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1. Identify and describe the training program.

This case report describes innovative developments in English as a foreign language (EFL) for people with a vision or hearing impairment of any severity. The initiatives took place against a background of promoting the social inclusion of non-native speakers of English who are blind and vision impaired (BVI) or deaf and hearing impaired (DHI), focusing in particular on their inclusion in the workplace.

Two consultancy groups were involved, overlapping in personnel[2] as well as in time for a period of four years. They consisted of teachers of English to blind people in Bulgaria and Greece, the National Association of Blind Entrepreneurs in Bulgaria, and applied linguists and adult education specialists in Austria, Germany, and the UK. For deaf people a similar team was assembled from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Romania, and the UK.

2. Describe the target audience for the training program.

The difficulties of BVI and DHI people in getting employment are well-known: unemployment among these groups is always greater than in the population as a whole. Expeditious surveys by the consultancy group confirmed this idea, together with the fact that in eastern Europe there has been a legacy of exclusion rather than integration of people with impairments. The abilities, expertise, and competence of BVI and DHI persons are often ignored, or are unknown to many, including potential employers. Making employers aware of the English language competence of BVI and DHI people is an essential step towards promoting their employability.

This need to raise awareness among employers highlighted the difficulties which employers face when judging the language competence of BVI and DHI candidates as potential members of the workforce. Employers may wonder whether the competences described in certificates for deaf or blind people are comparable to those attained by sighted or hearing people applying for the same job.

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[2] Details of the project partners are at elpforblind.eu/pd.php?lcode=EN&pd=8 and www.deafport.eu/EN/partners.html.

Furthermore, as part of the encouragement of self-awareness, the BVI and DHI candidates themselves need to understand how their personal competence would be assessed. They should also know how that competence might be measured against the competence of a person without any impairment.

An assessment package which is mapped against norms for the general language learner or for language for specific occupations has been produced under the generic title of *European Language Portfolio.* This portfolio includes a *Language Passport* and other supporting documentation, all developed through the Council of Europe[3]. The Language Passport is a graded list of Can-Do statements related to communicative language skills.

One of the undertakings of this program was to modify, delete, or extend the existing European Language Portfolio Can-Do statements, in order to create a set which apply clearly and directly to BVI and DHI language learners. The consultancy groups included experts familiar with the Council of Europe template of the Language Passport. To produce a Language Passport for BVI and DHI persons to show to employers, the BVI and DHI program also needed to develop the necessary supporting documentation, which as a whole is called the European Language Portfolio.

3. Describe the needs assessment procedures utilized to develop the program.

Needs assessment procedures in English as a foreign language are plentiful, and vary greatly in the depth and quality of their analysis. For some target groups, such as adults at open-enrolment classes, the analysis is perhaps vague, or indeed led by the contents of the textbook or the requirements of an examination or assessment procedure. For others – hairdressers, electric engineers, export sale staff, hotel workers – the analysis might be very detailed and specific. These and other occupational groups can include BVI and DHI people. The constraints on their performance and their ability to communicate successfully in the foreign language have never been quantified or recognized officially.

In conjunction with teachers of English to the target groups, the consortium looked closely at a range of needs analyses, noted the gaps and inappropriate texts, and then developed a needs analysis document which reflected the particular circumstances of BVI and DHI learners; this was approved by the target groups.

4. Explain the English language training program's over-arching goals and specific objectives.

The consultancy groups identified three specific objectives necessary to realise the over-arching goal of promoting employability through English language skills, namely by:

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[3] See www.coe.int/t/dg4/portfolio/?l=e&m=/main_pages/portfolios.html for full details. Note the link to Parts of the Portfolio

- developing a Language Passport specifically for blind and vision impaired people (LP BVI) and for deaf and hearing impaired people (LP DHI);

- developing the necessary supporting documentation for the LP BVI and for the LP DHI; and

- preparing a Guide for Employers.

5. Describe the teaching methods and training procedures used in the program.

This report is not describing teaching methods and training procedures per se. Rather it offers an accessible tool for individual learners, groups and teachers to measure ability and levels of competence against internationally accepted standards, documentation for which is available in all the languages of Europe. To that extent, this program can accommodate any mode of teaching and learning; it measures and records levels of competence in communicative skills – i.e. using the language at work.

