

# A QUALITY MATRIX FOR CEFR USE: Examples of promising practices

## 1. OVERVIEW

<b>Project leader(s) contact:</b>	Monika Mettler, Thomas Studer, Peter Lenz		
<b>Country:</b>	Switzerland	<b>Institution:</b>	Pädagogische Hochschule Luzern University of Fribourg
<b>Type of context:</b>	Regional (all German-speaking cantons)		
<b>Educational sector:</b>	Primary; Lower Secondary		
<b>Main focus of your project:</b>	Assessment by the classroom teacher; Teacher Education		

### SUMMARY

**Name:** CEFR-based toolkit for end of primary and lower secondary – Lingualevel

**Abstract:**

Lingualevel is a collection of CEFR-related descriptors, checklists, assessment tasks, assessment criteria grids, and calibrated, documented samples of spoken performances (videos) and scripts. It is used in both in-service and pre-service teacher education to familiarize teachers with the idea of what levels mean, and how the language competence of learners can be assessed in a communicative way, with transparent, defined criteria.

**Stage:** Implementation; Evaluation

**Theme:** Assessment; Teacher education

**CEFR aspects targeted:** Levels, descriptors, interaction tasks, assessment with defined criteria, self-assessment

**Main features of this example:**

- Descriptors adapted to context
- Involvement of large number of teachers (188) in development to create network
- Videos of performance at different levels
- Assessment tasks for teachers to use (listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, writing)
- Scientific development (including proper calibration of descriptors, videos, texts and assessment tasks)

**Quality principles demonstrated:** Relevance; Validity; Transparency; Coherence; Inclusiveness; Sustainability



## 2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### **Background:**

Switzerland was the country that developed the first European Language Portfolio and undertook widespread implementation in secondary schools. The way teachers in Switzerland met the CEFR was through the Portfolio, and indeed most thought the two were the same. The Lingualevel project was closely linked to the Portfolio: teachers needed tools to assess whether learners were at a certain level.

The research project that produced Lingualevel was called (in English) *Instruments for the Evaluation of Foreign-Language Competences* (*Instrumente zur Evaluation von Fremdsprachenkompetenzen: IEF*). The concept was first sketched out around 1999 at the initiative of Monika Mettler. At this stage only a small group of cantons in central Switzerland were involved. The idea at that time was to combine a survey of language competence in French and English at the end of different school years in lower secondary school with the provision of assessment tools that teachers would then be able to use themselves in future. The idea of such a project then acquired more and more support until all the German-speaking cantons were involved.

Based on a needs analysis, the project was then designed and carried out by Peter Lenz and Thomas Studer (Centre d'Enseignement et de Recherche en Langues Etrangères – CERLE, University of Fribourg) with Monika Mettler as project manager. In the event, the focus of the project switched to the development of a series of CEFR-related assessment instruments for use by the classroom teachers.

### **Stated aims:**

To describe and exemplify levels from A1.1 to B1.2 (=6 levels) as exit levels for school years.

To provide assessment materials that teachers could use to assess students' level.

### **Steps/stages:**

#### **1. Needs analysis**

The analysis showed that teachers need more than descriptors, they need examples:

- They need tasks, and training on developing tasks and exercises
- They need to see the way performance on specific tasks relates to levels – they asked for this

Since teachers were known to have difficulty assessing the productive skills reliably, it was decided to create videos with calibrated speaking samples of students to show at what level a certain production was. This meant that if, for example, a student should be at A2, teachers and/or parents would be able to choose a video of a student's performance calibrated at that level in order to have an idea of what A2 level speaking competence is.

#### **2. Developing descriptors and assessment tools**

A bank of can-do descriptors, and descriptors for assessment grids, was developed by adapting CEFR descriptors, incorporating descriptors from existing Portfolios (ELPs) and adding new descriptors based on suggestions that emerged from teacher workshops.

Based on the descriptor bank, self-assessment instruments (mainly checklists) and assessment tasks were developed for each level and each of the five areas of language activity represented in the CEFR Self-assessment Grid (CEFR Table 2). All receptive tasks as well as the various task types used for interaction and production were piloted with classes from the network of teachers being established for feedback and data collection (188 in total). These teachers were recruited through the cantons and were people with reputations as good English or French teachers.

