

## Training teachers to use the European Language Portfolio

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# The Common European Framework: Activities, competences, levels

## Foreword

When one is presenting the ELP to teachers, a common first reaction is the exclamation "where's the grammar? where's the vocabulary? Are we not supposed to teach these any longer?" Some of them would perhaps suggest that eliminating these is in fact the purpose of the portfolio, and that it is therefore not an instrument to be taken seriously. And in their eyes, this absence of an explicit grammar and vocabulary syllabus and the absence of explicit linguistic knowledge make it difficult even to consider adopting the portfolio.

It is true that the portfolio does not state explicitly what grammar and vocabulary are required for the different communicative activities, even though it has the function – among others – of providing information about an individual's knowledge of languages at a given time. Is this a contradiction?

In the presentation we propose to examine this "contradiction" and to explain more clearly the nature of the objectives described in the ELP. To do this, we will refer to the *European Common Framework of Reference* (CEFR) and, metaphorically, play on the strings of the ELP in order to draw on the extraordinary resonance that the CEFR provides for all those whose task is to accompany and guide the learners who work with the ELP.

By basing our work on the CEFR in this way, we will begin by distinguishing two kinds of objective: on the one hand, communicative language activities, and on the other communicative competences. We will turn our attention to the fascinating world presented by the different types of competence presented in the CEFR and the ELP, which extend far beyond the linguistic knowledge mentioned above. We will look more closely at the initial distinction between "activity" and "competence" and examine how this is integrated in the ELP, in order to pave the way for the issues of methodology which will be dealt with thoroughly in the workshop which will follow this presentation.

In this way our inventory of communicative activities and competences will contribute to a better understanding of the ELP and its potential – we will, for example, make clear the relationship between the language biography and certain types of competence – in order to broaden the range of methodological and curricular options open to teachers and (autonomous) learners, even if this is just by providing a rationale for present practice. Furthermore, the distinctions and definitions we will suggest in our presentation will provide a theoretical basis for other modules in the training project.

## Introduction

Activities and competences are two of the most important metacategories which are used in the CEFR to describe the (huge) domain of knowledge of languages or of an individual's language profile.

### *Communicative language activities*

The term "communicative language activity" is defined in the CEFR as a description of what a language user or learner is "able to do with a language" (CEFR, p. 43). A major part of chapter 4 of the CEF treats such activities, specifically by defining them in detailed operational descriptions in the form of scales or sub-scales. Below is an example taken from the sub-scale "writing".

### *Examples of descriptor scales of communicative activities*

#### OVERALL WRITTEN PRODUCTION (CEFR, p. 61)

C2	Can write clear, smoothly flowing, complex texts in an appropriate and effective style and a logical structure which helps the reader to find significant points.
C1	Can write clear, well-structured texts of complex subjects, underlining the relevant salient issues, expanding and supporting points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples, and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.
B2	Can write clear, detailed texts on a variety of subjects related to his/her field of interest, synthesising and evaluating information and arguments from a number of sources.
B1	Can write straightforward connected texts on a range of familiar subjects within his field of interest, by linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence.
A2	Can write a series of simple phrases and sentences linked with simple connectors like 'and', 'but' and 'because'.
A1	Can write simple isolated phrases and sentences.

CREATIVE WRITING (CEFR, p. 62)

C2	Can write clear, smoothly flowing, and fully engrossing stories and descriptions of experience in a style appropriate to the genre adopted.
C1	Can write clear, detailed, well-structured and developed descriptions and imaginative texts in an assured, personal, natural style appropriate to the reader in mind.
B2+	Can write clear, detailed descriptions of real or imaginary events and experiences, marking the relationship between ideas in clear connected text, and following established conventions of the genre concerned.
B2	Can write clear, detailed descriptions on a variety of subjects related to his/her field of interest. Can write a review of a film, book or play.
B1	Can write straightforward, detailed descriptions on a range of familiar subjects within his/her field of interest. Can write accounts of experiences, describing feelings and reactions in simple connected text. Can write a description of an event, a recent trip – real or imagined. Can narrate a story.
A2+	Can write about everyday aspects of his/her environment, e.g. people, places, a job or study experience in linked sentences. Can write very short, basic descriptions of events, past activities and personal experiences.
A2	Can write a series of simple phrases and sentences about their family, living conditions, educational background, present or most recent job. Can write short, simple imaginary biographies and simple poems about people.
A1	Can write simple phrases and sentences about themselves and imaginary people, where they live and what they do.

