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## **Project Y2**

**Report of Central Workshop 4/2005  
on the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the ECML**

**Back to the Future: the needs of tomorrow's language educators**

(Graz, Austria, 16-17 September 2005)

### **Co-ordinator:**

David Newby, Karl Franzens University, Graz (Austria)

### **Animator:**

Valerie Sollars-Camilleri, University of Malta, Msida (Malta)

### **Moderators:**

Elisabeth Görtsdorf, Karl Franzens University, Graz (Austria)

Andrea Renner, Karl Franzens University, Graz (Austria)

Christina Schuchlenz, Karl Franzens University, Graz (Austria)

Bettina Steurer, Karl Franzens University, Graz (Austria)

Wolfgang Woschitz, Karl Franzens University, Graz (Austria)

Jessica Samuel, ECML

The report is accessible in English and in French on the ECML website: <http://www.ecml.at>

The Executive Director of the ECML should be informed about any full or partial translation of the report and a copy of the translation should be sent to the ECML for information.

**Contact address**

The Executive Director  
European Centre for Modern Languages  
Council of Europe  
Nikolaiplatz 4  
A-8020 Graz  
Austria  
e-mail : [information@ecml.at](mailto:information@ecml.at)

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## **Report of the Central Workshop 4/2005 on the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the ECML**

### **Back to the Future: the needs of tomorrow's language educators**

On 16-17 September 2005 the European Centre for Modern Languages celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. To mark the occasion a workshop was held for young student teachers and postgraduate researchers from the ECML's 33 member states. The workshop was held in parallel with the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, which also saw the opening of the 'John Trim Collection' in the resource centre of the ECML.

The overall rationale of the workshop was, on the one hand, to provide teachers at the beginning of their careers with a retrospective view of the work of the ECML and of the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe and, on the other, to focus on current and future developments in language learning and teaching by actively involving participants in the ongoing ECML project "From Profile to Portfolio: a Framework for Reflection in Language Teacher Education".

The workshop co-ordinator was David Newby from the University of Graz, Austria, who is also the co-ordinator of the above-mentioned project. He was assisted by Valerie Sollars-Camilleri, University of Malta, and a team of undergraduate and postgraduate student moderators from Graz University: Elisabeth Görsdorf, Andrea Renner, Christina Schuchlenz, Bettina Steurer and Wolfgang Woschitz. Miriam Meister, a recent graduate of the Institute of English Studies, gave a plenary talk on using the ECML as a resource for research. The following objectives were set out for the workshop:

1. to introduce the work of the Council of Europe (LPD and ECML) to young researchers in language education and decision makers of tomorrow;
2. to examine new developments in language education;
3. to consider the needs of future language educators through the eyes of student teachers;
4. to create a network of student teachers;
5. to enhance ECML-based language teaching research.

The opening session of the workshop began in a light-hearted vein with participants making a 'human map of Europe' in the courtyard of the ECML, following which an opportunity was given to learn a few words of the many and varied languages represented at the workshop.

The first topic addressed by the workshop programme was 'The Work of the Council of Europe'. In a plenary talk John Trim spoke of ["The place of the Common European](#)

[Framework of Reference in teacher education and training](#)”(Appendix 1). Following this, an overview of the work of the ECML was provided by Adrian Butler, the Executive Director. The second plenary talk was given by Miriam Meister, who had recently completed a master’s thesis on the ‘Influence of the Council of Europe on Language Teaching in Austria’. Based on her experiences of writing this thesis, she spoke about the opportunities that the ECML provides to researchers in a talk entitled [“Using the ECML as a research resource”](#)”(Appendix 2).

On the Friday afternoon, a group work session took place, under the heading ‘Innovation in your local setting’. Two questions were discussed:

- What do you consider to be innovative aspects of language education in your country?
- What changes would you like to see in your teacher education?

The following innovations in language education were identified by several groups :

- Learner-centredness;
- CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning);
- The use of ICT in schools;
- The use of the *European Language Portfolio*.

Other innovative aspects included:

- Use of the communicative approach;
- Early Language Acquisition;
- Use of the *Common European Framework of Reference*;
- Plurilingualism.

It was clear from the discussions that the adoption of innovations in language education depends very much on the equipment and facilities available in the individual countries. This is particularly the case when looking at the use of ICT in schools. The implementation of the communicative approach, for example, was also considered to be dependent on certain pre-conditions such as small class sizes and adequate resources.

As far as the participants’ view of their own teacher education is concerned, the results of the group work presented a surprising homogeneity in their main concerns. The most urgent areas of improvement were seen to be:

- the need for more practice during their teacher education;
- a better balance between theory and practice.

Other areas of necessary change cited in groups were:

- More chance to reflect on issues related to learning and teaching;
- A more general language awareness among language educators;

- More networking and communication between language educators;
- A general move to adopting the innovative approaches mentioned above (in particular the communicative and learner-centred approaches) in schools and not just progression in the theory amongst experts.

The presentation of these results to the whole group was followed by a talk by Valerie Sollars-Camilleri entitled **The needs of language educators and language learners**. A short summary of her talk is given below.

Although the focus of the presentation was on the needs of language educators in the light of on-going changes which influence language teaching and learning, the main argument developed during the presentation was that the needs of educators can only be effectively addressed in the light of the changing role and needs of language learners. Methodological approaches have varied over the years. This has come about not only as a result of the dissatisfaction with the shortcomings of a particular approach but also because of widespread changes beyond the classroom. Research, historical developments, the potential impact of ICT on teaching and learning as well as changes in the roles of educators and learners have all influenced teaching and learning. Whereas learners are active participants in the learning process, capable of taking responsibility for their own learning, teachers can no longer assume that they are the unique source of knowledge and information in a classroom context. The boundary between the learner and the educator has become more diffuse: learners' prior knowledge shapes their learning with the result that they bring information and understanding to the classroom. On the other hand, educators can no longer expect to have all the information readily available; they too have become learners.

Language educators face many challenges.

- They need to constantly upgrade their own linguistic proficiency throughout their professional career.
- Language educators need to be equipped with skills which enable them to deal with more heterogeneous groups of students. Within a classroom, one needs to cater for learners of diverse abilities while simultaneously ensuring collaboration. The potential and limitations of the learners have to be acknowledged.
- While being creative and stimulating in the choice of material, educators are accountable and responsible for ensuring that standards are maintained and objectives are achieved. Thus educators can face the dilemma of choosing interesting material whilst ensuring that the curriculum is delivered.
- Language educators need to develop collaborative skills with their colleagues who may be teaching other languages or other subject areas. Collaboration among the adults not only sets the example of how students should work but facilitates the promotion of relevant and meaningful learning for students as topics of interest can be dealt with in depth (through the thematic approach) rather than superficially.

- Assuming availability, language educators need to have skills for making appropriate and maximum use of information and communication technology in order to capitalise on the potentially rich-learning environment such resources offer.

Language educators can be effective in their profession when they offer learners a teaching environment which addresses the learners' needs.

The second day of the workshop was devoted to the ongoing ECML project, "From Profile to Portfolio: a Framework for Reflection in Language Teacher Education" (project description at: <http://www.ecml.at/mtp2/FTE/>). There were two general aims to this part of the programme:

- to gain insights into the processes underlying the development of an ECML project;
- to critically assess this project and to provide feedback to the project coordinators from the perspective of the student teacher.

In a plenary session David Newby explained the background and aims of the project, a short summary of which can be found below.

Our project arose from the wish expressed by the Governing Board of the ECML to incorporate into the current medium-term programme a project which should address the broad question of harmonising teacher education across Europe. Before developing a concept, it was important, however, to take into account and build on work that had already been undertaken in this area. We therefore identified three major contributions to language teaching and teacher education. These were:

- the European Commission-financed project *European Profile for Language Teacher Education – A Frame of Reference*, which was coordinated by Mike Kelly and Mike Grenfell at Southampton University;
- the *Common European Framework of Reference*, developed by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe;
- the *European Language Portfolio*; whilst this was developed as a tool for reflection in language learning, rather than teacher education, the overall structure of the *ELP* - 'Passport–Bibliography–Dossier' - was considered as a possible model for our project.

