

PART II

**“TOWARDS A COMMON EUROPEAN
FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE FOR
LANGUAGES OF SCHOOL EDUCATION?”**

SELECTED CONFERENCE PAPERS

Section 1: Competences and frameworks

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THE USE AND MIS-USE OF COMPETENCE FRAMEWORKS AND STATEMENTS WITH PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO DESCRIBING ACHIEVEMENT IN LITERATURE

Introduction

A key question facing the Council of Europe project on Language(s) of School Education is whether competencies are a valuable means of framing learning outcomes in the context of language development or whether their limitations outweigh their advantages. One purpose of this paper therefore is to examine the ‘competence’ debate, looking at arguments for and against their use in order to establish whether criticisms stand up to scrutiny. A secondary focus is to look in particular at whether a competence approach can be usefully extended to include the development of literary understanding. This is an important question because literature will be an inevitable component of any European Framework which seeks to do justice to the breadth and subtlety of what counts as language competence. A third, underlying focus will be on language itself and the nature of language and meaning. The competence debate is often conducted without sufficient attention to questions related to the limitations of language. Questions about language and meaning, which appear on the surface to be highly abstract and theoretical, relate to practical utility and can show how competence frameworks can be made to work effectively. This paper then is intended to have both a functional value related to the use of competencies but also to offer

a theoretical perspective on meaning to contribute to the thinking which will underpin a Languages of Education framework.

In academic discourse it is sometimes assumed that in order to have a meaningful discussion it is necessary to define terms. This may sometimes be a useful starting point, but more often forming stipulative definitions results in the drawing of artificial, hermetically sealed boundaries which do not reflect the subtle twists and nuances of language in use. An approach which starts with definitions may serve to circumscribe concepts and be unduly prescriptive. The meaning of concepts is not fixed: language derives its meaning in shared social contexts so it is often more illuminating to look at possible meanings and how these overlap and interrelate. For example, the term ‘competence’ is often used fairly casually as a synonym for general ‘ability’ or ‘capability’. It also has more technical uses in both contexts of both vocational training and education. It is sometimes used to refer to a general domain (e.g. language competence, writing competence) or to narrower observable skill (e.g. ‘can spell two-syllable words’). It is used variously to describe the acquisition of low level practical skills or as a concept which embodies the highest levels of achievement (OECD 2005)¹; there is much potential for confusion not only in discussion when different parties are not aware of the different assumptions about usage, but also in argument when there is an inadvertent slide from one use of the term to another. A cynical view might argue that people use the term to refer to the highest, most complex levels of achievement but wrongly assume that they can claim the same level of clarity and precision that attends to lower level skills.

Advocates of using competence statements for assessment purposes and syllabus design see their value largely in bringing objectivity, clarity and transparency to the specification of learning outcomes. Despite opposition and criticism (Hyland 1993, 1997; Ashworth and Saxton 1990; Velde 1999;) their use has been gaining ground and is now widespread in a variety of spheres, including vocational education (*passim*), teacher training, higher education, interculturalism, and the Council of Europe’s own work on language policies.

¹ ‘A competence is more than just knowledge and skills. It involves the ability to meet complex demands, by drawing on and mobilising psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context. For example, the ability to communicate effectively is a competence that may draw on an individual’s knowledge of language, practical IT skills and attitudes towards those with whom he or she is communicating’ (OECD 2005).

Some of the criticisms which are levelled at the use of competencies in educational contexts (that they are too reductive and formulaic; that they focus on skills at the expense of understanding; that they seek to atomise complex forms of behaviour in artificial ways) are all the more challenging in the context of literature teaching where boundaries and definitions tend to be more fluid than in other disciplines. Competence statements may bring an element of rigidity which is anathema to a literary and artistic sensibility. It might be argued, for example, that the action-orientated competence approach adopted by the Common European Framework is appropriate for language acquisition but too crude for capturing the subtleties of the development of literary awareness. An alternative to an action-orientated, competence approach (which uses ‘can do’ statements as outputs) would be to concentrate on entitlements or inputs, using such formulations as ‘provide opportunities to...’, ‘help students explore...’, ‘teach pupils to...’, ‘develop understanding of...’. Lum (2003: 12) for example suggests that ‘only an account of processes and procedures’ can provide ‘a meaningful educational specification’. However the disadvantage of focusing on inputs is that they are not as easily translated into an assessment framework. Given that it is assessment which so often drives the curriculum, it is important to examine whether criticisms of a competence approach stand up to scrutiny.