#### **3. Data collection**

In a first phase, copying the methodology used in the original CEFR descriptor project (Schneider & North 1998, North 2000, Schneider & North 2000), a large number of teachers assessed some of their students

using draft lists of can-do descriptors. The lists included selected CEFR descriptors as anchors at the various levels. The emerging data was analyzed with the Rasch model to form a scale of calibrated descriptors. Thanks to the CEFR anchor items in the IEF descriptor sets, it was possible to link the new scale to the CEFR scale.

In order to pilot and at the same time calibrate the reading and listening tasks, sufficient numbers of students did the tasks that were allocated to overlapping test sets. In addition, they self-assessed themselves with checklists consisting of IEF and CEFR descriptors. The scaled data from these self-assessments was used to relate the scaled test items to the CEFR scale. This attempt was only partially successful as self-assessment and test results showed only moderate correlations.

Scripts from the writing tasks formed the basis of the calibrated examples for writing. A series of performances on speaking tasks were filmed and became the basis for the spoken examples. Adapting a method used in the original CEFR descriptor project, teachers judged these performances on the basis of CEFR and new IEF criteria in order to allocate the performances to a level and, at the same time, to calibrate additional criteria that could be used in finer-grained assessment grids for speaking and writing. The speaking samples were provided with documentation explaining why learners were at a certain level and showing the profile of each learner across the criteria being used (based on CEFR Table 3).

#### **4. Finalisation**

Materials were finalised on the basis of the analyses and feedback from the teacher network.

#### **5. Implementation - 2007**

The Lingualevel materials are used for both in-service and pre-service teacher education. They were quickly integrated into initial teacher training in the (then recently established) Pädagogischen Hochschulen (PH), with the result that new teachers (also for upper secondary school) now start their careers familiar with the main concepts and levels of the CEFR. The materials are accessible online to subscribers and hence can be consulted by future language teachers in their own time. As a result, the new generation of students has models that they can use and adapt for their purposes. In teacher training, the descriptors, for example, are discussed – whether they are clear and distinct enough – which at least gives teachers and student teachers an idea of how to create criteria and what criteria to take into consideration.

Lingualevel also played a significant role in the introduction of English into primary school in 2007, helping to bring over the idea of an action-oriented approach, rather than one based just on vocabulary learning. For assessment, teachers could use tools from the website (tasks, descriptors), and the videos were a way to demonstrate the levels (e.g. to parents). It was also important for in-service training for lower secondary teachers. Because English had been introduced into primary school, the students who were now coming into secondary were not beginners anymore – a situation the secondary teachers had to deal with. Lingualevel was an instrument to help them establish what level their new learners actually were – seen from an action-oriented perspective.

For example, in one region, in-service training (mandatory) was carried out with a practical sandwich course approach, with 3 x half-day workshops:

- (1) Assessment (Lingualevel): watching videos and deciding what levels the students in the video recordings were. The idea here was to familiarise teachers with what the levels meant in practice.
- (2) Introduction to coursebooks;
- (3) Up-to-date teaching approaches.

In-between workshop days, the teachers were expected to do some practical work, try out materials and come back for discussion, bringing their current tests with them. According to one teacher trainer, the majority of the teachers were fascinated. They found it practical to go on the website and find activities. In addition to the communicative tasks, some teachers particularly liked the cloze tests (C-tests) available because they give an answer to the question: “how can I test grammar?” are easy to mark and give a clear picture of the students’ knowledge. Teachers also liked the criteria for rating written texts and spoken

performances, finding them helpful.

#### 6. **Follow up**

In addition to everyday use by teachers, Lingualevel has also been used in large-scale assessment surveys. For example, in the academic year 2014/15 in a mandated evaluation project in Central Switzerland in which the French and English competences of 12 and 14 year-olds were assessed. Other teams have worked with Lingualevel tasks for evaluation purposes too.

Also, in an attempt to further facilitate the use of Lingualevel tasks for diagnostic purposes, bundles of tasks for use in specific school years were put together and made available to the teachers.

**Timeline:** 2000 to 2007

#### **People/roles:**

- Project coordination: Monika Mettler
- Researchers: Peter Lenz, Thomas Studer, University of Fribourg
- Network of 188 teachers, recruited through cantons
- Cantonal follow-up group (Begleitgruppe) responsible for implementation and to evaluate whether the toolkit was useful.

#### **Other resources needed:**

#### **Quality Assurance procedures employed:**

The Swiss cantons installed an advisory group, which held regular meetings with the project team. Also, the involvement of the 188 teachers contributed to the quality of the product.