It was our intention on the one hand to make use of the valuable contributions made by these three documents and tools and, on the other, to devise a project which would serve a need not yet met by them. It was with this in mind that we developed the overall aim of our project: to develop a core portfolio of competences required by language teachers which could be used as a tool for reflection by students during their initial teacher education. This will be referred to as the '*Student Teacher Portfolio*' (*STP*). Whilst the portfolio is intended primarily as a resource for initial teacher education, it will serve as a tool to assist curriculum development and course planning and also as an awareness-raising instrument in-service teacher education

As can be seen from the project members and the countries they work in - David Newby, Austria; Anne-Brit Fenner, Norway; Barry Jones, UK; Hanna Komorowska, Poland; Kristine Soghikyan, Armenia; Rebecca Allan, UK (representing the Southampton/EC project group) – we come from a wide cross-section of teaching cultures. Whilst we teach in vastly differing systems, we felt that it should nevertheless be possible to develop a list of competences which would be accepted as valid across Europe.

At the core of the *STP* is a list of approximately 200 ‘I can’ descriptors, which list competences in eight general areas: Context, Methodology, Resources, Lesson Planning, Conducting a Lesson, Independent Learning, Other Learning Environments, Assessment of Learning. Unlike the *European Language Portfolio*, however, in this case the descriptors refer to didactic, not linguistic, competences. The descriptors have three main functions:

- to facilitate reflection on the skills, knowledge and values required by future teachers;
- to serve as an instrument for ongoing self-assessment throughout the course of a student’s teacher education;
- to act as a springboard to dialogue among students and among students and their teacher educators.

The descriptors will be embedded in a structure adopted from the *European Language Portfolio*: a Passport, in which students will record their experiences of teaching and learning, examinations taken, supplementary skills acquired etc; a Biography, containing the descriptors; a Dossier, in which students can collect examples of their work, such as materials they have devised, lesson plans etc. The *STP* will be accompanied by a Guide for both Teacher Educators and Student Teachers.

The first draft of the *STP* will be presented at an ECML workshop in April, 2006.

After this brief introduction to the ‘*Student Teacher Portfolio*’, participants were divided into groups to analyse a single category of descriptors from the Portfolio (e.g. Methodology – Speaking; Assessment – Culture, etc. The task assigned to the groups was to answer the following questions:

1. Is the formulation of the descriptors clear?
2. To what extent are they relevant to your teaching context?
3. List three descriptors which appeal to you most.
4. List three descriptors which appeal to you least.
5. Are there any descriptors you feel should be added/excluded?
6. Any other problems/comments?

The groups all agreed that the formulation of the descriptors was generally clear although a few participants did come up with some specific linguistic criticisms, in particular concerning a certain lack of transparency of the descriptors. The participants also criticised the fact that some formulations were too ambiguous. The recommendation was made that examples should be added to the descriptors where

relevant in order to make them clearer. Some groups also found that the descriptors should be re-grouped or ordered in a more coherent fashion.

In the plenary feedback session, David Newby clarified the aims of the descriptors. They are not intended simply as a checklist to measure progress, but should lead to reflection and provoke discussion. Whilst certain descriptors may seem vague and ambiguous, it is hoped that this will make students reflect on the topic in question, which will in turn raise their awareness of relevant issues.

The descriptors were seen to be relevant to the participants' teaching contexts, especially as a tool for reflection, although the point was raised that resources would affect the relevance of certain descriptors (for example in the ICT and Classroom Management sections) in some countries. One group suggested the adaptation of the descriptors to different socio-cultural and educational contexts. David Newby responded to this by saying that the team were aware that it is impossible to achieve universal applicability due to the differences in curricula and facilities. However, the core competencies which underlie the descriptors were accepted by all members of the coordinating team, representing a variety of teaching cultures. The *STP* is not intended to be 'cast in stone'; descriptors can of course be amended by teacher educators at a national level. It should, however, be pointed out in this connection that there is a certain rationale at the heart of the *STP*; for example, the Council of Europe's philosophy on language education, focussing on learner autonomy, the use of portfolios and self-assessment is an important factor. Also, the Methodology section clearly shows an acceptance of general principles of Communicative Language Teaching.

The participants also discussed the issue of self-assessment and how to know when a descriptor could be ticked off from the list. David Newby explained that each descriptor will be accompanied by an 'open bar' assessment scale, which can be coloured in by users to chart their progress.

The final group work session was concerned with using the *STP*. The following questions were posed:

- How could it best be used?
- How useful is it for teacher education?
- What implications might it have for teacher education at your university/institute?

The participants agreed that the *STP* could be a useful tool to accompany trainee teachers throughout their education. The main points that came out of the discussion were that it could be useful as:

- A tool for reflection and self-assessment of the young teachers' progress;
- A means of self-evaluation by teacher educators themselves concerning the structure and content of teacher education programmes;

- A way of preventing teachers - by awareness raising - from getting stuck in a routine;
- A point of reference and a way of measuring progress;
- A way of encouraging student autonomy and critical thinking.

The criticism was made that the STP is very overwhelming as it stands and that it could be misused (i.e. not only for self- assessment) and so guidance or selective use of the descriptors would be essential, perhaps under the supervision of a mentor. David Newby replied that the *STP* should not be merely handed out to students but should be ‘mediated’ by teacher educators and incorporated into the teacher education programme. Also, the Students’ Guide will play an important role. One participant suggested that the guide could even contain examples relating to descriptors but that the descriptors themselves should be left open-ended as their main purpose is to provoke reflection and debate.

The discussion also brought up the fact that this kind of portfolio is already in use in certain countries and that the team of the project are in contact with the experts concerned.

These sessions provided very valuable feedback to the coordinating team, which was to meet shortly after the end of the workshop. In the meantime, several changes have been made based on the comments of workshop participants.

The final topic on the workshop agenda concerned the role student participants might play in the further development of the *STP*. As with all ECML workshops, it is hoped that participants will play an active role in disseminating the information and knowledge acquired in the course of the workshop. All in all, the participants were enthusiastic about the way the workshop had proceeded and keen to keep in contact and disseminate the results of the workshop. Participants were requested to make the *STP* known to colleagues and teachers and to explore possible ways of using the *STP* in teacher education in their respective countries.

An additional proposal put forward by participants was that each participant could produce one page of information on his/her educational system for reference for other participants.

Participants’ contributions to follow-up work on the workshop can be found on the ECML’s interactive forum under <http://www.ecml.at/interactive/>



## **Appendix 1: The place of the Common European Framework of Reference in teacher education and training**

*Lecture delivered by J.L.M.Trim (Graz, September 2005)*

It is a great pleasure to be back in Graz and to have the opportunity to talk with teacher trainers at a Council of Europe workshop, especially, perhaps, those of you who are entering on that career as I reach the end of mine. It is now almost 50 years since the Council of Europe first took up the promotion and modernisation of language teaching, following a dark period of almost 20 years in which normal international interaction was totally disrupted first by war and then by the financial restrictions and introversion of the post-war years of national reconstruction. For half of Europe, the Cold War extended the restriction of travel and foreign contact for a further 30 years. Under such conditions, language teachers became quite out of touch with the up-to-date realities of the languages and cultures they were teaching and concentrated their attention on pluristic formal correctness and the heritage of the classical national literature. My own studies of French and German left me knowing more of the language and literature of the medieval period and the early modern period up to the mid-nineteenth Century than anything spoken or written in the 20th Century. From about 1960 travel became easier and cheaper for those outside the iron curtain, and teachers and young people took full advantage of the opportunities open to them. Language teaching began to improve and the principles of language teaching for communication and the use of educational technology were formulated in the framework of an emerging applied linguistics. However, educational systems are quite resistant to change and the process of changing values, beliefs, ideas and working practices in the classroom is slow and difficult. What are the keys to success? They are many and coherence has to be achieved among the many often independent agencies involved. First there is the framework of ministerial curriculum guidelines. Then the processes for the award of qualifications: examination syllabuses and testing procedures. Suitable course materials have to be developed, perhaps authorised and made available: not only textbooks, but audio-visual materials, readers, interactive computer-based materials etc. To bring this supportive material together from diverse sources takes time, particularly if it is significantly innovative. Even so, it is a giant further step for it to be used effectively in hundreds of thousands of classrooms across our continent. Teachers and students have to be both willing and able to make the changes involved. There are quite powerful forces making for conservative attitudes among teachers. They are, after all, the successful products of the system under which they were taught and it has often been pointed out that one of the strongest influences on teachers are their own teachers and the methods they employed. Furthermore, teaching, especially language teaching is largely a female profession, and many mature teachers, having found a method that works with materials they are used to, working to tests and examinations they are familiar with, do not necessarily welcome changes which may demand extra-curricular study and preparation which conflicts with the demands on their time and energy made by a growing family. The co-operation of classroom teachers in educational innovation cannot be taken for granted,