1. Arguments against the use of competence statements

The use of competence statements to describe achievement has its origins in the reform of vocational education and training. The intention was to place the primary emphasis on *outputs* (an account of the specific occupational role broken down into performance statements) and to recognise that the particular *inputs* (training courses, work experience, prior learning) were contingent; it mattered more what prospective employees could actually do, not what training they had attended. The origin of the competence movement in vocational training accounts for the nature of some of the hostility it provoked, particularly when transferred to other contexts. By initially placing emphasis on technical skills and not higher level achievement (including understanding, attitudes, personal qualities) competence statements were thought to be

narrow, reductive and functionalist. By limiting assessment to what is observable, it was felt that competence statements were uncompromisingly behaviourist. Furthermore it was thought that a list of pre-determined skills did not allow for creative or unexpected outcomes. The word ‘competence’ itself suggested to some people satisfaction with ordinariness as opposed to excellence.

Many of these criticisms depend on the way the term ‘competence’ itself is understood and used. It is possible to operate a conceptual sleight of hand by building the criticisms into the definition of ‘competence’ from the start, thus creating a circular argument. If ‘competence’ is defined by critics simply as a narrow technical skill then it is hardly insightful to make this the subject of criticism. In fact few writers now subscribe to such a narrow definition even in the vocational context. Debling (1989: 80) saw the notion of competence as going beyond routine aspects of work activities but also embracing wider attributes which the role might entail including the ability to plan, innovate and cope with non-routine activities. In much of the literature there is criticism that the concept of competence is not clearly defined. There is for example uncertainty whether competence is a ‘personal attribute, an act, or an outcome of action’ and this uncertainty is advanced as an argument against their use (Ashworth and Saxton 1990: 3). However such uncertainty is not surprising; understanding becomes more refined and terms evolve. Writers who are frustrated by the lack of precision in the use of the term betray a naivety about the nature of language. Meaning is determined by use in specific contexts which suggests that it is unreasonable to expect the meaning of ‘competence’ to be static and always consistent and precise.

One way of narrowing the definition of what a competence is is to emphasise that it is orientated towards action – that it describes behaviours in the form of ‘can do’ statements. This approach is intended to provide a form of clarity and transparency which on closer inspection may turn out to be somewhat illusory. The surface grammar (Wittgenstein 1953: 168) may disguise crucial differences in statements which are similar in structure. There is a difference for example between a lower order achievement such as ‘can recognise a simile in a text’ and a higher order achievement ‘can understand and interpret critically complex literary texts’. The first statement is an action in the strict sense in that it can literally be performed. The second statement ‘can understand...’ is not an action in this narrow sense and would need further discussion and negotiation to provide the kind of transparency which competency

statements are expected to deliver. What for example does ‘understand and interpret critically complex texts’ actually mean? The strict use of ‘can do’ statements in formulating a competency approach may obscure differences in the types of statements which are used and may constitute an unnecessary straightjacket.

Different interpretations of what a competence is and how widely or narrowly it may be defined can be illustrated by an example from a vocational context. Take the case of a trainee dental nurse. Her occupational role may be broken down into a series of performance statements, e.g. she can sterilise equipment, prepare a mixture for a filling, distinguish a molar from an incisor and so on. Critics of the competence approach might argue that a list of atomised statements of that kind says nothing about her passion for the job, her ability to communicate with patients nor her ability to react to the unexpected. However if those attributes are considered important for the role, it can be argued they too should be included in a list of competence statements in some form. There are parallels here with literary understanding as indicated above. It may not be enough to say of someone that they can identify metaphors in some mechanical way but we need to be reassured that they are aware of how metaphors can contribute to the meaning of a text. Just as the nurse must be able to communicate with patients, the literature student must show understanding of literary techniques in context. It might be argued in turn that to widen the notion of competence in this way is to stretch the concept too far, making it of little practical use. (Note that a competence of that kind can take a ‘can do’ form e.g. ‘can show understanding of literary techniques in context’ but that statement is not by itself very helpful and would need to be unpacked to be useful as an assessment tool. One of the reasons for introducing the notion of a competence is to seek clarity and objectivity for assessment purposes.) If the dental nurse is to demonstrate ‘passion for the job’; then this must be translated into *observable behaviours* to make the particular quality understandable and assessable. It is for that reason that the competence movement has been criticised for being behaviourist.

Hyland (1997: 492) is one of the writers who has taken this view that competence based models are “intrinsically behaviourist”. By that he means that the focus is exclusively on mechanical performance of actions and ignores cognition. Norris (1997: 332) has similarly argued that ‘the most prevalent construct of competence is behaviourist’ and that ‘it rests on a description of behaviour...that is capable of demonstration and observation’. Velde (1999) has distinguished between ‘behavioural’ and

'holistic' approaches (seeking to integrate knowledge, skills and attitudes) but acknowledges that the latter have not been applied to actual practice. The usual objections are that people are far more complex than the sum of their actions and that the behaviourist approach presents an impoverished view of human beings.

