

Springer Texts in Education

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CEFR-informed Learning, Teaching and Assessment

A Practical Guide

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A Practical Guide

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Preface

This book is a practical guide to the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001) and the newly developed CEFR Companion Volume (CEFR/CV, Council of Europe 2018), which have increasingly been used to inform language policies and teaching practices of countries within and outside of Europe. The development of the CEFR Companion Volume reflects the evolution of a paradigm shift in language teaching which began in the 1970s. The shift was marked by the publication of the Threshold Level in 1975, and accelerated with the introduction of the CEFR; that is, the defining of objectives in terms of performance standards rather than content specification (e.g., notions and functions) and from teacher-centered language teaching to learner-centered language learning promoted through self-reflection, collaboration and mediation among learners, and between learners and teachers. This shift is occurring most visibly in Europe but can also be seen in countries beyond Europe. Countries in Asia are now keen to adopt and implement the CEFR. The Ministry of Education in Japan, for instance, proposed in 2011 that concrete objectives of English curricula at the secondary education level ought to be stated using the ‘Can Do’ schemata of the CEFR to improve English proficiency of learners. Then, the CEFR-J, a contextualized version of the CEFR, was published in 2012. In 2014, the Ministry announced a new English examination system for college enrollment to be launched in 2020 using a number of English proficiency tests developed by private testing organizations and firms, the scores of which will be linked to the six levels of the CEFR. In the People’s Republic of China, the China Standards of English (CSE) was developed in reference to the CEFR by the National Education Examinations Authority under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. In Taiwan and Vietnam, situations are similar: Each of these governments pushes the adoption of the CEFR to set standards of English proficiency and hopes to rejuvenate its English education system accordingly, which places new challenges and demands on teachers.

These top-down attempts to implement the CEFR, however, have caused great confusion among practitioners and led to misconceptualizations of the CEFR. The philosophy and core ideas of the CEFR and the principles to utilize it are neither widely understood nor shared by these practitioners. Furthermore, wide varieties of useful CEFR-related documents, which are already available through the Council of Europe (COE), the European Centre of Modern Languages (ECML) and other

organizations are not presented systematically according to themes or topics in one source, and are difficult to identify and evaluate.

This book attempts to help practitioners (i) grasp essential and core concepts of the CEFR, (ii) identify parts of the CEFR and the CEFR/CV as well as other CEFR-related resources and documents which are relevant for readers' different purposes, and (iii) utilize the resources for their own needs. The book consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 explains the philosophy and core ideas behind the CEFR and discusses its impact on language education, while acknowledging some critical views on the CEFR. The chapter also lays out major CEFR-related resources and categorizes them based on five themes, each of which will be explained in detail in the subsequent five chapters. Chapter 2 focuses on curriculum and course design; key issues are raised to consider and make decisions regarding learners' needs and CEFR descriptors, which are elucidated and utilized as a medium to articulate learners' needs. Chapter 3 focuses on how to design, implement, and evaluate CEFR-informed assessments. The chapter also clarifies important concepts in assessment such as summative and formative assessment, CEFR-informed assessment rubrics, and rater training and learner self-assessment training, which are vital to understand and perform CEFR-informed assessment. Chapter 4 focuses on learner autonomy and the European Language Portfolio. The CEFR regards learners as social agents responsible for their language learning development, and this chapter demonstrates how the European Language Portfolio promotes learners' reflective attitudes toward their learning. Chapter 5 aims to integrate topics discussed in the previous three chapters—course design, assessment, and learner autonomy—with teaching by giving CEFR-informed tasks a central role for doing so. Finally, Chap. 6 focuses on teacher autonomy, which has evolved independently of the CEFR, but which is widely discussed in line with learner autonomy and regarded as a prerequisite not only for the development of learner autonomy but also for CEFR-informed language teaching innovation.

Chapters 2 through 6 are laid out in a similar format, so that readers can easily follow each chapter and develop an understanding of how to use and contextualize the most relevant CEFR and CEFR/CV documents for their own purposes. First, each chapter elucidates parts of the CEFR, the CEFR/CV, and CEFR-related information most relevant for each theme. Second, step-by-step processes to utilize them are demonstrated in illustrative diagrams and explanations. Finally, exercises concerning the usage of the CEFR and CEFR-related information for different purposes, samples of case studies, and further reading are provided. Each chapter is written as an independent unit on its specific topic, while at the same time being interrelated to the other chapters. Therefore, the book may be read cover to cover for a thorough introduction to implementing the CEFR and its related resources, or readers may simply refer to individual chapters as the need arises.

Chapter 2, for instance, explains the most relevant parts of the CEFR and the CEFR/CV for curriculum and course design: the global scale and self-assessment grid for the former and illustrative scaled descriptors for communicative activities and language competence for the latter. It then demonstrates what constitutes CEFR descriptors by decomposing them into different descriptive roles: for instance, types

of tasks & activities, manner as well as conditions, and constraints on task performance. After a detailed analysis of CEFR descriptors, the chapter shows how to modify them to articulate overall objectives for curriculum design and concrete learning outcomes for course design. The process is demonstrated step by step, providing numerous examples, including new descriptors from the CEFR/CV. Finally, exercises concerning how to modify CEFR descriptors, case studies from Europe and beyond, and further reading are provided.

The purpose of this book is to provide a hands-on guide, a tool-kit to navigate through the complexity of the CEFR and the huge amount of available resources. It will help novice users of the CEFR grasp and implement key aspects of the framework and advanced users to reflect on their practice. The information and the resources presented may at times overlap and be repeated to illustrate application in different contexts on one side, on the other they are simplified and only mentioned sparingly so as to not overload readers. It is written by practitioners for practitioners. We hope it will help many educators to use the CEFR and its tools effectively and promote critical reflection in language learning and teaching.

Finally, this whole project would have not been realized without the very generous support by the JSPS Grant-in-Aid research funds project no. 16K02835 and 16K02834. While writing this book we presented parts of the book at several conferences including the 2018 CercleS International conference XVI in Poznan, Poland, JALT 44th Annual International Conference on Language Teaching and Learning in Shizuoka, Japan and JALT PAN-SIG 2018 Conference in Tokyo, Japan. We are very grateful to participants of the conferences and to members of JALT CEFR & LP SIG who provided comments on our work and encouragements. Our gratitude also goes to Morten Hunke and Naoyuki Naganuma who are part of the research team and helped develop ideas for the book. We are most grateful to Fergus O'Dwyer and Judith Runnels who gave valuable and insightful comments. Last but not least we are thankful for Theron Muller who painstakingly copy edited this volume.

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