or coerced, They must be informed, motivated, encouraged, empowered, and their workload must be made manageable. For this reason, though the Council of Europe has sought to inform and support high-level policy making and the work of support services, it has seen the essential key to successful innovation to lie in teacher-training, both initial and in-service. In the two major series of workshops for teacher training in the 80s and 90s 72 workshops were held in 21 countries, with over 2000 participants and well over 200 animators. You will find the reports of all the workshops in the library, with a consolidated report of the first series. The impact of the workshops was powerful, in broadening and deepening the conceptual basis of language teaching for international communication and understanding through the participation of leading researchers, in influencing high-level policy-making through the direct personal involvement of senior ministry officials and the national inspectorate, and changing classroom practice through the large-scale involvement of teacher trainers and teachers with training responsibilities. Together, they played a central role in developing a strong consensus on the aims, objectives and methods of language teaching across Europe and indeed more widely, which until now has remained essentially unchallenged. The success of these workshops prepared the way for two very important developments in the last years of the 20th Century. First, it gave the governments of the member states of the Council of Europe the confidence to do what they had declined to do in 1960 and 1977, and to set up, on the generous initiative of the Austrian government, a permanent European Centre for Modern Languages here in Graz to carry forward the Council's activities in close support of modern foreign language teaching in the classroom, with special emphasis on workshops for those with a multiplier function, thus freeing the section in Strasbourg for high-level policy development.

Secondly, the strong sense of common purpose, of shared educational aims and objectives, encouraged them to respond to an initiative of the Swiss government and to commission a Common European Framework for Languages. An International Symposium was held in Rüslikon in November 1991. It defined the aims of the Framework as:

- to promote and facilitate co-operation among educational institutions in different countries
- to provide a sound basis for the mutual recognition of language qualifications
- to assist learners, teachers, course designers, examining bodies and educational administrators to situate and co-ordinate their efforts.

The task of authorship was entrusted by the Council's Working Party to a small group consisting of Brian North (Eurocentres, Switzerland), Daniel Coste (St. Cloud, France) and myself. With successive drafts, field consultations and revisions, the development took a decade. The Common European Framework for Languages: learning, teaching and assessment was published simultaneously in English and French in February 2001, marking the European Year of Languages. A German version followed shortly afterwards and others, e.g. Spanish, Catalan, Basque, Italian, Finnish, have followed. A Japanese version, published in 2004, attests to the world-wide interest it has evoked. This enthusiastic response may be said to make it the best-known document in language pedagogy in recent years. From another point of view,

however, it may be said to be little known. Attention has been concentrated on the second aim: to provide a sound basis for the mutual recognition of language qualifications at the expense of the other two. This is understandable. Increasing educational and vocational mobility in Europe make it a matter of some urgency for schools and universities as well as employers to know what the qualifications brought by candidates from other countries actually mean in terms of the applicants ability to use the language. It is much to be welcomed that governments now recognise the value of objective international standards which will allow their qualifications to be situated relative to others. So attention has focussed on the scales of language proficiency and the six levels for which descriptors are given. The global scales, especially the self-evaluation grid used in versions of the European Language Portfolio have been widely reproduced. They are well-known, to the extent that many people think they are the Framework, the rest of the 200+ pages being a vague background to them. Teachers may then feel that the Framework is of concern only to those planning examination syllabus and teaching procedures at a higher level. This is unfortunate, since the Framework is designed to be accessible to all concerned with language learning, teaching and assessment, particularly classroom teachers and students.

The descriptors of levels of communicative proficiency were selected from some 30 existing lists by submitting them to a large sample of language teachers in Switzerland, retaining those which the teachers were confident in rank ordering. Those which made up the self-assessment grid are formulated so as to be understood in a common-sense way by pupils as well as teachers, so that both can get a clear idea of where they stand on the ladder and what they are aiming at as the next step. Of course, the six-level system marks the objectives for only the major steps in the educational system. As a very rough guide, A1 (breakthrough) is appropriate to progress in the first foreign language at the 10 or 11 year primary/secondary interface, A2 (waystage) to around 14, B1 (threshold) to 16+, the lower secondary goal, B2 (vantage) to 18+, the completion of upper secondary education, and C1 and C2 to specialist university level. I say a rough guide since the speed of learning depends greatly on such factors as the learner's age and aptitude, the curricular time available, extra-curricular contact, the relation of L1 to L2, etc. The awareness of an overall scheme of progress in learning may actually help to make teaching more flexible. Flexibility and diversification of language learning and teaching are indeed emphasised throughout the Framework document. One of its main functions is to provide the profession with as overall view of its aims, objectives and methods which will enable individuals to situate their own activity relative to others and to be aware of the full range of options open to them when deciding their own course of action. This is what makes it a valuable tool for teacher education and training, both initial and in-service.

Arrangements for initial teacher education and training across Europe are very diverse. For one thing, language teachers are inevitably the successful products of whatever methods were used in their own education. That experiential background is always a powerful influence on their own practice and is one of the factors which make for conservatism. As to the organisation of initial education and training in higher education, it ranges from simply releasing young teachers into the classroom after a language degree that pays no attention to lower level language teaching to courses in which advanced work in language and culture is combined with teacher

training throughout. One of the valuable aspects of a workshop like this is to enable you to exchange experience of teacher preparation across systems and to evaluate the pluses and minuses for your own personal and professional development, (bearing in mind, of course, that you are the successful products of whatever system you were exposed to!).

Given that a period of pre-service preparation is provided, it has, I suppose, two main objectives. One is to build confidence and reduce anxiety in facing the daily reality of classroom management and language teaching. The other is to give a broad perspective on the nature, aims objectives and methods of language learning and teaching.

It is in this latter respect that the Framework can be of particular value in teacher education and training. The proficiency scalings presented in Chapter 3 already provide an overview of the progressive development of knowledge and skills from the earliest stages of learning (A1) to the most advanced levels of near-native proficiency attainable within an educational system (C2). This scaling is presented in a number of ways: Table 1 gives a brief global description at 6 levels. Table 2, the self-assessment framework breaks this down into 5 activity areas (listening and reading, spoken interaction and spoken production, i.e. monologue and writing. Table 3 defines progress in terms of the quality criteria; range, accuracy, fluency, interaction and coherence, to be expected at each level. Chapter 3 also brings these aspects together in relation to a brief characterisation of the notions, functions, grammar and vocabulary implied, and points to the existing, detailed specifications available for the Threshold Level (B1) in some 25 European languages and also for English and Greek at Breakthrough (A1), Waystage (A2) and Vantage (B2) levels. These specifications are not at all rendered redundant by the general descriptors of the Framework,. However, the Threshold Level model is not concerned with qualitative judgements. It specifies what has to be done and known, rather than how well. Moreover, it specifies in detail one possible objective at B1, namely to enable a learner to act as an independent agent in a country where the language is in everyday use. This may well be what most learners want and need, but it is not the only possible objective. CEFR does not specify the content of a learning objective, but sets out more comprehensively the parameters of language use and competences, and the criteria to be satisfied if a learner is to be said to have reached a particular level of proficiency.

Finally scaling is provided for as many as possible of the activities and competences detailed in Chapters 4 and 5, which we will discuss shortly. Overall, then, the characterisation of the main stages of progress in foreign or second language proficiency is rich and valuable to a new teacher for general orientation in the field. Many users have simply looked at the most global scale, but as you see, a much more detailed scaling is available for profiling proficiency or attesting partial competences.

Using the whole of these resources, a multinational team from Germany, Austria and Switzerland has produced Profile Deutsch, based on the material from the German T-level Kontaktschwelle, but reorganising and extending it to make a 4-level specification structured according to the categories developed in CEFR. The team is currently working to extend the system to Levels C1 and C2. A similar project is being conducted for French and is expected for English.