OVERALL WRITTEN INTERACTION (CEFR, p. 83)

C2	As C1
C1	Can express him/herself with clarity and precision, relating to the addressee flexibly and effectively.
B2	Can express news and views effectively in writing, and relate to those of others.
B1+	Can convey information and ideas on abstract as well as concrete topics, check information and ask about or explain problems with reasonable precision.
B1	Can write personal letters and notes asking for or conveying simple information of immediate relevance, getting across the point he/she feels to be important.
A2	Can write short, simple formulaic notes relating to matters in areas of immediate need.
A1	Can ask for or pass on personal details in written form.

## REPORTS AND ESSAYS (CEFR, p. 62)

C2	Can produce clear, smoothly flowing, complex reports, articles or essays which present a case, or give critical appreciation of proposals or literary works. Can provide an appropriate and effective logical structure which helps the reader to find significant points.
C1	Can write clear, well-structured expositions of complex subjects, underlining the relevant salient issues. Can expand and support points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples..
B2+	Can write an essay or report which develops an argument systematically with appropriate highlighting of significant points and relevant supporting detail. Can evaluate different ideas or solutions to a problem.
B2	Can write an essay or report which develops an argument, giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view and explaining the advantages and disadvantages of various options. Can synthesise information and arguments from a number of sources.
B1+	Can write short, simple essays on topics of interest. Can summarise, report and give his/her opinion about accumulated factual information on familiar routine and non-routine matters within his/her field with some confidence.
B1	Can write very brief reports to a standard conventionalised format, which pass on routine factual information and state reasons for actions.
A2	No descriptor available.
A1	No descriptor available.

### *Competences*

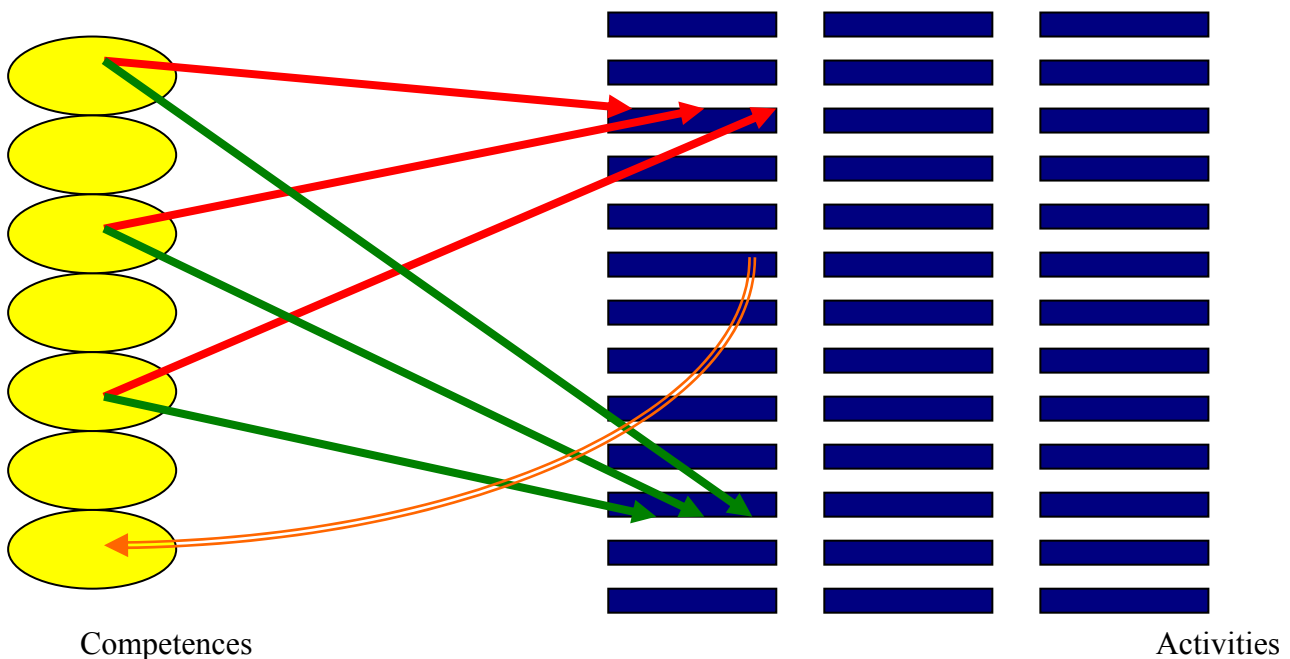
In order to carry out these activities, language users and learners use a range of competences, which is the second major metacategory in the CEFR. These competences are acquired in the course of the user / learner's previous linguistic experience, principally as s/he participates in communicative activities (CEFR p.101). These are described in Chapter 5 of the CEFR. Here is an example:

