

WORKSHEET B

Title Language biography	
Objective(s) To raise awareness of the importance of language biography for language teachers	
Keywords Learner - learning process – autonomy – plurilingualism - plurilingual competence	
Ref to the Guide II. 2	Ref to the CEFR 8.4.2.
To complete this worksheet you need ... Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters www.coe.int/t/dg4/autobiography/default_EN.asp Examples of PEL Extracts from other language biographies	
Task	
Step 1 († † †)	
Read the following extracts from language biographies by teachers or future teachers. Then reflect on their successes and difficulties as learners of a modern language. Share ideas with others.	
<i>Cristina</i> “I was born in Romania, where I learnt my language with my parents and then at school. When I was twelve, we emigrated in France for my father’s job, and I went to sixth grade school with French pupils. I only managed to understand a little part of the exchanges and the teachers’ questions: the summer before our departure, I had learnt French with an old lady, a retired French teacher, who made me read, repeat and pronounce to better my performances (French <i>r</i> , the <i>ch</i> , ...). But that wasn’t enough: above all, I didn’t understand the logic of activities in class. When the French teacher said “Do you understand?” I used to hide so as to avoid answering because I was ashamed, and when he insisted, I blushed. One day he himself understood and asked me to come and see him every weekend after the lesson. He would explain things to me again, lend me books and give me extra exercises, and he smiled at me saying that I would get there. And it was true indeed: after studying French Letters, I became a teacher. Here I am, twenty years later, teaching foreign children who arrive in France not knowing the language, or hardly. We do writing workshops where they write about their departure and their arrival in France; when they stop for fear of making mistakes or because they can’t find the right word, I understand; and when we have recess, I tell them how I myself arrived in France in 1988, I show them photos, and their eyes go bright. I feel that they can see their success is possible.”	
<i>David</i> “I only spoke English in my childhood and adolescence because in every place where we lived (London, Bombay, Jakarta, Sydney, ...) English was the usual language; when my schoolmates spoke other languages among them, I learnt some words with them. I didn’t realize how easy it was. I learnt other languages in class, but that stopped when I left the classroom. But when I fell in love with a Swiss journalist whose family was partly German-speaking and we moved to	



Lausanne, I had to really start learning and writing another language and even two. Sorry! Three, four, because then my wife was sent as a radio correspondent to La Paz, and later to Brasilia. And that undoubtedly isn't finished: I am an engineer and I became a teacher in specialised English, and thanks to my late learning, I understand my students better: their difficulties to get out of their habits, the importance of previous cultural learning, the fear of losing their identity in a new dominant language, etc. My recipe: listening, putting myself in their place, trying to understand how they learn based on their initial schooling. After so many years I haven't forgotten my astonishment when I had to answer my father-in-law in German (a language that I learnt a little at school) and how at that time ... some words didn't come to me. *Sprachlos!* How ashamed I felt. I laugh now, but at the bottom of my heart those are bitter memories."

Step 2 (†)

Think at your own successes and difficulties as a (former) language learner and write a short paragraph.

Choose a specific experience (at school or out-of-school), and try to remember in a systematic way:

- what was pleasant, nice (for example, exercises, relations with the teacher and the classmates, types of activities, etc.), and why (your opinion then and now);
- what was difficult and why.
- how did you become successful in the learning of a modern language.

Step 3 († † †)

Share your paragraphs with your colleagues and exchange on main ideas.

Step 4 († †)

- What do you do when you are a teacher?
 - o to better understand each learner and his/her language biography;
 - o to develop positive evaluation and to play down the importance of mistakes
 - o to help learners build on their linguistic strengths/previous knowledge/language "bridges"/L1, etc
 - o to motivate each learner in the construction of their language biography.

Discuss with your partner and make notes in form of a mind map