The scales and descriptors have been of special interest to authorities who want to situate their language qualifications relative to those of others, and to the "users" of qualifications gained in other systems, such as employers in deciding who to appoint to jobs involving language use to a greater or lesser extent and educational authorities in establishing entry requirements for courses at different levels. Many authorities were very quick to state that their qualifications were at a particular level, which of course attracted the critical attention of the language testing professionals, who drew attention to the wide differences possible in the interpretation of words and phrases like, simple, basic, familiar, everyday, main ideas, without too much effort reasonably accurate, etc They also felt that it is one thing to claim that the holders of an examined qualification have reached a certain level of proficiency, and another to substantiate the claim. What if a university claims that its graduates reach level C2, but then, in its teaching and testing, uses only translation of literary texts and essays in the mother tongue, with the pass level set at 33 %? Or if a central examining body awards its highest grade (A\*) to candidates with 47 % and an acceptable C grade to those with 17 %? Transparency is needed not only on syllabus objectives, but also on test procedures and standards of marking. The Framework discusses the issues involved in Chapter 9, but does not go into technical detail, which was in fact offered in a separate guide written by Dr. Milanovic on behalf of ALTE and is now the main content of the manual prepared by a group of leading experts in the field. The same can be said of the Framework in relation to other specialist users, such as teacher trainers, textbook authors and educational authorities. Each group of specialists has to consider whether and how to make use of CEFR for its own purposes, amending, adapting and supplementing it as they find necessary and then letting the profession know what they have done so as to improve provision everywhere.

The Council of Europe has neither the power nor the desire to issue directives to member states or to independent examining bodies. However, the Council is currently conducting a project to assist governments and other agencies in developing examinations geared to CEFR. Leading test experts from a number of countries are producing a manual of principles and procedures. A draft is already on the Internet. It will be supported by sets of audio and video recordings of learners from different countries at different levels of performance, which will make it possible for testers and examiners to co-ordinate their judgements, and for classroom teachers to have a clearer picture of what to expect from students at different levels. So there is no doubt in my mind that CEFR will powerfully influence the structure and conduct of national qualifying examinations across the globe and is in fact already doing so.

A further development is now being planned, to produce "A Common European Framework of Reference for Languages of School Education". A conference has been announced, to be held in Krakow in April 2005, organised jointly by the Council of Europe and the Jagellonian University. It will review the whole field of language in school, including mother tongue education, looking at the basis of the diverse terms in use, analysing current curricular policies and also considering again proficiency descriptors and attainment issues. So, as you can see, the Framework is far from a dead end, but is generating new and more focused thinking in the fields it covers.

You may, though, by now be thinking that CEFR is concerned only with high-level policy-making, affecting national policies, curricular guidelines and examinations: matters over which the classroom teacher has little control. You may be inclined to

share the fear that your students will be made to teach to European norms which take little account of their particular situation. Some critics have expressed the fear that CEFR will be treated as a 'Bible' and that authorities will try to follow its recommendations blindly and uncritically. One German professor has gone so far as to say that if CEFR is followed, all research in applied linguistics and language didactics will come to an end! Well, I can state quite categorically that CEFR gives no instructions or even recommendations to its users as to what they should or should not do. Its function is to stimulate reflection, to invite all those concerned with language learning, teaching and assessment to ask themselves questions, to lay out options and to offer a common means of calibrating learner proficiency in fairly broad terms. We have never wanted teachers to feel themselves reduced to mere retailers of decisions made at a higher level, unthinkingly accepting curricula, materials and methods and imposing them on learners in a mechanical fashion. At the heart of the Council of Europe's work in education is the concept of education for democratic citizenship. This means that whilst national and regional authorities must provide a framework that safeguards and promotes the public interest, decisions should so far as possible be made as close as possible to the point of learning, taken by those directly involved: the teachers and the learners. That, in turn, requires of them a strong sense of social responsibility and the necessary knowledge, understanding and technical skill. For teachers, this comes from their own education and training, their reading, discussion with colleagues and their day-to-day classroom experience. For pupils, it is built up during those 10-12 formative years of full-time education by their experience of classroom learning, mediated by teachers, and their experience outside the classroom, mediated by parents, older siblings and other children and adults, as well as by their own independent efforts as their physical and mental powers develop and mature. It is the overarching aim of education for democratic citizenship that by the end of their full-time education, young people should have acquired the knowledge and understanding, and developed the powers of judgement and sense of social responsibility, that will enable them to exercise freedom and independence of thought and action responsibly, to achieve success and fulfilment in facing the challenges of living in a modern democratic society.

In our view, all teachers have a part to play in guiding and empowering the next generation in this way. Language teachers, concerned with developing the powers of understanding, expression and communication central to all human society, have a particularly important role. They need a deep understanding of the act of human communication, not only of the observable actions involved but the different kinds of knowledge and skill that a person has to call upon in order to act effectively. For me, the primary objective of CEFR is to set out, clearly and comprehensively, what a competent language user knows and does. Of course, CEFR is not a manual, but a framework, a catalogue rather than a description. But it does focus attention on the many parameters of language use and language competences, inviting the reader to reflect on the relevance of each for his or her own work.

Allow me to begin by reminding you of the aspects of language use in relation to the language user treated in Chapter 4.

## **CHAPTER 4: LANGUAGE USE AND THE LANGUAGE USER/LEARNER**

- 4.1 The context of language use:**
  - 4.1.1 domains**
  - 4.1.2 situations**
  - 4.1.3 conditions and constraints**
  - 4.1.4 the user/learner's mental context**
  - 4.1.5 the mental context of the interlocutor(s)**
  
- 4.2 Communication themes**
  
- 4.3 Communicative tasks and purposes**
  
- 4.4 Communicative language activities and strategies:**
  - 4.4.1 productive**
    - 4.4.1.1 oral production (speaking)**
    - 4.4.1.2 written production (writing)**
  - 4.4.2 receptive**
    - 4.4.2.1 aural reception (listening)**
    - 4.4.2.2 visual reception (reading)**
    - 4.4.2.3 audio-visual reception**
  - 4.4.3 interactive**
    - 4.4.3.1 oral interaction**
    - 4.4.3.2 written interaction**
  - 4.4.4 mediating**

As you see, CEFR first deals with the context in which language is used, then the themes, or subjects which are spoken of, then the tasks and purposes - what results we try to bring about through acts of communication - and then the actual activities of speaking, writing, listening and reading taken first in isolation, then linked together - in communicative interaction. Where possible, these activities are individually scaled. Note that special attention is paid to mediation, such as interpretation and translation, where language users are called upon, not to express their own ideas, but to act as a channel of communication between a people who would not otherwise understand each other. Important though face-to-face communication between plurilinguists is, it is in fact through innumerable acts of mediation that humanity overcomes its cultural and linguistic fragmentation to share a common pool of knowledge experience and understanding of the world and to function as one evolving culture, differentiated but interactive.

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**4.5 Communicative language processes**

- 4.5.1 planning**
- 4.5.2 execution**
  - 4.5.2.1 production**
  - 4.5.2.2 reception**
  - 4.5.2.3 interaction**
- 4.5.3 monitoring**
- 4.5.4 practical actions**
- 4.5.5 paralinguistic behaviour**
- 4.5.6 paratextual features**

**4.6 Texts**

- 4.6.1 media**
- 4.6.2 genres and text-types**
  - 4.6.2.1 spoken texts**
  - 4.6.2.2 written texts**

CEFR then follows through the actual processes of language production and reception, the chain of neurological, physiological and physical events, from the planning and formulation of an utterance, or written text, via its execution in the bodily actions which produce speech and writing, through to its perception, identification and understanding. We should not forget the monitoring of one's own activity while speaking, as well as the various actions, such as gesture, mimicry and body language, that accompany speech and are part of the communicative event. Lastly, texts themselves are considered and classified, not only according to their type and function, but also in relation to the media which carry them and the activities which produce them.

As you can see, all this is concerned with language in action, the what, how, when, where and why of what people do when they use language to communicate. I think you will agree that it is quite complex. Language communication is perhaps the most demanding of all human activities. To handle this complexity, we need an equally complex array of skills and different kinds of knowledge, much of which does not normally enter into our conscious awareness. In chapter 5 of the Framework, we have attempted to make a survey of these 'competences'.