The teaching carried out by program partners covered the complete spectrum, from full-time education in state-funded schools, to part time education in adult education institutes. However, it is worth commenting on teaching methods and training procedures. With extremely few exceptions, the task of teachers of English to BVI and DHI learners is made difficult by the lack of resources tailor-made for their target groups. This means that the goodwill, energy and commitment of the staff are focused on transforming materials designed for hearing and sighted learners into materials suited for their classes. For BVI and DHI, the vocabulary and structures contained in standard course books used to teach English can be inappropriate. For example, descriptions of people based on the colour of hair, clothing, or things such as a balloon, luggage or cars should be replaced by language more useful to a learner with a severe visual impairment. Further information can be obtained from the individual partners; see http://www.assist-net.eu/ for DHI; and www.euroinformbg.com for BVI.

6. Describe the teaching materials used in the program.

The outcome of this program is the Language Passport (LP) and this relates to any set of teaching materials because it defines communicative objectives. The LP is a small passport-like booklet which contains a short summary of the holder's abilities in any foreign language. The summary is expressed by a range of Can-Do statements at six levels of ability, which cover the language skills of speaking, reading, writing and listening, suitably adapted for BVI and DHI persons. The LP is a user-friendly document and its contents are decided by the holder and his or her competent mentor. The LP is designed to be accessible for the holder and for anyone who wants to look in it – for example, the holder's friends, family, or potential employers.

Because the LP is a summary document, it is underpinned by a far more detailed set of Can-Do statements in the so-called *Language Biography*. This document is part of the supporting documentation referred to above which forms the complete European Language Portfolio. It is the key document in the package. It is completed by the learner and states what he/she can do in EFL; it provides further information on language learning experiences gained in and outside formal educational contexts; and it gives insights into the learner's cross-cultural experiences and awareness. The language skills are described in detail, with numerous Can-Do statements in each skill at each of the six levels.

Can-Do statements in EFL describe particular capabilities, for example, "I can propose a wedding toast" or "I can follow the instructions in a maintenance manual." Can-Do statements can apply to any age group, any type of communication, and any language. For example, the statement "I can describe my work to visitors" has the same communicative outcome in Bulgarian, Greek, English, or any language, even though the words, sounds, script, or grammar are different in each. Here are some examples of typical Can-Do Statements:

Example 1: Speaking With Other People	
Lowest (level 1 of 6):	I can handle very short social exchanges with one other speaker, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.
Highest (level 6 of 6):	I can express myself fluently and convey fine shades of meaning precisely.

Example 2: Understanding What People Say	
Intermediate (level 2 of 6):	I can understand words and phrases related to everyday life, such as basic personal information or employment.
Advanced (level 4 of 6):	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument, provided the topic is reasonably familiar.

An important feature of the LP and the documentation is that is personalized by the holder. The phrase 'everyday life, such as basic personal information or employment' might be changed to 'my love of gardening and my work in a bookshop'.

Detailed sets of Can-Do statements exist, whether for general use or for highly specific purposes of particular professionals, such as nurses or railway engine drivers, and can be viewed on the Council of Europe website quoted above. Personalized profiles will depend on topic, relevance, age, sex, and social and cultural factors. No such adapted sets had previously existed for people who are blind and vision impaired or deaf and hearing impaired.

A. **What written and spoken genres are covered in the training program?**

The BVI components were developed first and followed the traditional model of four language skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. The contexts in which learners might use the skills depended on the class they attended, but the majority focused on all genres associated with social interaction and work-related matters. The main change was in the consideration of alternatives methods of coping with a genre. As mentioned above, reading as a skimming skill might become a listening task if the text is read out. Writing tasks might become spoken transcription.

In the development of the components for the DHI, a re-evaluation of the four skills gave rise to a new taxonomy and a new sequence of presentation to the learner. The skill sets for DHI are described as Reading, Writing, Speaking with Other People, Making Announcements and Speeches, and Understanding What People Say.

Speaking is divided into two categories: Speaking with Other People for two way communication; and Making Announcements and Speeches for one-way communication. Listening as a term is broadened to Understanding What People Say, which now includes other methods of achieving this communicative objective. For example, the communicative outcome of an auditory input might be achieved by reading a speech-to-text screen. The DHI learners focused on all genres associated with social interaction and work-related matters.