## GRAMMATICAL ACCURACY (CEFR 114)

C2	Maintains consistent grammatical control of complex language, even while attention is otherwise engaged (e.g. in forward planning, in monitoring others' reactions).
C1	Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare and difficult to spot.
B2+	Good grammatical control; occasional 'slips' or non-systematic errors and minor flaws in sentence structure may still occur, but they are rare and can often be corrected in retrospect.
B2	Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control. Does not make mistakes which lead to misunderstanding.
B1+	Communicates with reasonable accuracy in familiar contexts; generally good control though with noticeable mother tongue influence. Errors occur, but it is clear what he/she is trying to express.
B1	Uses reasonably accurately a repertoire of frequently used 'routines' and patterns associated with more predictable situations.
A2	Uses some simple structures correctly, but still systematically makes basic mistakes – for example tends to mix up tenses and forget to mark agreement; nevertheless, it is usually clear what he/she is trying to say.
A1	Shows only limited control of a few simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns in a learnt repertoire.

### *The relationship between activities and competences*

Competences can be viewed as toolboxes from which the user draws the resources to carry out activities but which are modified and added to by the communicative process. A limited number of competences allow the user to carry out a large number of activities. Understanding this distinction between the two categories of descriptor is essential for steering the process of teaching and learning languages.



What is the relationship between activities and competences from the learner's point of view ? This is a complex question since (1) learning can only be partially observed the learner is not fully aware of the process and (2) depending as it does on the learner's environment, it lends itself only partially to comparative study. Nevertheless two or three outlines of answers can be attempted: language use, especially in interaction with others, allows language acquisition, which involves the development of competences. Direct, conscious, uncontextualised learning of specific competences (such as learning grammatical rules) helps the learners, but is not sufficient to allow the language to be acquired as a communicative instrument. The usefulness of uncontextualised language study depends on factors such as the competences which have been already acquired or the availability of time for studies. The more opportunities learners have to use the language, the less it seems relevant to study without a communicative context.

## Communicative language activities

We will now look at activities in a bit more detail, first of all to point out that they can be divided into **reception, production, interaction and mediation** (principally translation and interpretation), each of which can be accomplished **orally** or **in writing**, or in a combination of **speaking** and **writing**. (CEFR 2.1.3, p. 14)

reception production interaction mediation	oral written oral / written
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At this point it is helpful to take note of some specific aspects of these types of activity (always according to the CEFR, p. 14)

Thus it is interesting to note that receptive activities assume silence on the part of the listener and attention to the medium or to the speaker and that they play an important part in many forms of learning (understanding the content of lessons, reading instructions, reference works and documents). Productive activities have also an important function in a number of academic and professional fields (spoken presentations and exposés, written studies and reports) and in the area of social evaluation which they typically give rise to (judgement of written performance or spoken fluency, confidence in spoken presentations and explanations).

In interaction, production and reception alternate, although the listener is generally trying to predict the rest of the message heard and formulating a response to it. Therefore, learning to interact involves more than learning to receive and produce utterances, and this there is frequently great emphasis placed on interaction in both language learning and language use because of the central role it plays in communication. Mediation involves both reception and production and consists of translation and interpretation (such as summarising, reporting, or (re)formulation of statements). The language activities employing mediation, of explaining an existing text in different words, form a considerable part of the day-to-day use of language in society.

## Communicative competence

### *A definition of competence*

We will start with a definition which owes much to that given in the CEFR, but which treats the categories somewhat more systematically and simplifies them by enlarging the concept of competence and by reducing the number of sub-categories. A competence is a set of areas of knowledge, or aptitudes and skills and of attitudes and existential competences (*savoir-être*) (CEFR 2.1, p. 9). The proportion of knowledge, skill and *savoir être* will, of course, vary from one competence to another.

All human competences contribute in different ways to the learner's ability to communicate and can therefore be considered as features of communicative competence. However it is useful to make a distinction between purely linguistic competences and those which do not have a direct link with language. The CEFR separates general competences and communicative language competences. Throughout the discussion of competences in the CEFR, two competences are emphasised as being transversal – these are strategic competence and learning competence, the ability to learn.