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**Chapter 5 THE USER/LEARNER'S COMPETENCES**

**5.1 General competences**

- 5.1.1 declarative knowledge (savoir)**
  - 5.1.1.1 Knowledge of the world**
  - 5.1.1.2 Sociocultural knowledge**
  - 5.1.1.3 Intercultural awareness**
- 5.1.2 skills and know-how (savoir-faire)**
  - 5.1.2.1 Practical skills and know-how**
  - 5.1.2.2 Intercultural skills and know-how**
- 5.1.3 existential competence (savoir-être)**

- 5.1.4 ability to learn (savoir-apprendre)**
  - 5.1.4.1 Language and communication awareness**
  - 5.1.4.2 General phonetic skills**
  - 5.1.4.3 Study skills**
  - 5.1.4.4 Heuristic skills**

The first thing to notice is that in order to use language properly, we call upon a number of competences which come out of our general experience of life and do not seem to be particularly concerned with language. We know what sorts of things exist in the world, their properties and the relations between them, what events are possible and actually occur or can be imagined. We expect anything said or written in any language to make sense in such terms. A very important aspect, worth separate consideration, is concerned with the way human societies work and patterns of everyday living, interpersonal relations, values, beliefs and attitudes, various conventions and rituals called for in defined situations. We may then develop an awareness of the relation between our own cultural and societal values and those of another people. Then, in addition to this body of knowledge about the world we live in, we have at our disposal a range of skills for handling practical affairs and for dealing with personal relations. Then, beyond these, is a dimension less easy to place. This is the area of personal qualities, partly inborn, partly the result of experience, such as character, intelligence, sympathy, personality, which influence the way we react to people and to circumstances. For this we use the perhaps paradoxical French term *savoir être*. Intangibles, but who doubts that they have a great deal to do with the success of a teacher, and are also an important determiner of the methods a teacher will find appropriate and feel comfortable using.

The last of the general competences is *savoir apprendre*, the ability to learn. In addition to study skills, such as the ability to use learning materials and to organise one's own strategies and procedures in accordance with one's own characteristics and resources, we also include here very general linguistic competences: knowledge and understanding of the characteristics and organisation of language and the ability to perceive and produce speech sounds in general. We also attach a good deal of importance to heuristic skills, i.e. the ability to find things out for oneself, to observe accurately and then to make intelligent deductions from limited experience, going beyond what you already know..

This brings us to the communicative language competences themselves.

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- 5.2 Communicative language competences**
  - 5.2.1 linguistic competences:**
    - 5.2.1.1 lexical competence**
    - 5.2.1.2 grammatical competence**
    - 5.2.1.3 semantic competence**
    - 5.2.1.4 phonological competence**
  - 5.2.2 sociolinguistic competence:**
    - 5.2.2.1 markers of social relations**
    - 5.2.2.2 politeness conventions**
    - 5.2.2.3 expressions of folk-wisdom**

- 5.2.2.4 register differences
- 5.2.2.5 dialect and accent
- 5.2.3 pragmatic competences:
  - 5.2.3.1 discourse competence
  - 5.2.3.2 functional competence
  - 5.2.3.3 schematic design competence

Firstly, and obviously, come the linguistic competences narrowly defined: knowledge of the language system in its lexical, grammatical, semantic and phonological dimensions and skill in its use. These linguistic competences are necessarily at the core of language use and language learning. Without them there is no language! However, the Framework also deals with other language competences which play an important part in communication. The socio-linguistic competences guide the way we use language in social life. They include such markers of social relations as forms of address, honorifics, etc. Politeness conventions involve not only the use of ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ but more generally whether and how one may intrude on another person’s thought and action without giving offence. We have included what we have termed ‘expressions of folk wisdom’, because our everyday use of language is rich in common expressions, often stereotyped formulae, which imply a body of shared assumptions and attitudes which are often not directly referred to. Register differences, from the highly formal through the general colloquial to the intimate, serve to establish in the mind of the participants the nature of a social situation. Compare, for example, ‘May I suggest we postpone further consideration of this matter until our next meeting’ with ‘Let’s leave it till next time’. Who says which of these to whom, where, when and why? Lastly in this section come the features of dialect and accent that proclaim the regional and class provenance of a speaker and upon which listeners are led, rightly or wrongly, to base assumptions about these and perhaps other personal characteristics of an interlocutor.

The general heading of ‘pragmatic competences’ is given to different aspects of the language user’s ability to produce and understand language above the level of the sentence. Discourse competence covers the principles and mechanisms involved in stringing sentences together to form coherent discourse: ways of referring back and forward, logical ordering and clarity of expression, as well as features of text design, that is, how descriptions, narrative and argumentation are structured and essays, say, composed. These are matters with which mother tongue teaching is largely concerned. They become of increasing importance at higher levels of FL proficiency. Indeed, we hope that common reference to the model presented in the Framework may help teachers across the curriculum to realise that they are engaged in different aspects of a common enterprise. Functional competence covers our ability to impart and to seek factual information, to express and find out attitudes, to get people to do things and to socialise. It is dealt with briefly in the Framework, though it forms the basis of the Threshold Level model. ‘Schematic design competence’ refers to our ability to steer our way through a structured interaction, from simple question and answer to conducting an interview or buying a new suit or dress.

In all, it can be seen that what a fluent, mature language user knows and does is very complex. How much of this complexity is relevant to a teacher of foreign languages? I can imagine some hard-pressed classroom teacher saying: ‘Look! With the hours I’ve got with a class, the amount I’m supposed to cover in the syllabus and the kind of

children in my class, I've got my work cut out to just get enough vocabulary and grammar into them to pass the exams they need to get a job. The rest of it is just frills, irrelevant to me. I will give them the language; what they do with it is up to them.' Now I do not see that I am in any position to condemn such a teacher, who may be trying her best to get her pupils a qualification they must have for employment, under near-impossible conditions. She may, in fact, be making the best use of the resources, human and material, at her command. I certainly would not want her to feel threatened, anxious and guilty, afraid that regardless of circumstances, unless she manages to teach all that is in these chapters of the Framework, she is somehow failing in her work. What I would ask of such teachers - as of any others - is to think through their teaching situation and their response to it more critically and in greater depth. Are pupils in fact becoming proficient in manipulating the formal language system? Are they then able to use it effectively for some purpose? Have you got the best balance between receptive and productive skills? Between vocabulary development and grammatical organisation? Between the competing criteria of range, fluency and accuracy? If the syllabus is overloaded in relation to the time available, are you trying to cover the whole grammar, but allowing too little time for it to be mastered? Or, if you are insisting on accurate and fluent use of all that you are teaching, is this achieved at the cost of a very narrow range of experience, leaving learners unable to understand much of what they may hear or read? Above all, perhaps, are pupils well-motivated and drawn into the language, or is it a chore, a grind of mechanised exercises remote from real life, to be dropped and forgotten at the first opportunity? Does classroom teaching give you an enjoyable and satisfying professional life? Are you over-preparing, over-rehearsing examination techniques rather than developing the resources which will enable pupils to do a lot more than perform in tests, which they will in fact take equally or more successfully as a result? Are you making full use of whatever freedom of decision the syllabus leaves open to you? Or confining yourself to an unnecessary extent to acting as the agent for authorities at a higher level, whom you expect to take all the decisions for you? Only you can answer these questions. The aim of the Framework is to open your eyes to the questions that you ought to be asking, not to answer them for you.

It is for these reasons that I feel the Framework to be an invaluable tool for teacher education and training. Individual teachers may easily mistake its purpose, look for quick fixes and be disappointed. They may find its style and density daunting, and feel that they are unable to answer the questions posed. They may jump to the conclusion that it is too academic, remote from the day-to-day realities of the classroom. In the hands of an experienced teacher trainer, misconceptions can soon be overcome and I really do believe that it will provide a student setting out on a teaching career with an invaluable mind-map, a resource of continuing relevance at different career stages. In in-service training, it can give a teacher trainer the basis for getting teachers who may have got stuck in a rut and have closed down their options, to reassess their values, aims, objectives and practices in dialogue with other experienced course participants. It is much easier for the relevant, challenging questions to be raised and debated in a group under skilled management than by any individual in isolation.