B.   What communicative functions are covered in the training program?

The Language Passport documentation allows for almost any communicative function, for two reasons. Firstly, the Language Biography relates to real life; and secondly, the skills level range from complete beginner to near-native speaker in competence**.**

For BVI and DHI, the modes of discourse expected of sighted or hearing people – such as *skim reading*, or *listening for gist* – seem to be quite impossible for many BVI and DHI language learners. Yet if we understand these modes of discourse as having communicative outcomes, then there can be a way for BVI and DHI learners to achieve the outcomes, even if the routes to them are different. By recognizing this possibility in the learning and assessment process, the newly developed Language Passports enable BVI and DHI people to recognize and explain their competences.

Inappropriate textbook tasks
To accomplish the communicative function of many exercises, it may be necessary to change the vocabulary and structures in a task. It is easy to find examples of tasks in textbooks where the language is inappropriate for BVI or DHI learner.

Example 3: Describing People
Task 1   Look at the picture. [picture shows five people labeled A – E]
         Who fits this description - person A, B, C, D, or E?.

> She has long, brown hair. Her dress is sleeveless. She looks quite young.

A blind learner of English can never answer this particular question. But that does not mean that a blind person learning English cannot describe people at all. There are several issues to consider here. First, a sighted learner of English might not understand *sleeveless* or *brown* or *quite*. Second, at this elementary level of general English, the lexis chosen can easily vary: The textbook input is just an enabling model for real communication.
The sentence patterns "She has…", "It is…", and "She VERBS…" are the foundations of the description, and a blind student can learn and communicate with these structures.

This point leads to the third consideration: Another equally valid task should be substituted which yields the same communicative outcome, but with different words or structures. Blind people can describe other people very well, for example, by touch or by listening to their voices.

We can see that this strategy applies to the whole BVI and DHI population, and relates to different degrees of impairment. Blind people describe people, animals, places and objects through many instances of hearing, taste, touch, and smell, as well as heat, space, and balance. Deaf people describe people, animals, places, and objects through many instances of vision, taste, touch, and smell, as well as heat, space, and balance. By making these insights explicit in the Can-Do statements, the teacher (or the course book or the examination) reduces the degree of disability in learners fulfilling the communicative task. The learners' impairment is present, but the task is enabling because descriptions of language learning are based on blind-specific or deaf-specific Can-Do statements.

Changing the modes of discourse

Among BVI and DHI persons, it is a regular occurrence in their native language that a written notice can be read to a blind person, or that a loudspeaker announcement can be written down for a deaf person. The use of assistive devices and other techniques is commonplace. However, this process is not recognized as an integral part of the communication skills set which BVI and DHI learners have in a foreign language. A feature of the BVI and DHI Can-Do statements is to make these distinctions explicit at all levels. Here are some examples:

Example 4a: Skim reading
Skim reading is a task encountered in real life; it is practical, relevant, and achievable.
Input: Printed program guide
Classroom task: Skim read a program guide to find the time of a radio program
Outcome: Time of program
Can-Do statement: I can skim read schedules and find times

For a blind learner, the task set out in Example 4A is clearly impossible. However, the following task specified in Example 4B is achievable.

Example 4b: Extracting specific information
Extracting specific information is a task encountered in real life; it is practical, relevant, and achievable.

Input: Printed program guide
Classroom task: Find the time of a radio program
Assistive device: A computer speaking; a friend reading aloud
Outcome: Time of program
Can-Do statement: I can extract specific information from written schedules and find times

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Similarly, deaf people cannot hear an announcement about a train's delayed arrival time. However, they can read it when it is written down, and a *Listening for Information* task has become a *Reading for Information* task.

Other examples are when *Look & Speak* becomes *Touch & Speak.* Tasks based on *Reading* become *Dialogue*; or *Writing* becomes *Speaking* – for example, leaving a spoken message rather than sending a text message.

The communicative abilities of BVI and DHI people can be shown through appropriate tasks, and the new Can-Do by the learners' impairments. The development of the Can-Do statements highlighted how BVI and DHI learners are distributed along a scale which includes all apparently non-impaired learners. For example, the introduction to *Understanding people at any level* describes the a constraint from the point of view of a hearing impaired person:

> Everyday noise (e.g., traffic, restaurant clatter, crowds) can sometimes make hearing very difficult. Difficulty in hearing on certain occasions is not because of a lack of ability by me, but a temporary lack of suitable conditions preventing me from using my ability.