Underlying this sort of criticism is the view that a competence approach does not take account of what Ashworth and Saxton (1990:10) refers to as a 'mental capacity'. The dental nurse may be able to operate a sterilising machine but it may also be crucial to her role that she has understanding of why sterilising dental instruments is important. This is true. However the criticism that competence statements, because they are based on behaviour, do not take account of understanding is mistaken and based on a false dualistic assumption (Wittgenstein 1953). We do not have direct access to people's consciousness – the only way we can know what people understand is by their behaviour, by what they do and what they say. The use of competence statements should not be interpreted as a total behaviouristic explanation of what it means to be human but as a device for articulating and unpacking what we mean by achievement or expertise in a given area. The dental nurse may need to display understanding, not just an ability to follow mechanical directions. However the evidence for this understanding must come from behaviour, from how she acts, what she says or what she writes. Some of the confusion to which critics have been lead may derive from unwittingly limiting the concept of 'behaviour' literally to performed actions instead of also including reference to what people may say and write.

The use of 'can do' statements derives from a vocational context where the primary focus tended to be on performed actions (in the narrow sense) and it is easy to see why the emphasis was placed on performance. It is inappropriate to assess a dental nurse, or a teacher for that matter, only by what they say and write – they must be observed performing the role. But it may also be the case that simply observing performed actions is insufficient for judging, for example, whether the individual understands what they are doing and has the right attitude for the job. A dental nurse may appear to have acquired the ability to use a sterilising machine but if one day she picks up one of the newly sterilised dental instruments from the floor and hands it to the dentist for use it is clear that understanding is entirely missing. In practice it is difficult to distinguish 'performed actions' from speaking and writing – extensive observation of a dental nurse in her occupational role is likely to reveal quite a lot about her attitude and understanding; she will after all be

observed speaking to patients. In an educational context what students say and write provide key insights into their attitudes, understanding and values (crucial dimensions that were missing from a narrow behavioural approach).

It is difficult to capture highly complex human achievement in a series of atomised statements. However the fact that the task is difficult does not mean that the principle is wrong. The view that competence statements are reductive is often voiced as a criticism of their use but it is the nature of all language to be in some sense reductive. Competence statements can be seen not as static claims to certainty but more as forming a framework for communication and negotiation within particular communities of practice. Complex activities need to be ‘reduced’ and simplified to some degree in order to talk about, teach and assess them. The question is not whether competencies are reductive but whether they are too reductive for the purpose they are intended to serve. It is important then to distinguish between poor examples of the use of competencies and general arguments for and against their use. It may well be that some statements are ‘empty and uninformative’ (Ashworth and Saxton 1990: 9) but that is not necessarily so of all of them.

A key concept in the development of a competence framework is the idea of ‘exemplification’, meaning that statements of competence are accompanied by concrete examples of what they might mean in practice. Sometimes those responsible for developing competence frameworks assume that by constant refining of the statements themselves, it is possible to achieve total transparency and consistency of interpretation. But that is to misunderstand the nature of language and meaning, a theme underlying this paper. It is by sharing and negotiating through examples of practice that agreement in judgement will be reached.

2. The value of competence frameworks

As suggested earlier in this paper, the value of competencies is often thought to lie in the objectivity and transparency they bring to the assessment of learning outcomes. However, as argued, competence frameworks can be subject to mis-use if it assumed that total transparency is an easily attainable goal and that its achievement can be found in increasingly precise specification of detail. However, once those

parameters (partly set by the limitations of language) are understood, competence frameworks can provide a valuable shared focus for developing understanding and communication. They also have potential value in motivating learners and focusing their efforts. Two contrasting approaches to the use of competence frameworks can be distinguished: one is based on authority, is more rigid and static and claims a spurious form of objectivity; the other is more democratic, based on consultation and evolving understanding within shared communities of practice. It is wrong to assume that competence statements are objective, neutral and devoid of values but their value may well lie in bringing those considerations to the fore and render them open to debate.

Competence frameworks are valuable in focusing on performance and action (defined in the widest sense) and thus may raise questions about educational purpose, in contrast to the idea that the accumulation of knowledge is important for its own sake. The traditional liberal model of education was a much needed antidote to authoritarian and narrowly functional approaches to education. However it can be criticised for its emphasis on intrinsic knowledge and for positing an unrealistic conception of the autonomous individual, thereby underestimating the importance of social, cultural and communitarian values and power relations. The evolution of competence frameworks has the potential to pose questions about the purpose of knowledge and how it contributes to the good of society and the individual. In the case of language acquisition and development, competence frameworks have the potential to focus on the importance of *use* and *purpose*, implying a more dynamic rather than static concept of language.