A skilled animator can, for example, help teachers not to jump too easily to the conclusion that some sections are irrelevant. For instance, I was told that teachers in Hungary could see no use for the section on conditions and constraints in the context

of language use. In reply, I gave the example of language training for airline pilots, who must rely on 100% accuracy in digit recognition in noisy and distracting conditions. The pilots rely on the ability of air traffic controllers to produce clearly articulated speech. Indeed, this ability is required of all those called on to make public announcements. Behind them, those who write such announcements need to learn to phrase them in such a way as to make clarity easier – simple sentences with key words in positions of prominence! These are matters of concern regarding the vocational aspects of education. In any case, classroom management imposes severe time constraints on the nature and extent of communicative activities as well as questions of noise control. Both are serious considerations for testing. These are very practical questions that affect all teachers. The Framework cannot solve them - indeed we insist that the best solution comes from a proper understanding of the specific local conditions, but I do sincerely believe that all teachers will benefit from passing each of the categories of use and competence under review, both as individuals and, wherever possible, in dialogue, exchanging experience and ideas with colleagues.

The later chapters of the Framework are concerned with language learning and teaching, curriculum development, and assessment. Here too the approach is non-directive. No methodology is recommended. We simply set out the options, inviting teachers to identify their present practice and to reflect upon it in the light of the other options available to them. The chapter on assessment is particularly aimed at demystifying testing and freeing teachers from fear and from devoting too much attention to test techniques at the expense of the sound development of communicative abilities. It is of course of particular value to teachers given responsibility for assessing their own students, who are introduced to a wider range of techniques, with their various uses and limitations. The chapter on language teaching is especially concerned with laying out the widest range of options. As an example; we may take the general approaches to language learning and teaching set out on p. 143.

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### **6.4.1 General approaches:**

In general, how are learners expected to learn a second or foreign language (L2)? Is it in one or more of the following ways?

- a) by direct exposure to authentic use of language in L2 in one or more of the following ways:
  - i. face to face with native speaker(s);
  - ii. overhearing conversation;
  - iii. listening to radio, recordings etc.;
  - iv. watching and listening to TV, video, etc.;
  - v. reading unmodified, ungraded, authentic written texts (newspapers, magazines, stories, novels, public signs and notices etc.);
  - vi. using computer programmes, CD ROM, etc.;
  - vii. participating in computer conferences on- or off-line;
  - viii. participating in courses in other curriculum subjects which employ L2 as a medium of instruction.

b) by direct exposure to specially selected (e.g. graded) spoken utterances and written texts in L2 ('intelligible input')

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c) by direct participation in authentic communicative interaction in L2, e.g. as a conversation partner with a competent interlocutor;

d) by direct participation in specially devised and constructed tasks in L2 ('comprehensible output');

e) autodidactically, by (guided) self-study, pursuing negotiated self-directed objectives and using available instructional media;

f) by a combination of presentations, explanations, (drill) exercises and exploitation activities, but with L1 as the language of classroom management, explanation, etc.;

g) by a combination of activities as in f), but using L2 only for all classroom purposes;

h) by some combination of the above activities, starting perhaps with f), but progressively reducing the use of L1 and including more tasks and authentic texts, spoken and written, and an increasing self-study component.;

i) by combining the above with group and individual planning, implementation and evaluation of classroom activity with teacher support, negotiating interaction to satisfy different learner needs, etc.

First, the option of learning by simple exposure to authentic language is presented, then by interaction with competent speakers, then auto-didactic study, then in f) to i) the various forms of classroom teaching from the more traditional teacher-centred forms using the mother tongue as the medium of interaction to those emphasising the use of the target language and the development of autonomy.

Further options concern: the roles of teachers, learners, instructional media and texts, the development of learners' strategies and competences, and attitudes to error. The options presented for teacher and learner roles should prove sufficiently controversial to provoke lively discussion among course participants, since they raise questions of authoritarian vs. learner-centred approaches and the promotion of learner autonomy, which still arouse strong emotions!

A separate chapter is devoted to the role of tasks in learning and teaching. The chapter on curriculum development considers the options for the organisation of language teaching in schools in the light of the development of plurilingualism, the enlargement of an individual's overall communicative competence to include integrated competences in a number of languages. The essential difference between this concept of plurilingualism and the more familiar multilingualism is that languages are not seen as simply existing side by side, quite separate in the mind, but as interacting to form one integrated competence upon any part of which a user may draw to meet the

demands of communication. This makes for much greater flexibility in real situations and can be brought to bear on new learning. We should, I think, agree that we cannot be sure when educating a child what language or languages he or she will actually need in adult life. One of our responsibilities in teaching the first foreign language is to enable the learner to develop the skills needed to learn, or at least deal with, further foreign languages as necessary in later life. This is one reason why the general competences are relevant, and communicative awareness, knowledge of the world, including socio-cultural awareness, general phonetic skills as well as study and heuristic skills all have a part to play. Their development over a period of years should be planned for and cultivated rather than left to chance. I should like to see Spanish children given the confidence and ability to read a simple text in any Romance language. If they spend some years learning English, then on the one hand they are well placed to exploit to the full its Romance component, taken from French and Latin, and on the other to use its Germanic component to be able to make sense of simple texts in Dutch and in German. You may wonder how such abilities, often in respect of particular competences (e.g. reading comprehension, say), can be recognised and attested in a qualification system which is organised on the basis of single discrete subjects tested one by one on a four-skills basis. I would point in reply to the European Language Portfolio. It is specifically designed to record this kind of experience, which I feel sure would be valued by prospective employers.

I am very much aware that this rapid tour of the Framework leaves more unsaid than said. I have given rather less attention to the scaling of proficiency, because that has received most attention elsewhere and I wanted to convince you of the relevance of the general body of the document to your concerns. But there is too little time.

To summarise: the actions and competences of a fluent mature speaker are complex. Some can be transferred from MT to FL as they are. Many involve new learning or restructuring. To become a fluent mature user of a FL is a long and demanding process, which has to be planned and carried out over many years. The Framework gives an overview of the process as a whole. Educational authorities can and should use it for long-term strategic planning of language learning aims and objectives. It is for a teacher responsible for any one stage of the process to make use of it to reflect on the contribution he or she has to make to the development of pupils in its various aspects under the given conditions. It is then for teacher trainers to empower teachers to make full use of the resources which the Framework offers them. I know of a number of teacher trainers who already use the Framework as the backbone of their courses. The Guide for Users published by the Council of Europe contains a chapter contributed by Barry Jones based on his experience in doing so at Homerton College, Cambridge.

One final word; the Framework is an ideologically neutral document. It makes no recommendations, but provides all those involved in language learning, teaching and assessment at any level with a tool to facilitate reflection and communication and, if they so wish, to co-ordinate their efforts and calibrate their objectives. But I - and I believe all those engaged in the language programmes of the Council of Europe and the European Union - have clear policy objectives. We want to see a new generation of Europeans equipped with the knowledge and skills they need for communication at a more than superficial level; well-informed and open-minded in their relation to people from other cultures; flexible and able to benefit from freedom of movement

across our continent; independent but responsible in thought and action, able and willing to participate in public life and to enjoy the rights and duties of democratic citizenship. We believe that the language teaching profession has a central, indispensable role to play in helping this new generation to develop its full potential in a world with much promise yet beset by great dangers. Everything we do and produce is meant to help the profession rise to this challenge. I trust that teacher trainers will do all in their power to help it do so.



## **Appendix 2:** **Using the ECML as a research resource**

*Miriam Meister, Karl-Franzens University, Graz*

Members of the ECML and of the Governing Board, Dr Trim, colleagues from other European universities.

My name is Miriam Meister and I am a graduate student of Karl-Franzens-University Graz. I will show you today in what way I have used the ECML - and the work of the Council of Europe before the foundation of the ECML - as a resource for my research. This presentation is made up of two parts: the first is dedicated to a university course which I attended almost two years ago entitled "Second Language Acquisition: The Interface Between Theory and Practice"; the second part will be a short presentation of my thesis which bears the title "The Influence of the Work of the Council of Europe on Language Teaching in Austria". In the following I will comment on both of them in some detail.

### **I. Project Seminar**

Let me begin with the seminar held by Dr Newby at the Department of English Studies at Graz University. It was a so-called project-based linguistic seminar held in the winter semester 2002/2003. As I do not know how many of you can imagine what a 'project-based seminar' is, let me briefly explain it to you. At that time, it was the first time that this kind of seminar had been held at our university. Its aims were (and, of course, still *are* as this type of course has proved to be successful over the years) to encourage undergraduate students to become active in linguistic research and to investigate links between theory and appropriate areas of practice. Another aspect of the project-based seminar is that the participants are not only supposed to work individually, but a strong focus is also laid on team work. We had to work in groups and each had to write an individual paper which formed part of a single coherent publication, which I have brought with me, but which can also be downloaded from the ECML homepage. I will tell you the web page at the end of this presentation.