COMPETENCES	
knowledge	
know-how, skills	
existential	competence,
<i>savoir-être</i>	

### *Individual general competences*

#### *Psycho-social competence or existential competences (savoir-être)*

Personal factors such as attitudes, motivation, values, beliefs, cognitive styles and the personal traits which make up identity affect users' and learners' communicative activities (CEFR 5.1.3, p.105). These existential competences are linked to the user / learner's own personality and should be considered as frames of mind and devices that social actors must, in one way or another, take into consideration in communicative or learning situations. They are constituents of the language user's emotional, affective, cognitive and social attitudes.

Clearly these elements of *savoir-être* are not to be considered as an individual's permanent attributes. They are subject especially to social and cultural variations and because of this are sensitive areas for intercultural perceptions and relationships: the way in which a member of one culture uses language as appropriate to express cordial warmth and interest in another individual can be perceived by the interlocutor as an indication of aggressiveness or vulgarity. Existential competences can be acquired and modified in the process of language use or language learning (of one or several languages, for example).

It should be noted that these features of the learner's *savoir-être* or psycho-social competence are often considered relevant to language learning and teaching. This can lead to the development of psycho-social competence being seen as an objective in language education

and one hopes it would also include careful consideration of personality traits which help or hinder language learning and the acquisition of a second or foreign language.

### *Socio-cultural competence*

Strictly speaking, knowledge of the society and culture of the community (ies) which speak a language forms part of an individual's knowledge of the world and, is therefore part of general culture. (CEFR 5.1.1.2, p. 102-103). However, knowing about the beliefs and values current in social groups in other regions or countries – such as religious beliefs, taboos, a shared history etc. – is essential to communication. So this kind of knowledge is sufficiently important to deserve special attention in language teaching, since – in contrast with other kinds of knowledge – it is likely that it will not be part of the learner's previous knowledge or has been (de)formed as a set of stereotypes. Socio-cultural competence consists of knowledge, skills and existential competences relating to the distinctive characteristics of a particular society. These include the features of daily life, living conditions, interpersonal relations, values, beliefs and behaviours, body language, *savoir-vivre* (or knowing how to behave), social rituals (there is a more complete list of these in CEFR 5.1.1.2)

Sociocultural competence is considered as intercultural competence when it takes account of the comparison between the "world of origin" and "the world of the target community" (CEFR, p. 103). Intercultural competence comprises taking account of this contrast, an understanding of the representations of experience it embodies, the establishment of personal relationships in contact with members of the target community, coping with situations where misunderstanding or conflict arises, becoming aware of the cultural, regional and social diversity existing within and outside each of these worlds.

### *Communicative language competence*

Communicative language competence has **a number of component parts**: it includes linguistic, socio-linguistic and pragmatic competences. Each of these made up of knowledge, aptitudes and skills.

#### Linguistic competence

Linguistic competence comprises the knowledge and skills related to lexis, phonology and syntax and other features of language systems, considered independently of the sociolinguistic impact of variations in use and of the pragmatic functions of the utterances produced. (CEFR 5.2.1, p. 109) and CEFR 2.1.2). It concerns not only the range and quality of knowledge (for example, the range and precision of lexical knowledge) but also involves cognitive organisation and the way this knowledge is stored in memory (for example, the question of how a lexical item fits into the networks of associations the speaker has available) and the accessibility (for example, how an item can be recalled, activated and its availability for use). This can be either conscious and capable of being made explicit or not. It is thought that the cognitive organisation of vocabulary, the way in which phrases are stored in memory depends, together with other factors, on the cultural characteristics of the community (or communities) in which the language user's socialisation takes place and on his different learning experiences.



### Socio-linguistic competence

Socio-linguistic competence (CEFR 5.2.2, p 118 and foll.; CEFR 2.1.2, p. 13) refers to the knowledge and skills involved in using language functionally in a social context. Since language is a social phenomenon, its use requires sensitivity to social norms and customs which affect to an important degree all linguistic communication between representatives of different cultures, even if the participants are frequently unaware of them. These social norms affect, amongst other factors, rules of address, greetings and politeness, the way in which relations between generations, sexes, people of different social status, social groupings are expressed through special language markers, linguistically codified rituals, differences in register, dialect and accent, through vocal rhythms, for example. Linguistic competence leads us to consider social and intercultural parameters and the way in which they influence language use.