This situation can apply to any learner on occasion (or to any native speaker. For those with a hearing impairment, it applies to a greater degree while remaining on the same scale.

C.   What speech events are covered in the training program?

The Language Biography reflects a person's life. It can relate to self, family and friends, and work; therefore, any speech event might occur. They can all measured against the scale of competences set out in the document. This link to real life highlights an essential feature of the LP BVI and DHI program. People with impairments are considered as part of the whole language learning population in all respects – in terms of relevant learning goals, preparedness for employment, and assessment of their competence.

The following is an indicative list of ways in which a hearing-impaired learner can resolve a situation where there is difficulty in understanding what is being spoken:

Understanding people at any level

If I am deaf or have problems hearing what is said in this language, I use a variety of ways of helping myself, including the following:

- letting people know that I have a hearing loss; asking speakers to help me by speaking more clearly, or by lowering their voice if they are shouting, or by allowing me to see their face;
- trying to understand what is being said by speech-reading: that is, visually interpreting facial movements (eyebrows, mouth, lips) and body language (e.g., shrugs, hand movements);
- using information provided by the context, language, and situation;
- asking for repetition from the speaker (e.g., a sales assistant) or another listener (e.g., for public announcements);
- asking the hearing speaker to spell the word or phrase, or draw the object, or sketch a map;
- using aids available to anyone (e.g., volume control, amplifiers);
- using my own equipment (e.g., hearing aids, cochlear implants, induction loop); and
- transferring my lip-reading skills, if any, to the new situation.

It is clear by inspection that many of the remedies above apply to learners with no impairment. The LP for BVI and DHI are not restrictive documents, highlighting just what learners with impairments might achieve. They are inclusive documents which allow people with impairments to compare their competence in communicative outcomes with the rest of the population.

8. Explain the delivery mechanisms employed by the program.

The BVI and DHI Language Passport materials can be used by any teachers of English (or other languages) to people with vision or hearing impairments. The documentation is transferable to any pedagogic situation, can apply to any occupation, and can be individualized by the holder.

The teaching carried out by program partners covered the complete spectrum, from full-time education in state-funded schools, to part time education in adult education institutes.

The primary delivery mode for English language tuition to BVI and DHI people is classroom-based instruction, whether for individuals, small groups, or whole classes. In all cases, this teaching is accompanied by closely monitored student committed time for follow up, preparation, and consolidation tasks. Information Technology is used increasingly, sometimes within limits imposed by budget and competence.

The Language Passport for Blind and Visually Impaired People and the Language Passport for Deaf and Hearing Impaired People can be accessed through the websites in print form or in e-format.

9. Explain the assessment procedures used in the program.

The assessment of competence of BVI and DHI language learners gains validity if the abilities can be mapped against the abilities of learners with no such impairment. This assessment is what the BVI and DHI Language Passport program does.

When employers are comparing the qualifications and abilities of employees or job applicants, it is important for them that the comparisons can be made easily. International English tests and certificates are moderated so that similar scores represent similar abilities. Employers do not want to compare English language competence of applicants, for example, with "blind English", or with "English as used by deaf and hearing impaired people".

In examples 3 and 4 above where there has been a switch in task construction or discourse mode, the BVI and DHI Can-Do statements recognise that the communicative outcome has been achieved. The route to the outcome may be different, but the outcome itself is the same.

Of course for many BVI and DHI learners of English, taking this different route may prove more difficult and may take longer than for other learners. This challenge is analogous to learning a language deemed easy compared with learning a language deemed difficult. Consider the Can-Do statement, "I can make formal presentations about my work and employment, taking questions from the audience if appropriate applies to advanced learners." There is an expectation that native speakers of English can take longer to reach this level of competence in, say, Vietnamese than they would in Spanish or German. But if this level of competence is claimed, then the ability to perform must be there.

