training programs on the ELP and their dissemination at schools might not only throw more light on the situation but would also rekindle interest in the ways, benefits and challenges of applying the ELP.

The experience of the countries in Europe with successful implementation of the ELP has shown that “regular teacher seminars in broadly familiar contexts seem to yield good transfer effects” (Schärer 2008, p. 4). One-off seminars are not sufficient, evidently the

Portfolio demands further sustained regular promotion by the teachers who practice it, who have enthusiasm for innovative ways to help students learn the language, and who can share their experience in dealing with the problems that teachers encounter in applying the ELP. When teachers’ needs for appropriate training and support are disregarded, it leads to a distorted perspective of the ELP, its mechanical application and disappointment in the innovative ways of learning languages. Accurately planned and monitored projects for an extended period of time followed by their evaluation discussed in public might help ensure the implementation of the ELP.

## Conclusions

Lithuania possesses a strong foundation for introducing positive changes in language teaching with the help of the European Language Portfolio: the accredited ELPs for all sections of the education system and a sufficiently large number of teachers informed about the benefits and ways of applying the ELP. However, ten years of experience in implementing the European Language Portfolios have proved that they have not produced the desired impact on the quality of teaching/learning.

To improve the situation, effort needs to be made on the part of teachers, teacher trainers and authorities. Teachers need to gain better awareness of how to integrate the ELP into the school curriculum and make it compatible with the syllabus and the textbooks. Seminars and workshops on regular basis could help teachers solve the problems related to the specific cases of integrating the ELP.

Involvement of school authorities, with the role of deputy directors clearly defined

in the process of implementation, is of utmost importance. Without support of school authorities, teachers are neither willing nor able to introduce changes in the development and application of new ways of teaching. Encouragement given to teachers can take various forms: discussing successful practices in public, inserting a line about the ELP implementation in the list of requirements for attestation or reducing the teaching load.

The Portfolio can be implemented successfully if and only if the authorities understand that this is a long process and that

further dissemination of the ELP methodology is necessary to get all schools involved in the implementation not just individual teachers.

With the implementation of the Portfolio being slack, its reporting function cannot be fully performed, since the information on the achievement of a student is directed only to the school environment – students, teachers or, sometimes, parents. To perform its reporting function, the Portfolio should be better promoted in all spheres of life by informing employers, university authorities, ministries and centres of education.

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**Zita Mažuolienė**

Vilniaus universitetas, Lietuva

*Moksliniai interesai: anglų kalbos mokytojų rengimas, kalbinių kompetencijų vertinimas ir įsivertinimas, profesinės anglų kalbos mokymas*

## EUROPOS KALBŲ APLANKO DIEGIMAS LIETUVOJE: PROBLEMOS IR SPRENDIMAI

**Santrauka**

Straipsnyje apžvelgiama Europos kalbų aplanko (EKA) diegimo Lietuvoje patirtis ir nagrinėjamos priežastys, trukdančios sėkmingai jį taikyti švietimo sistemoje.

Lietuvoje sukurtos palankios sąlygos EKA taikyti: sukurti Aplankai skirtingo amžiaus grupėms, parengta metodinė medžiaga darbui su Aplankais vidurinio mokslo švietimo sistemoje, funkcionuoja elektroninis interaktyvus vyresniųjų klasių Aplanko variantas. Pedagogų profesinio rengimo centre pravesta per šimtą įvairios trukmės (nuo vienos iki trijų dienų) seminarų, kuriuose dalyvavo apie pusantro tūkstančio užsienio kalbų ir lietuvių valstybinės kalbos mokytojų. Tačiau nepaisant didelių finansinių ir žmogiškųjų investicijų Europos kalbų aplankas Lietuvoje diegiamas lėtai ir vangiai.

Pagrindinės nesėkmingo EKA taikymo priežastys kyla dėl administracijos abejingumo jo taikymui, mokytojų motyvacijos stokos, negebėjimo integruoti EKA į mokymo procesą, sieti jį su programos reikalavimais ir mokomąja medžiaga. Sėkmingai taikyti EKA galima tik esant visiškai dermei tarp EKA ir kitų sudėtinių mokymo proceso dalių. Straipsnyje pateikiamas anglų kalbos detalaus mokomojo plano fragmentas iliustruoja, kaip galima integruoti EKA į mokymo procesą, kaip planuoti mokymo veiklas darniai siejant EKA su kitais mokomojo plano komponentais, kaip Aplanko aprašai gali tapti šio proceso šerdimi, galinčia ne tik sujungti mokymą(si) ir į(si)vertinimą, bet ir padėti nuosekliau juos organizuoti.

Siekiant sėkmingai taikyti Europos kalbų aplanką būtinas glaudus administracijos ir mokytojų tarpusavio bendradarbiavimas, teigiamo patyrimo sklaida, visapusiškas mokytojų skatinimas. Aplanko sklaidą turėtų vykdyti mokytojai,

**Zita Mažuolienė**

Vilnius University, Lithuania

*Research interests: Language testing, English language teacher training, learner training, ESP*

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO IN LITHUANIA: PROBLEMS AND IMPLICATIONS

**Summary**

The article reviews the experience of designing and implementing the European Language Portfolio (ELP) in Lithuania and analyses the obstacles for its successful employment in the system of education.

The European language Portfolio has been one of the biggest language education projects of the last decade in Europe. Lithuania has invested considerable finances and effort to exploit the benefits of the ELP, the country possesses strong foundation for introducing positive changes in language teaching with the help of the European Language Portfolio: the accredited ELPs for all sections of the education system and a sufficiently large number of teachers informed about the benefits and ways of applying the ELP. However, ten years of experience in implementing the European Language Portfolios have not produced the desired impact on the quality of teaching/learning.

To improve the situation, effort needs to be made on the part of teachers, teacher trainers and authorities. Teachers need to gain better awareness of how to integrate the ELP into the school curriculum and make it compatible with the syllabus and the textbooks. Seminars and workshops on regular basis could help teachers solve the problems related to the specific cases of integrating the ELP.

Involvement of the school authorities, with the role of deputy directors clearly defined in the process of implementation, is of utmost importance. Without support of school authorities, teachers are neither willing nor able to introduce changes in the development and application of new ways of teaching. Encouragement given to teachers can take various forms: discussing successful practices in public, taking into account

sėkmingai taikę Aplankus ir susipažinę su jo taikymo galimybėmis ir praktika Europoje. Su informuojamąja Aplanko funkcija turėtų būti supažindinami visi socialiniai partneriai: ne tik vidurinio mokslo švietimo sistemos dalyviai, bet ir darbdaviai, kuriems svarbus objektyvus darbuotojo užsienio kalbos kompetencijos įvertinimas.

REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: Europos kalbų aplankas, EKA taikymas, integravimas, detalusis mokymo planas; EKA sklaida.

teacher's involvement in the ELP implementation for attestation, or reducing the teaching load.

The Portfolio can be implemented successfully if and only if the authorities understand that this is a long process and that further dissemination of the ELP methodology is necessary to get all school involved in the implementation not just individual teachers.

KEY WORDS: European Language Portfolio, ELP implementation, integration, syllabus, ELP dissemination.

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