### Pragmatic competence

Pragmatic competence (CEFR 5.2.3, p. 123 & foll.; CEFR 2.1.2, p. 13) involves the functional uses of linguistic resources (carrying out language functions, speech acts) using scenarios or predetermined scripts of interactional exchanges. It also involves mastery of discourse, cohesion and coherence, the recognition of text types and genres, using irony or parody. Even more than in the case of this factor than for linguistic competence, the development of pragmatic skills is strongly influenced by interactive experience and by the cultural environment.

### *Transversal competences*

The learner's structuring of all five of the competences described above requires a process of acquisition and learning. The competences can become learning objectives, so it is relevant to examine how to learn and develop them. In order to develop there is a need for a further competence, a competence of acquisition (ability to learn), which we call "transversal" since it applies to all the competences (including itself, as in learning to learn) and at the same time to all the activities.

If a task is especially difficult, it may be necessary to mobilize different competences in order to carry it out and this will require applying strategies. Having appropriate strategies available, knowing how to use them is an additional transversal competence.

It seems to me that in language classes teachers are well aware of these two transversal competences in their relationship to linguistic competence (for example, how to learn vocabulary and grammar, what to do when one encounters an unknown word) and pay attention to them. But what about the other more general competences? Do they receive as much attention from learners and teachers? Aren't they often treated as though they were poor relations of the other skills? How can the ELP, which takes action of the "human", action-centred, socio-cultural dimension of language learning, help to remedy this?

### *Ability to learn or acquisitional competence - Learning skills*

Let us examine in more detail some of the aspects of acquisitional competence. In a broad sense it is the **ability to observe** new language experiences, **to participate** in them and to **integrate** the new knowledge acquired, even if it means modifying previous knowledge.

**Learning skills** (savoir-apprendre) [see CEFR 5.1.4, p. 106-107), CEFR 2.1.1, p. 11) bring into play existential competence, knowledge and skills, and depend on a combination of competences (i.e. they call on transversal application of competences).

The element of savoir-être in learning competence involves being “open to discover otherness” whether it be another language, another culture, other people or fresh knowledge; it means a readiness to take initiatives, even risks in face to face communication so that one manufactures for oneself opportunities for speaking, and knows how to ask ones interlocutor for help in communication, by reformulating what they say in a simpler way; it also comprises being a good listener, paying attention to what the other says and being aware of the risks of cultural misunderstanding.

Learning competence involves skills, too, in, for example, the ability to make efficient use of learning opportunities in teaching situations – paying close attention to information provided (concentration), grasping the purpose of tasks to be carried out, co-operating constructively in group or pair work, making frequent use of the language learnt, even at beginner levels and using new technology to search for information. It is especially important to acquire communicative skills in the target language through close observation of and participation in communicative events and to develop heuristic, analytical and observation skills.

Knowledge comes into play through understanding the principles by which language (and language learning) is structured and used, and through knowing **how** one learns in order to find a firm foundation for further learning; it is the awareness of one’s strengths and weaknesses as a learner, and the ability to identify one’s own learning needs and to use them as a basis to organise learning strategies and procedures.

There is not space here for an exhaustive account of learning competence, so I will finish with a quotation from the CEFR: “it is through the diversity of learning experiences, provided they are not compartmentalized nor strictly repetitive, that the individual extends his / her ability to learn” (p. 13)

### *Strategic competence*

"A strategy is any organised, purposeful and regulated line of action chosen by an individual to carry out a task which he or she sets for himself or herself or with which he or she is confronted” (CEFR 2.1, p. 10). Such a line of action, which we can also call a “plan” is potentially explicit. Strategic competence with regard to communicative tasks involves using mental competences and processes in order to control and manage the communicative process. It acts, therefore, as a link between the learner’s resources (his / her competences) and what he / she is able to do with them (the communicative activities).

All language users, whether native or non-native, regularly use communication strategies (which are those we are here concerned with). “Communication strategies should therefore not be viewed simply with a disability model – as a way of making up for a language deficit or a miscommunication.” (CEFR 4.4, p. 56) Since the communicative tasks to be carried out and the underlying processes they require are neither routine nor automatic, all language users and learners employ strategies.

By control and management of the process of communication, we mean specifically, for example:

- dealing with the unexpected, such as changes of domain, theme schema etc.;
- dealing with communicative breakdown in interaction or production as a result of such factors as memory lapses, inadequate communicative competence for the task in hand, misunderstandings and misinterpretation, slips of the tongue, mishearings.” (CEFR, p. 93)

These difficulties require the use of various compensation strategies, such as reorganisation of the utterance, periphrasis, substituting one word for another, asking for help or clarification, or the use of repair strategies.

