A QUALITY MATRIX FOR CEFR USE: Examples of promising practices

1. OVERVIEW

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Country: Ireland **Institution**: Institute of Technology Tallaght Dublin

Type of context: Classroom level

Educational sector: Tertiary

Main focus of your project: Learning/Self-Assessment, Portfolio Use

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SUMMARY

Name: Raising learners awareness of their CEFR proficiency profile before a language stay abroad

Abstract:
Systematic learner awareness-raising in a 3-month (Semester 5) German preparation course as a prelude to a semester abroad (Semester 6). Learners are introduced to the concepts of levels and profiles across different skills, self-assessment, the European Language Portfolio and the standardised European Curriculum Vitae "Europass" in a course characterized by continuous assessment with descriptors, and Tandem learning with native speaker students.

Stage: Implementation; Evaluation

Theme: Assessment

CEFR aspects targeted: Levels, Descriptors (Eaquals adaptation), Self-assessment, European Language Portfolio

Main features of this example:
- Single teacher with their class
- Systematic preparation for a 'stay abroad' in the country concerned (Germany)
- Learner training in the CEFR levels and self-assessment
- Principled exploitation of online CEFR resources

Quality principles demonstrated: Relevance, Validity, Transparency, Coherence, Inclusiveness, Sustainability

European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe
www.ecml.at/CEFRqualitymatrix

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Background: German as a foreign language (Deutsch als Fremdsprache: DaF) is one of the course offers at the Institute of Technology, Tallaght, a mainly vocationally—oriented tertiary college in Dublin. The project concerned a small cohort of third year (Semester 5) DaF learners prior to their Study Abroad or Internship period during Semester 6. Their German module consists of 4 formal hours of class-based teaching + 1 hour Tandem learning[1] per week.

The German module is 100% continuous assessment (CA). There are:
- two functional language oral CAs
- an oral conversation CA, a written CA
- a written project
- an oral presentation
- five tandem language learning tasks.

Stated aims:
- To help learners become more aware of the multi-dimensionality of language learning and the non-linear nature of progression, and so facilitate an understanding of the layers and levels of progression in language learning;
- To help these learners adopt a more proactive approach to their individual language learning, their progress in the various skills, exploiting self-assessment;
- To help develop more critical awareness of the 'can-do' aspects of their language learning i.e. acknowledging the positive but also addressing their shortcomings;
- To enable more consultation between learner and lecturer/teacher e.g. when a learner identifies an area which requires more investment, that the language teacher advise, confirm the short-coming (or not, and provide guidance towards independent learning beyond the formal classroom context.

As enabling aims, the intention was:
- To introduce this small group of third level DaF learners to the CEFR Global Scales, CEFR Self – Assessment Grid in English and German, plus the Eaquals descriptors and checklists;
- To introduce them to on-line the self-assessment tools of the Goethe Institut and Deutsche Welle Einstufungstests;
- To encourage a degree of self-assessment with reference to CEFR Global Scales, CEFR Self – Assessment Grid;

Steps/stages:

1. **Mid to end-September 2017:** Introducing learners to the CEFR
   Discussing proficiency profiles Learners were introduced to the **CEFR Global Scale** and aspects of language learning were discussed. Student were also issued with the CEFR **Self – Assessment Grid** (English & German versions) and aspects of the multi-layered nature of language learning were discussed.

2. **Mid-September (start of Semester):** Online test
   Students were advised to complete on-line self- assessment Einstufungstest.
   When discussing their CEFR level, it was a revelation to students that language learners do not necessarily proceed at the same pace, or with the same level in all language skills. Also, 'what constitutes level C2 in a native speaker population?' provided the basis for an interesting discussion. Students also recognised that there are interim levels between each level.

   The Eaquals descriptors – with 'plus levels were introduced (with specific focus on Spoken Interaction &

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[1] Tandem learning (originally a German concept) is when a language learner teams up with a native speaker of the language they wish to learn, who in turn wants to learn the mother tongue of the first learner. Normally there are one or two one-hour 'lessons' a week in which one of the two language is used alternately for conversation practice: e.g. session 1: English; session 2: German; session 3: English, session 4: German, etc.