#### **Publications that have been used or produced related to this example:**

See website [www.lingualevel.ch](http://www.lingualevel.ch)

## **3. RESULTS**

#### **What was achieved:**

Lingualevel was published in 2007 as a folder of resources for French and English in primary and lower secondary school (= 7 to 16), including DVDs, supported by a website [www.lingualevel.ch](http://www.lingualevel.ch). Lingualevel comprises:

- Portfolio-style checklists of 'Can do' descriptors for six levels (A1.1 to B2.1) adapted for the younger age group and school situation
- 260 assessment tasks for French and English for the different levels for school grades 5 to 9 (age 12-16). Per level per skill there are about 6 to 8 tasks (for reading, speaking, etc.). All are available online
- Video samples and written samples of performance, with documentation profiling the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate in relation to CEFR-related criteria (speaking assessment grid based on CEFR Table 3)

#### **Impact:**

Teachers gained needed professional development opportunities:

- Lingualevel helped teachers become more action-oriented in their approach.
- It also helped teachers understand CEFR concepts (levels, action-orientation, assessment with defined criteria) by providing something concrete. The link between the can-do statements and the assessment tasks was especially important.
- The reference exemplars (tasks, videos, scripts - all at different levels) were very well received by teachers. The learner scripts and videos showing examples of rated production showed the assessment criteria in action.
- Now the tool is over 10 years old and it needs some adaptation, some of the tasks are a bit outdated. But

it gives teachers an idea, and that was one of the aims: for them to have an idea of “how can I assess language skills in a communicative way?” It gives teachers a model for their own assessment tasks. The same is true for the assessment grids for writing and speaking.

- The discussion of the videos in combination with the criteria is excellent practice. Checking the written tasks of the students and then discussing their mistakes at that level, the importance of making mistakes – how many mistakes would you allow? – and discussing the status of mistakes in language learning is also very good practice.

However, there are some other more difficult aspects.

- Lingualevel is a self-administered tool. Some teachers found that it didn't work well because they had difficulty understanding the idea of criterion-referenced assessment. The fact that teachers tend not to read is an obstacle in any serious development.
- Teachers generally do not tend to make the intended link between Lingualevel and the final grade they give to students.
- Teachers sometimes appeared afraid of losing control (by having student interaction, self-assessment, external criteria).
- Parents influence the retention of more traditional assessment practices (e.g. one mark deducted for one mistake). Parents demand explanations of grades that fit their understanding of evaluation. They require a great deal of education to understand the concept of criterion-referenced assessment. They need to be re-educated to understand that counting marks is not necessarily more objective.

#### **Resources on this theme:**

See [www.lingualevel.ch](http://www.lingualevel.ch)

## **4 ADVICE AND LESSONS LEARNT:**

- Lingualevel was an overwhelming amount of work: the scope of the project was too large. The researchers developed competence “on the job” during the project. The fact that the project showed many aspects of the same thing (action-orientation and levels) to different people was a key asset of the project, BUT it also made the project somewhat unwieldy. It might have been better done as a series of more modest projects.
- One of the keys to the success of Lingualevel, for example, was the fact that a network of practitioners was established by involving 188 teachers not only in implementing the resources but also participating in the development of the project, by giving feedback and trialing materials. This later gave the project “outreach” as they communicated their experiences to colleagues. It also meant that the project was not perceived as a ‘top-down’ project, even though the initiative had in fact come from the educational authorities.
- The project worked with a cascading “train the trainers” model. A vital component of a train-the-trainers model is that trainers must understand that:
  - o Teachers need to be able to see how they can transfer the instrument into their own context. If they don't, the tool will not be transferred.
  - o Teachers and teacher trainers need to understand that they have to adapt the tools provided to the context of their classroom/school/community; things cannot be ‘implemented’ off-the-shelf.
  - o Teacher trainers MUST integrate the new materials into their own methodology courses, because they are the people who influence the future.
  - o To this end, it is important for teacher educators to be given the opportunity to look at, touch and react to new resources. This was key in the Lingualevel implementation.
- Apart from the actual numbers of teachers involved, the second aspect important in this success was the way the researchers conducted themselves: they did not come over as prophets or experts telling people what to do – they did not give the impression of selling anything. That builds trust with both

administrators (from the cantons and regions) and teachers. In this respect, being seen to think things through with the practitioners, to learn things from them, has a positive effect.

- The link between education and research is very important. For example, the projects in the Research Centre on Plurilingualism (Fribourg) all have student involvement. This link gives students at the centre an evidence-based reflective approach to teaching and learning.
- You have to make life easier for the teachers, otherwise they won't use the tools. The resources must be simple to access.