However, the CEFR goes even further in its description of the strategic components of the process of communication. It includes strategies in the description of the four main kinds of communicative activity – Reception, Interaction, Production and Mediation – and for each of them it presents a sequence, based on meta-cognitive principles, of planning, execution, evaluation and repair. In this way the CEFR provides descriptions of strategies for each type of activity as they are sequenced or phased.

#### *Avoidance strategies, Achievement strategies*

Bange (1992b<sup>1</sup>) and the CEFR (4.4.1.3, p. 63) make a distinction between two types of strategy: avoidance, and achievement strategies. “Ways of scaling down ambitions to fit resources in order to ensure success in a more limited area have been described as avoidance strategies; scaling up and finding ways to cope have been described as achievement strategies. In using achievement strategies the language user adopts a positive approach with what resources he or she has; approximating or overgeneralising with simpler language, paraphrasing or describing aspects of what he or she wants to say, even “foreignising” L1 (first language) expressions (Compensating); using highly accessible pre-fabricated language he or she feels sure of – islands of reliability – to create stepping stones through what for the user is a novel situation or concept he or she wants to express (Building on previous knowledge), or just having to go with what he or she can half remember and thinks might work (Trying out). Whether or not the language user is aware of compensating, skating over thin ice or using language tentatively, feedback in terms of facial expression, gesture and subsequent moves in the conversation offer him or her the opportunity to monitor the success of the communication (Monitoring success). In addition, particularly in non-interactive activities (e.g. giving a presentation, writing a report) the language user may consciously monitor linguistically as well as communicatively, spot slips and “favourite” mistakes and correct them (Self-correction)“ (CEFR 4.4.1.3, p. 63).

These strategies are communicative strategies, since they are used with the intention of achieving successful communication, or of coping with a communicative problem. However, because there are close links between communication, i.e. using language to communicate, and learning a language (for which communication is both a framework and a means of learning), communicative strategies can also have a parallel effect of aiding acquisition, provided that the language user sets this as an explicit (and long-term) objective, and sees himself or herself in the role of learner (Bange 1992b).

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<sup>1</sup> Bange, Pierre (1992b): *A propos de la communication et de l'apprentissage de L2*. AILE 1, Editions de Paris VIII. S. 53-85.

## Schematic summary of communicative competence

Psycho-social  
Socio-cultural  
linguistic  
pragmatic  
sociolinguistic

strategic  
acquisitional

a  
c  
t  
i  
v  
i  
t  
i  
e  
s

## Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper, we emphasised the conviction that understanding the distinction between communicative activities, strategies and competences is important, since in any teaching and learning enterprise, one can (and in fact has to) focus on one or the other of these features of language learning as the learning objective and the subject of evaluation. Teachers, learners, directors of studies, materials writers and test developers all face the challenge of focusing on a specific feature and the degree to which and the way in which they take account of the other components of communication. Any examination of textbooks illustrates this clearly.

It is to be hoped that the use of the CEFR will contribute not only to learning aims being established appropriately for learners in their social environment, but also to ensuring that the methods used to attain the objectives will be those that stakeholders (especially the learners themselves) perceive as being the most efficient. For efficiency does not just depend on the kind of human and material resources employed, but also to learners' characteristics and motivation. In order to respect this principle, a broad range of possible objectives and a greater variety of methods and resources are essential.

In our view the introduction of the ELP, on the one hand, broadens the range of objectives and communicative language activities (in both quantity and quality) traditionally offered and, at the same time, promotes the development and the enrichment of learners' individual competences and their transversal competences (especially learning ability), as the table below illustrates.

There is a further aspect I would like to emphasise in this presentation. A detailed knowledge of activities and competences makes it possible to complement the parts of the ELP which users and teachers may find too vague. For example, the description of competences in the CEFR provides additional specific definitions which can be used to write the language biography in the Swiss Portfolio – whose categories in this area are somewhat meagre.