At the beginning of our seminar, which was, as mentioned above, entitled "Second Language Acquisition: The Interface Between Theory and Practice", we spoke about some of the most important theories and applications of second-language acquisition. Our task was then to find to what extent linguistic theories actually influence foreign language teaching and learning. Linguistic theory and actual pedagogic practice (this is, FL Teaching and Learning) are linked by an area of mediation: this can include teacher trainings, books, articles, projects, workshops. According to these three areas, we were divided into four groups that worked simultaneously on different tasks:

Firstly, we formed a theory group. Their task was to cover the theoretical aspects in detail and to present a theoretical basis in our publication to what was to follow.

We considered the fact that the mediation between linguistic theories and pedagogic practice functions both on an international and on a national level. Consequently, we had one group working on the international level. They carried out their research here at the ECML. The group working on the national level, carried out their research at the Austrian Centre of Competence in Modern Languages (ACCML or ÖSpK in German - Österreichisches Sprach-Kompetenz-Zentrum), which was set up by the Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, and whose main task is to carry out and implement research into foreign language learning and teaching as well as disseminating the work of the ECML at a national level.

The fourth group, the schools group, devised and administered a questionnaire in order to find to what extent the theories were actually implemented in foreign language classes in Austrian schools. The questionnaire was distributed among 88 language teachers in 17 schools.

I want to sum up our four groups: Firstly we had the theory group, secondly the group that did their research at the ECML, thirdly the group examining the work of the ACCML and fourthly, a schools group. We thus covered the theory, mediation and practice.

I am not going to describe all the findings of the four groups in detail as there is little time. I just want to mention that our work throughout the publication concentrates on certain fields of linguistic theory, namely those of general Theories of Language Learning, Language Awareness, Cultural Awareness, Languages Across the Curriculum and Learner Autonomy. In our specific groups we were subdivided according to the topics.

I do want to go into some detail about the second group of students, though, which I was part of: the ECML group. We did our research here at the library of the European Centre for Modern Languages - and on its homepage, where many workshop reports, expert résumés and so-called “thematic collections” – that is to say, summaries of the work done at the ECML so far - but also some of the project publications can be found. My task in this group was to examine to what extent theories of language learning had been reflected in the activities and publications of the ECML. The other members of my group worked on the concepts of Language Awareness, Cultural Awareness, English Across the Curriculum, Learner Autonomy and the connections between these topics with the work of the ECML.

My results of this research were that at that time only a few of the ECML workshops or projects had specifically focussed on language learning theories. Only one project had been held which was explicitly concerned with theory, entitled “Mediating between theory and practice in the context of different learning cultures and languages”, but the project publication was not available to me at the time. In the meantime it has appeared. In the current Medium-term Programme an additional project is focussing on the role of theory in teacher education. This has the title ‘Cohesion of competences, coherence of principles’.

What I found out was that theories of language learning had played a role in the centre's discussions on Learner Autonomy, Cultural Awareness, Young Learners and Bilingual Education. I thus examined these areas and tried to filter out the theories

which had entered these fields. With Learner Autonomy, for instance, reference had been made to George Kelly's constructivist theory. His theory of personal constructs, applied to foreign language learning, lends support to the idea of learner autonomy as a means of fostering individual learning processes and individual ways of approaching the learning and processing of information.

Another example of the presence of learning theories was to be found in the résumé of the work of the ECML on Young Learners from 1995-2000 by Peter Doyé. He showed some of the principal theoretical arguments from different schools of thinking to explain why it is desirable for FL learning to start early. He referred to theories from developmental psychology, neuro-physiology, anthropology and pedagogy.

I want to cite a last example which could be found in the ECML's discussion of Bilingual Education. In a workshop report of the year 1997 on "Redefining Formal Foreign Language Instruction for a Bilingual Environment" by Glen Ole Hellekjaer, there was mention of Merrill Swain's Output Hypothesis as a reaction to Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis. Krashen argues that, to learn a language, it is both necessary and sufficient to be exposed to comprehensible input. As experience has shown that comprehensible input alone is not sufficient, Merrill Swain argued for the importance of the productive output. In the workshop report the two hypotheses were put in contrast and discussed. What I found good about this workshop report was that the theory was explained very clearly and then there were also some practical examples given of how to put the theory into practice. During our research my colleagues and I found few workshop reports relating to the early work of the ECML that were really comprehensive, because very often they only described the number and names of the participants, the time tables and what was done, but for someone coming from the "outside", lacked the necessary background information to get a coherent idea of the topic. It was for this reason that the ECML introduced the idea of comprehensive publications, which give a fuller picture of the work carried out in projects. As you have already heard, these publications are available to visitors free of charge and many can be downloaded from the ECML website.

My colleagues who worked on the other topics - Language Awareness, Cultural Awareness, English Across the Curriculum, Learner Autonomy - had less difficulties of finding relevant information about the work of the ECML in these areas. They all had been important issues in the Centre's work. At the end of our seminar we had the unique opportunity to present our work here at the ECML to the members of the Governing Board of the Centre and to representatives of the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe.

Unfortunately there is no time to speak to you in more detail about our findings, but if you are interested, you can consult our publication online. I want to show, though, a short list of the main resources of the ECML we used for our research. These were:

#### 1. ECML Project publications:

For her contribution to our publication, my colleague working on Learner Autonomy focussed on two publications by the ECML. One of which provides useful information on what an autonomy-orientated textbook could look like. It gives practical examples as well. It is entitled *Approaches to Material Design in European Textbooks: Implementing Principles of Authenticity, Learner Autonomy, Cultural*

*Awareness* and was edited by Anne-Brit Fenner, David Newby. The other one, entitled *Helping Learners Learn: Exploring Strategy Instruction in Language Classrooms Across Europe*, edited by Vee Harris, is concerned with teaching learning strategies and should function as a guidance for teachers as it also contains practical advice.

2. Workshop reports

3. Thematic Collections

4. Related research

All of them can, of course, be downloaded from the ECML homepage which, in my eyes, is very helpful for anyone interested in language teaching and learning research, but also for anyone who is studying to become a language teacher or is already working as such.

In the end it was this involvement in our project seminar that made me become interested in the work of the Council of Europe in the field of language teaching and learning - also because until then I had never heard of their work, strange though this may seem to you. When I came to think about a topic for my master's thesis I knew I wanted to do something in relation with the Centre's and the Council of Europe's work on language teaching and learning. My supervisor David Newby was very helpful in this period of "topic-research" and in the end we agreed on the topic "The Influence of the Work of the Council of Europe on Language Teaching in Austria". It seemed clear to me that the Council of Europe had influenced foreign language teaching in Austria considerably; I wanted to find out in which ways and to what extent. There have been individual reports and articles written about these influences, but there was no comprehensive summary to be found. As you have probably noticed I have now come to the second part of my presentation – my thesis.

## II. Thesis

"The Influence of the Work of the Council of Europe on Language Teaching in Austria"

I should point out that in my thesis I actually concentrated on the influences of the work of the Council of Europe on language teaching in general secondary education – which are called in Austria *Allgemeinbildende höhere Schulen (AHS)*. Also, the focus is laid on the instruction of English as a foreign language.

My thesis is made up of two main parts. This is due to the fact that I concentrated on (probably) the two most significant stages of the Council's work: the setting up of a unit/credit system at the beginning of the 1970s, when language teaching was influenced widely by the communicative movement, and the publication of the influential *Threshold Level* in 1975. The other notable success which I treated in my thesis concerned the recent publication of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages – Learning, Teaching, Assessing* (CEF) in 2001. The

development of the *European Language Portfolio* is one of the Council's latest focal areas and was only dealt with briefly in my thesis.

The two main parts of my thesis thus focused on, first, the *Threshold Level* and, second, on *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF)*. Both parts are made up of a theoretical introduction and an empirical analysis. I briefly want to explain to you what this means.