Spoken Production) as they are very useful in this respect. Eaquals Bank of descriptors as **Levels**, as **Scales** and as **Checklists** were used

3. **October - November:** European Language Portfolio
Once students were familiar with the CEFR Levels, Descriptors, 'Can -do' Checklists they were issued with the Standard adult Language Passport (interactive version & pdf). They agreed to complete the ELP as the semester progressed. These self-assessed levels were referred to at intervals during the Semester, particularly in advance of oral Continuous Assessments.

4. **November 2017**: Europass
As one of the German module topics for Semester 5 was 'Die Arbeitswelt', students were introduced to the European Union's "Europass," in English and German. Europass is a standardised Curriculum Vitae incorporating the **Council of Europe's European Language Passport (CEFR) Self-assessment grid. Curriculum Vitae English & German https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/editors/en/cv/compose & https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/editors/de/cv/compose** and advised to complete his in advance of their January departure for Study/Internship abroad.

Timeline:
One semester – September to December 2017.

People/roles:
5 Irish students of German as a Foreign Language, Semester 5, prior to their Study Abroad or Internship. The group consisted of 4 male and 1 female student. Within this group of five learners, four commenced as zero beginners in German in Semester 1, one student had prior learning to Leaving Certificate.

1 German lecturer

There was no formal recruitment – this student cohort attends a pre-departure programme in IT Tallaght during Semester 5 and the students continue their language course.

Publications that have been used or produced related to this example:
CEFR Global Scale https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale

CEFR Self – Assessment Grid https://rm.coe.int/168045bb52 and https://rm.coe.int/168045bb59

Goethe Institut , Deutsche Welle Einstufungstest http://einstufungstest.dw.de/index.php?id=3

Eaquals Bank of descriptors as *Levels*
http://clients.squareeye.net/uploads/eaquals2011/EAQUALS_Bank_as_levels.pdf

Eaquals Bank of descriptors as *Scales*
http://clients.squareeye.net/uploads/eaquals2011/EAQUALS_Bank_as_scales.pdf

Eaquals Bank of descriptors as *Checklists*
http://clients.squareeye.net/uploads/eaquals2011/EAQUALS_Bank_as_checklists.pdf

The Equals descriptors are also available towards the bottom of the page at:
https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/bank-of-supplementary-descriptors

European Language Portfolio:
https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio/templates-of-the-3-parts-of-a-pel
https://rm.coe.int/1680492ff9
https://rm.coe.int/1680492ff8

Europass (standardised Curriculum Vitae with Language Passport):
    English: https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/editors/en/cv/compose
    German: https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/editors/de/cv/compose

3. ADVICE AND LESSONS LEARNT:

Do:
- Take the time to identify a reliable on-line placement level which is:
    - easily accessible to students,
    - provides an indication of 'time required to complete'; and
    - issues a CEFR level on completion.

    Learners value their time and want immediate results for any time investment.

- Be clear about which aspect of language skills you intend to focus on – in this case it was mainly Spoken Production, however during oral assessments Spoken Interaction could not be overlooked.

- Issue a 'Can-do' checklist which matches against the functional language topics in your programme.

- Integrate the CEFR / EQUALS can – do checklists at some point during every language class; it has to be consistent exposure in order for learner awareness to be continual.

- Consider the allocation of marks (or some rewards system) for successful completion of tasks.

- Explore ways of integrating the CEFR to Tandem Learning. This particular cohort derived a lot of benefit from the required x5 Tandem Language learning conversations with native speakers.

Don't:
- rely on learners to reliably complete an on-line test in their own time, allocate class time to monitor completion.

Lessons learnt:

It is important to obtain a reliable CEFR level at the outset in order for learners to benchmark against this as their learning progresses in the various skills.

At the outset the Tandem learning was not integrated with the CEFR and ELP, but it could have been.

The exploration of CEFR/ELP material could be accompanied by practical and theory based sessions on 'How to Learn a Language' informed by applied linguistics and the theory and practice of language learning and teaching.