*Activities and competences in the Swiss European Language Portfolio*

	activities	competences
Language passport I Self-assessment grid 1.1	■■■ listening, reading, taking part in a conversation, continuous oral production, writing	■ some features of pragmatic competence (fluency)
Language passport II Résumé des expériences linguistiques et interculturelles	■ assumes activities	■ assumes competences (psycho-social, sociocultural, socio-linguistic, ...)
Language Biography I Checklists for self-assessment 2.2	■■■ listening, reading, taking part in a conversation, continuous oral production, writing strategies	■ certain aspects of communicative language competence (pragmatic, linguistic)
Language Biography II Personal language learning biography, important linguistic and intercultural experiences 2.1, 2.3	■	■■■ a number of competences, especially general and transversal ones (without descriptors): ability to learn, psycho- social, sociocultural, socio-linguistic, strategic – less emphasis on linguistic and pragmatic competences
Language Biography III Information about foreign language learning in schools and language courses (objectives, content, methodology): My learning objectives (2.4, 2.5)	■■ activities	■■ competences
Dossier The learning process and present level of knowlege 3.1	■■ activities	■■ competences, especially ability to learn

## Workshops

### *Workshop 1*

Communicative activities, strategies (included in the former) and communicative language competence are "horizontal" meta-categories for which descriptors are to be found in the CEFR. In the Framework a "vertical" dimension is added to the horizontal one of language use: this is the ordering of descriptors in scales of levels, and the establishment of the six common reference levels. The CEFR provides scaled descriptors for various aspects of linguistic, pragmatic and socio-linguistic competence. Other aspects of these competences together with general individual competences (in this case psycho-social and socio-cultural) seem not to lend themselves to being defined by level, nor to being part of a scale.

### *Horizontal and vertical dimensions of the CEFR*

	Horizontal metacategories		
	Communicative activities (listening, reading ...)	Strategies	Communicative language competences
	Language quality		
Vertical dimension	C2	C2	C2
	C1	C1	C1
	B2	B2	B2
	B1	B1	B1
	A2	A2	A2
	A1	A1	A1

In the workshop we will present a series of descriptors taken from the Swiss Portfolio (checklist CEFR level A2) which illustrate the three dimensions or meta categories (activities, strategies, competences – called Language quality in the Swiss Portfolio). You will receive them in alphabetical order, without any indication of the (meta) category they belong to, so you will not know when you read the descriptors whether they describe an activity, a competence or a strategy. You will be asked to discover the appropriate metacategories and to put them in the right order. One further point is important with regard to the metacategories. The Swiss Portfolio, in its checklists, distinguishes different types of "activity" – reading, writing etc., but presents the other metacategories in a global way, as entities not subdivided into categories. We think it will be interesting, as a subject for your reflection on the theme, to attempt to create subcategories of competences and strategies.

The work of reclassification can be done in small groups and the discussion this stimulates will, it is hoped, help you to a greater awareness of a range of issues related to the notions of competence and activity, and of their role as objectives for learning and assessment, and of the means and methods used to attain the objectives.

*Descriptors to be ordered as categories / types*

- I can make myself understood using memorised phrases and single expressions.
- I can understand short narratives about everyday things dealing with topics which are familiar to me if the text is written in simple language.
- I can understand phrases, words and expressions related to areas of most immediate priority (e.g very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment).
- I can understand a simple personal letter in which the writer tells or asks me about aspects of everyday life.
- I can describe an event in simple sentences and report what happened when and where (for example a party or an accident).
- I can describe my educational background, my present or most recent job.
- I can very simply ask somebody to repeat what they said.
- I can say what I like and dislike.
- I can discuss with other people what to do, where to go and make arrangements to meet.
- I can indicate when I am following.
- I can make and respond to invitations.
- I can ask for attention.
- I can describe myself, my family and other people.
- I can briefly introduce myself in a letter with simple phrases and sentences (family, school, job, hobbies).
- I can get simple information about travel.
- I can describe past activities and personal experiences (e.g the last weekend, my last holiday).
- I can link groups of words with simple connectors like "and", "but" and "because".
- I can identify the main point of TV news items reporting events, accidents etc when the visual supports the commentary.
- I can find the most important information on leisure time activities, exhibitions, etc in information leaflets.
- I can use some simple structures correctly.
- I can use the most important connecting words to indicate the chronological order of events (first, then, after, later).
- I have a sufficient vocabulary for coping with simple everyday situations.

*Classification grid for descriptors 1-22 (workshop 1 1).*

Metacategories	categories / types (subdivisions)	Write the numbers 1-22 in the appropriate place in this column
Activities	Listening Reading Participating in a conversation Continuous oral production Writing	..... ..... ..... ..... .....
Competences (Language quality)	Linguistic Pragmatic Sociolinguistic	..... ..... .....
Strategies	What competences are required ? What activities are enabled?	..... .....

