

**AC** Languages for social cohesion  
Language education in a multilingual and multicultural Europe  
**BD** *Les langues pour la cohésion sociale*  
*L'éducation aux langues dans une Europe multilingue et multiculturelle*

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*Former les enseignants à l'utilisation du Portfolio européen des langues*

**Training teachers to use the European Language Portfolio**

Project C6 of the ECML  
2nd medium-term programme  
(ELP\_TT)

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**Self-assessment based on the ELP and tests/exams based on the CEFR:  
some issues of general principle**

David Little

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**Languages for social cohesion**  
 Languages for social cohesion and multilingualism




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 Préférer une langue dans une Europe multilingue et multiculturelle

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## Overview

- The CEFR and assessment
- The ELP and self-assessment
- Some common problems with language exams
- A practical example

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## The CEFR and assessment

- The primary orientation of the CEFR is behavioural: it describes communicative proficiency in terms of the activities learners can perform ("can do" statements, task-based)
- Herein lies one of the CEFR's most important innovations: the same descriptions can be used to
  - Define a curriculum
  - Plan a programme of teaching/learning
  - Guide the assessment of learning outcomes

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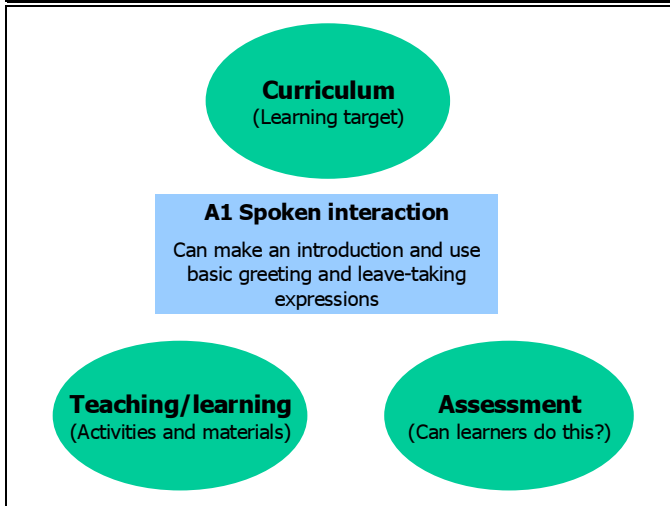
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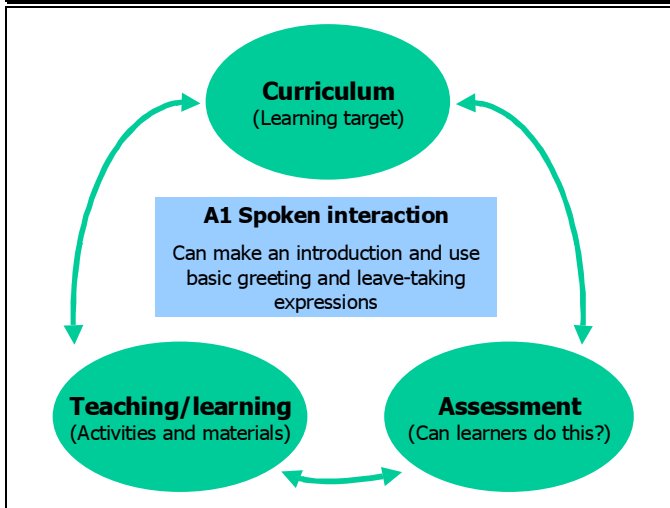
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### The CEFR and assessment

Implications of the CEFR's behavioural orientation:

- Curriculum, teaching/learning and assessment should be more closely related to one another
- Curriculum and assessment should be as accessible to learners as to teachers and educational planners
  - Note the second half of the CEFR's title: "**Learning**, teaching, assessment"



### The CEFR and assessment

Intended functions of the CEFR in relation to assessment:

- **To specify what is assessed**
  - Using the levels and descriptors as the basis for defining test content
- **To interpret performance**
  - Using the levels and descriptors to state the criteria by which to determine whether or not a learning objective has been attained
- **To compare different language tests**
  - Using the levels and descriptors to analyse test content

(Cf. CEFR, p. 178)

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**The ELP and self-assessment**

- The ELP is intended to support the development of learner autonomy
- Learner autonomy entails that learners are involved in planning, monitoring and evaluating their own learning
- Planning, monitoring and evaluation that are not haphazard and random depend on accurate self-assessment
- Self-assessment in the ELP is carried out against the levels and descriptors of the CEFR

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**Forms of self-assessment in the ELP**

- **Summary and summative**
  - With reference to the self-assessment grid in the language passport
- **Formative**
  - Using checklists to identify learning targets and assess progress in meeting those targets
  - Selecting items to include in the dossier in order to demonstrate learning achievement

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**Some worries**

- "Learners do not know how to assess themselves"
  - Self-assessment is a skill that must be learnt; its development must be given classroom time
- "Learners will overestimate their level"
  - Learners should be expected to justify their self-assessment by proving they can do what they claim
- "Learners will cheat by including in their ELPs material they have not produced themselves"
  - It is difficult to do this in a properly maintained ELP

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### The relation between self-assessment and tests/exams

- If the same levels and descriptors are used (i) to guide self-assessment during the learning process and (ii) to specify test/exam content and/or the criteria by which performance will be judged, it should be possible to accommodate self-assessment within the overall framework of assessment
- Only when this happens can curricula claim to be fully learner-centred
- Note the growing interest in portfolio assessment
- Note also, however, that the ELP is the property of the learner

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### Some common problems with language exams

- In many educational cultures exams are traditionally written rather than oral
- This may encourage the belief that written exams are the "real thing", whereas oral exams are an "extra"
- And this in turn may cause reading and writing to be given greater importance than listening and speaking
- We learn and use languages interactively, yet most exams focus exclusively on the individual learner – this cannot do justice to communicative realities

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### A practical example

- How we developed a curriculum for English as a second language in Irish primary schools
- CEFR, primary curriculum and classroom observation used to generate descriptors for A1, A2 and B1 in relation to thirteen curriculum themes
- ELP developed with simplified self-assessment grid and checklists based on benchmarks
- Benchmarks used to develop assessment framework: placement, proficiency and achievement tests

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### Questions for discussion

In your context

- How can you ensure that ELP-based self-assessment is accurate?
- Are established language examinations sympathetic to the approach embodied in the CEFR?
- Is it possible to design local assessment procedures so that they include ELP-based self-assessment?

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