Let me begin with the first part, which was concerned with the T-Level. In an introductory chapter I discussed the developments in language teaching that led to the establishment of the *Threshold Level* specifications in 1975. I started with the new focus laid on language and language use in the 1970s and the so-called 'communicative movement' that emerged at that time. The Council of Europe played a significant role in the developments that followed. Since the early 1970s its work was dedicated to the setting up of a European unit/credit scheme and the description of learning objectives through functions and notions. It was crowned by the publication of the *Threshold Level* in 1975. Maybe some of you will ask yourselves: What is this Threshold-Level she is talking about? It is a language-based specification, that describes through functions and notions the minimum requirements which learners should be familiar with in order to, as it is said, 'cross the threshold' to another language community. In 1976 *The Threshold Level for Modern Language Learning in Schools* was published. In this first important subchapter I thus presented these initial changes in the outlook on language, the innovations the communicative approach brought to language teaching and also described the underlying theories of the *Threshold Level*.

The following chapter of my thesis described the implementation of the *Threshold Level* in Austria and a first analysis of the actual national influences of the work of the Council of Europe. The analysis in this chapter again consists of two parts: in the first I examined the Austrian syllabuses for lower and higher secondary level, which came out in 1985 and 1989 respectively; in the second part, I analysed national textbooks for English.

For instance, the areas of interest for my analyses of the syllabi were the objectives and the contents of teaching which were specified. The main objective of the syllabus for lower secondary level was the achievement of communicative competence. Importance was attached to the notional/functional description of language. I also drew up tables which helped to understand in what ways the categories of the *Threshold Level* corresponded to those indicated in the syllabus. Most were to be found in both documents, although the arrangement in the syllabus was different. The syllabus also took the task of 'enabling communication' into consideration, which the *T-Level* did not. The topic areas corresponded to a great extent in both documents. The four skills assume an important role in the syllabus and also the subordinate role of grammar as a means to facilitating communication became evident, which show the influence of the communicative approach. Grammatical forms were also indicated by notional/functional descriptions.

In a second part, the schoolbooks were analysed with regard to notions and functions, grammar, topic-related behaviour and the four skills. The textbooks which I analysed had all been published in the same period, the beginning of the 1980s. The textbook

which was certainly most interesting to analyse was *Ticket to Britain*. This course book was the outcome of a project initiated by the Austrian Ministry of Education and which worked in cooperation with the Council of Europe's Modern Language Project Group. The direct influence was thus perceptible with regard to structure, content and the choice of exercises of the textbook. But also in the other textbooks the new trends and innovations in language teaching were visible, as they all tried to include the famous 'four skills', similar topics and tried to describe the use of language through functions and notions.

The second main part of my thesis was again focussed on the work of the Council of Europe, namely to the highly influential publication *The Common European Framework of Reference – Learning, Teaching and Assessment*, published in 2001. I presented a small summary of the CEF, although as those of you who know this document, this is an extremely difficult undertaking given its complexity?! A subchapter of this theoretical part of the thesis is dedicated to the *European Language Portfolio*, which, in my opinion, is a very inspiring development.

The last part of my thesis is again dedicated to the practical influences of the *Common European Framework* and the *European Language Portfolio* which are already perceptible in language teaching in Austria. I analysed parts of the new Austrian syllabus for English for higher secondary level, where the direct influence of the CEF can be clearly seen. There are, for instance, the 6 levels of proficiency used in order to describe the levels the students should reach at the individual grades; the new curriculum has only been in use since the present academic year 2004/05, which means that the results are not yet apparent.

Since last autumn, schools in Austria can also make use of the national version of the language portfolio for lower secondary education, which was developed by the ACCML. The impacts of the CEF and language portfolios on the learning of foreign languages in Austria are still very recent. In what way they will really be implemented in the language classrooms remains to be seen in the coming years. However, I think that these developments will provide interesting research topics for university students.

With my thesis, it was my purpose to show both very recent developments as well as those that occurred almost 30 years ago. In this way, I hoped to ensure that the reader is aware of the importance of the Council of Europe's work in the field of language education. However, at the same time this gave me the opportunity to show that language learning and teaching are dynamic, ongoing processes which continue to be researched, analysed, and improved over the years. In the structure of my thesis I decided to follow the historical progression and therefore vary between theoretical and analytical parts in order to make the relationship between theory and practice or the actual application of the theory and documents the Council has developed clearer. It became clearly apparent that the work of the Council of Europe - and of the ECML in the last ten years - has influenced language teaching and learning in Austria very widely, but also that Austria as a member state has played an active part in the work of the Council of Europe. Austria has benefited enormously from its close connection with the Council of Europe and in particular from the setting up of the ECML in Graz – today's event being a good example of this.

For my thesis, apart from the usual theoretical books from university libraries, I have also used Council of Europe publications, writings and project reports. In my opinion, the resource centre of the ECML, which is really very well equipped, could prove useful for anyone involved in specific research projects, for students who are writing their theses – or taking part in seminars on second language acquisition - just like me, for teachers who are looking for background or further information about a specific topic, or also simply for people who are generally interested in language teaching and learning. As I have already mentioned, the homepage of the ECML is also very well organised and contains most of the ECML publications in an online version, including by the way a PDF version of my thesis. I would also like to state that everyone at the ECML has always proved to be very helpful and willing to collaborate.

As a final point, I would also like to state my wish that the ECML should reach more university students directly and also help them get to know their work and provide them with opportunities to collaborate. Our project seminar is a positive example for the fact that collaboration *does* work. Those of us in Graz can also benefit from a dissemination project set up by the *Verein EFSZ in Österreich*, called ‘Connecting Tertiary Education Experts - CONTEXT’, a series of events at which visiting experts to the ECML present their work to a wider public of students and teachers. Last but not least, the fact that I, a former student, future teacher, and you – whether still students, already teachers or perhaps researchers - are all here today shows that networking and dissemination work is in progress, which is definitely a very positive development.

I would like to thank the ECML for having given me the chance to be here today. It was again a unique opportunity and an unforgettable event for me.



**THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ECML**  
**“Back to the Future: The Needs of Tomorrow's Language Educators”**  
**16 and 17 September 2005, Graz**

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**USING THE ECML AS A RESEARCH RESOURCE**

Miriam Meister  
Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz

**1. Project-Based Linguistic Seminar**

*“Second Language Acquisition: The Interface Between  
Theory and Practice”*

The seminar was held in the winter semester 2002/2003 at Karl-Franzens University Graz. Four groups of students were formed to investigate links between relevant areas of theory (Theory Group), mediation (ECML and ACCML Group) and practice (Schools Group).

The **ECML Group** made their investigations at the **ECML library** and on the centre's homepage ([www.ecml.at](http://www.ecml.at)). Research was carried out, for example, about the **Theories of Language Learning** and how they had been reflected in the activities and publications of the ECML. By then, only few of the ECML workshops or projects had specifically focussed on Language Learning Theories, but they had played a role in the centre's discussions on Learner Autonomy, Cultural Awareness, Young Learners and Bilingual Education. Other students analysed the concepts of **Language Awareness, Cultural Awareness, English Across the Curriculum, Learner Autonomy** and the connections between these topics with the work of the ECML.



**Research Resources: ECML Project Publications, Workshop Reports, Thematic Collections, Related Research.** All of them can, of course, be downloaded from the ECML homepage which is very helpful for anyone interested in language teaching and learning research.



**Download:**

<http://www.ecml.at/documents/relresearch/projectseminarDN.pdf>

## 2. Thesis: “*The Influence of the Work of the Council of Europe on Language Teaching in Austria*”

This master’s thesis is made up of two parts: one focuses on the **Threshold-Level** (1975) and the other on the document of the **Common European Framework for Reference – Learning, Teaching, Assessing** (CEF) (2001). Each parts consists of a theoretical introduction and an empirical analysis.

In the first part the developments that led to the establishment of the *Threshold Level* specifications are discussed (e.g. communicative movement, functions/notions, European unit/credit scheme). The first empirical chapter of the thesis describes the **implementation of the *Threshold Level* in Austria**. This analysis again consists of two parts: first, of an analysis of the Austrian syllabuses for lower and higher secondary level (1985/1989); second, of an analysis of national schoolbooks for English.

The second main part of the thesis focussed on the *Common European Framework for Reference*. After a small summary of the CEF, a chapter of the thesis is dedicated to the *European Language Portfolio (ELP)*. In a second empirical part, the **practical influences of the CEF and the ELP** which are already perceptible **on the national level** are analysed.



Research Resources:  
**Council of Europe Documents and Publications,**  
**ECML Publications,**  
**Project Reports.**



**Download:**  
<http://www.ecml.at/documents/relresearch/meister.pdf>