### *Solution for workshop 1:*

The list below (the numbered descriptors) show to the categories descriptors 1-22 belong to. They are taken from the A2 checklist of the Swiss Portfolio (European Language Portfolio. Version for young people and adults. Swiss Conference of cantonal ministers of Education. Council of Europe, 2001) The descriptors without numbers are also taken from the same A2 checklist but have not been used in this workshop task.

#### Self-assessment Checklist Level A2 (Swiss Language Portfolio I)

##### *Listening*

I can understand what is said clearly, slowly and directly to me in simple everyday conversation; it is possible to make me understand, if the speaker can take the trouble.

I can generally identify the topic of discussion around me when people speak slowly and clearly.

3. I can understand phrases, words and expressions related to areas of most immediate priority (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment).

I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.

I can understand the essential information in short recorded passages dealing with predictable everyday matters which are spoken slowly and clearly.

18. I can identify the main point of TV news items reporting events, accidents etc. when the visual supports the commentary.

##### *Reading*

I can identify important information in news summaries or simple newspaper articles in which numbers and names play an important role and which are clearly structured and illustrated.

4. I can understand a simple personal letter in which the writer tells or asks me about aspects of everyday life.

I can understand simple written messages from friends or colleagues, for example saying when we should meet to play football or asking me to be at work early.

19. I can find the most important information on leisure time activities, exhibitions, etc. in information leaflets.

I can skim small advertisements in newspapers, locate the heading or column I want and identify the most important pieces of information (price and size of apartments, cars, computers).

I can understand simple user's instructions for equipment (for example, a public telephone).

I can understand feedback messages or simple help indications in computer programmes.

2. I can understand short narratives about everyday things dealing with topics which are familiar to me if the text is written in simple language.

##### *Spoken Interaction*

I can make simple transactions in shops, post offices or banks.

I can use public transport: buses, trains, and taxis, ask for basic information and buy tickets.

15. I can get simple information about travel.

I can order something to eat or drink.

I can make simple purchases by stating what I want and asking the price.

I can ask for and give directions referring to a map or plan.

I can ask how people are and react to news.

11. I can make and respond to invitations.



I can make and accept apologies.

8. I can say what I like and dislike.

9. I can discuss with other people what to do, where to go and make arrangements to meet.

I can ask people questions about what they do at work and in free time, and answer such questions addressed to me.

### *Spoken Production*

13. I can describe myself, my family and other people.

I can describe where I live.

I can give short, basic descriptions of events.

6. I can describe my educational background, my present or most recent job.

I can describe my hobbies and interests in a simple way.

16. I can describe past activities and personal experiences (e.g. the last weekend, my last holiday).

### *Strategies*

12. I can ask for attention.

10. I can indicate when I am following.

7. I can very simply ask somebody to repeat what they said.

### *Language Quality*

1. I can make myself understood using memorised phrases and single expressions.

17. I can link groups of words with simple connectors like "and", "but" and "because".

20. I can use some simple structures correctly.

22. I have a sufficient vocabulary for coping with simple everyday situations.

### *Writing*

I can write short, simple notes and messages.

5. I can describe an event in simple sentences and report what happened when and where (for example a party or an accident).

I can write about aspects of my everyday life in simple phrases and sentences (people, places, job, school, family, hobbies).

I can fill in a questionnaire giving an account of my educational background, my job, my interests and my specific skills.

14. I can briefly introduce myself in a letter with simple phrases and sentences (family, school, job, hobbies).

I can write a short letter using simple expressions for greeting, addressing, asking or thanking somebody.

I can write simple sentences, connecting them with words such as "and", "but", "because".

21. I can use the most important connecting words to indicate the chronological order of events (first, then, after, later).

## *Workshop 2*

As a follow-on to the classification task of workshop 1, you are asked to reflect, first individually, then in groups, on the uses you could make of the information in the presentation and of the classification task in your future projects as ELP trainers and to note your ideas and plans as well as any critical observations you may have.

Specifically, you should try to answer the following questions:

Which information in the presentation and in the experience of workshop 1 do you consider will be most useful ? Why?

How do you plan to use them?

What tasks related to the information will you be able to include for participants in your future training programmes?

How can you teach activities and competences?

What is their place and role in the learning process?

How do you envisage the interface between activities and competences?

What do you think will be the role of conscious learning and what will be acquired by practice in the two categories?

More specifically: what are the methodological options for the learning / acquisition of vocabulary and grammar in the context of the ELP?

When can you say that a communicative language activity has been mastered ?

How can teachers develop learner awareness of the two metacategories (activities and competences) and help them to understand them?