The Employers Guide to the materials for Deaf and Hearing Impaired people states this view in these terms:

This documentation is specifically for Deaf and Hearing Impaired people. In order to achieve a specified level of ability in any language skill, the performance of a deaf or hard of hearing person must match the internationally agreed norms and standards which apply to everyone. The key document for employers is the *Language Passport*, which provides a short summary of the language skills, the levels of ability, and the range of languages of an individual passport holder. Employers can use the *Language Passport* to quickly assess an employee's suitability for any foreign language task.

The internationally agreed norms and standards in the Language Passports for BVI and DHI people are aligned to a rating scale agreed upon by the Council of Europe. The definitions of each descriptor in the scale are available in all the languages of Europe, and the Language Passport is recognized by employers throughout Europe and elsewhere.

The six levels of ability referred to above are listed as *Basic User* (A1 and A2), *Independent User* (B1 and B2) and *Proficient User* (C1 and C2) on the Common European Framework of Reference. The skills are traditionally listed in the normal sequence of acquisition: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Speaking is subdivided into spoken interaction and spoken production. This system was used for the BVI Language Passport.

During the development of DHI Language Passport, the team wanted to take the particularization of the Can-Do statements a little further. The skills were re-named and re-ordered to reflect hearing impairment, giving *Reading*, *Writing*, *Speaking with other people*, *Making speeches and announcements*, and *Understanding what people say*.

10. Explain the program evaluation mechanisms used.

The BVI and DHI Language Passport program was funded by the European Commission. The Commission has a body of independent experts who evaluate such programs at the halfway stage and at the end. The feedback is practical and related to the contents, but programs must score well to receive the finance as planned.

The independent European Union evaluation has appraised the BVI and the DHI program most positively. In particular the DHI program, with the acronym Deaf Port, scored ten out of ten in three categories, and nine out of ten in four, for an overall mark of 90%. This grade is a mark acknowledged as high under this system.

The evaluation report highlighted in particular the development of an *Employer's Guide*; a new set of self-assessment tasks; and a background paper *Sign language, signing, and gesticulation*: *Report*, justifying the exclusion of sign language from the Can-Do statements. The evaluation is available on the Language Training London website.

11. Discuss the challenges involved in offering this English training program.

A major challenge for the BVI and DHI Language Passport program was how to rethink radically the content and modes of presentation of the Can-Do statements. Clearly deaf and blind people have special issues associated with learning English (or any other new language), so changes to the standard Council of Europe (COE) documentation were needed. But it was also important not to lose the norm calibration with the accepted bank of COE materials dealing with other target groups, such as young children, teenagers, or general adult education.

It was also important to make the contents transparent and accessible to learners and potential employers. This paper has outlined some of the key issues in the development of the BVI and DHI Language Passport program, and the websites contain all the documentation.

12. Describe the successes of the program and explain how they are documented.

The success of BVI and DHI Language Passport extends beyond the deliverables. It has influenced other developments, showing sustainability both in materials and in their transferability to other scenarios. The positive outcomes include employability, personal development, and encouraging respect for the individual. Through the BVI and DHI materials, the target groups have learned how to better codify their knowledge and skills.

The aspiration set out in the Employers Guide has been achieved. That is, the LP DHI allows an employer to see at a glance what an employee is able to do in any language. For example, a person may be able to read service manuals or import documentation in three languages, but be good at welcoming foreign guests in just one language. A switchboard operator may be able to deal with incoming calls in five languages, but cannot write much in any of them. The DHI Language Passport allows an employer to match a work task to a particular employee.

Developing the BVI and DHI Language Passport materials and the Employers Guide provides a variety of benefits, including the following:
- for the learners: improved textbooks and learning objectives;
- for the teachers: improved conditions for teaching;
- for assessment: more relevant and accurate methods; and
- for employers: easily accessible information about the abilities of BVI and DHI persons in English as foreign language.

These BVI and DHI Language Passport materials are copyrighted and commercial exploitation is subject to normal negotiation. However, they can be downloaded and used for educational purposes by individuals, schools, companies, and adult education centers; acknowledgement should be given where possible.

References

Language Passport for Blind and Visually Impaired People http://elpforblind.eu/

Language Passport for Deaf and Hearing Impaired People www.deafport.eu/

Language Training London www.ltltraining.eu/projects.php

Council of Europe http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/portfolio/?l=e&m=/main_pages/portfolios.html

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