3. Applying competence statements to literary understanding

The discussion of the particular challenges involved in developing a competence framework for the teaching and assessment of literature which follows will be undertaken with particular reference to the development of a common framework for language education. Another possible criticism of any set of competence statements, in addition to those described above, is that they take too much for granted, that because the intention is orientated towards the concrete and practical they fail to acknowledge the implicit assumptions which may be unwittingly

embodied in their formulation. It is always important to be aware of consequences of defining and describing competencies in particular ways. In the context of literature a set of competencies describing the sorts of skills and understanding pupils need in order to *read* literary texts may fail to consider whether the *creation* of texts should be also included. This mistake is less likely in formulating a common framework when there are already existing syllabuses and curricula on which to draw; the national and cultural differences are likely to bring to the fore issues which could otherwise remain hidden. But the importance of guarding against taking implicit values for granted is another reason for a consultative approach to the development of competency frameworks. The following questions draw attention to the sorts of implicit assumptions which may underlie the formulation of competencies in relation to literature and therefore indicate some of the possible areas of convergence or divergence between national curricula.

1. Should literature be included in the teaching and assessment of language education or treated separately? There is an argument for suggesting that to separate language from literature presents a conception of language which is too narrow and functional. It is literature that encapsulates language in its most subtle and intricate forms where nuances of meaning and ambiguity have to be embraced. On that view it is inappropriate to separate ‘language’ from ‘literature’. It may be preferable then to think in terms of competence in ‘reading’ (as well as writing and speaking and listening). The following objectives provide examples of how language and literature objectives are often integrated: extract meaning beyond the literal; identify ambiguity in a text and understand whether it is desirable or not; understand how language can be used in imaginative and innovative ways; compare texts in terms of structure and style.

2. Is it possible or desirable to define literature as a discrete category? Many writers argue that literature has no ‘stable, transhistorical identity’ (Farber 2005:1). Categories exist in a network of overlapping relationships and are not always easily separated: literary and philosophical texts are not always distinct from each other; some letters and essays count as literature; the term ‘folk literature’ could embrace urban legends and playground rhymes; some songs (e.g. ballads) can count as literature; the term ‘narrative’ embraces film as well as literature. The term literature traditionally refer to novels, plays and poetry but should other texts including media also be included? In England the approach of the school National Curriculum for the subject English

incorporates in the category ‘reading’ non-fiction and so-called non – literary texts such as print and ICT-based information and reference texts, media and moving image texts (for example newspapers, magazines, television). In forming objectives, therefore, attention may need to be paid to the *range* of reading as in the following examples: select and compare information from different types of texts; understand how text can be translated from one form or genre to another (e.g. novel to film); understand how meaning is conveyed through sound and images as well as text.

3. Is personal response to text valued as well as knowledge of literary devices? A list of competence statements applied to literature may unwittingly betray literary theoretical bias, for example in favour of structuralism, reader-response, psychoanalytic theories or new criticism. A ‘new critical approach’ is likely to place more emphasis on the way meaning inheres in the formal features of the text. In contrast, reader-response theorists are likely to place more emphasis on the ability to respond imaginatively to texts, to engage with characters, to fill in creative ‘gaps’ in the textual meaning. Relevant objectives might take the following form: express a response to texts, identifying preferences and backing these up with reasons; identify how texts relate to one’s own life; respond imaginatively to texts by, for example, continuing the story or writing a letter as a character in role.

4. What types of technical knowledge are thought desirable? In contrast to reader response theory, a ‘new critical’ approach tended to place more emphasis on formal aspects of the text, emphasising analytical skills and knowledge needed to conduct a close reading of a text and identifying how the author’s craft creates both meaning and feeling. Examples of such competencies would include: recognise rhythm and rhyme patterns in poetry and show how these affect meaning; identify different narrative styles in a text; distinguish different types of narrator in fiction.

5. To what degree should knowledge of the socio-historical context be viewed as important aspects of developing understanding in literature? Different literary theoretical perspectives take different views of where the primary authority for meaning in the text resides, whether in the intention of the writer, the text itself or the reader. Formalist, structuralist and new critical approaches placed more emphasis on the text itself and denied the relevance of the author’s intentions to the meaning of the text (the intentional fallacy). Alongside this view was a diminution of the relevance of the wider contextual knowledge which might be represented

in such objectives as: understand that literary styles and approaches change over time; identify major movements in the development of literature; understand that the meaning of a text is related to its social context.

6. Is literary achievement defined purely in terms of the ability to respond to literature or should it also be judged in relation to an individual's ability to write creatively? An advantage of creating a framework in terms of 'reading, writing, speaking and listening' as opposed to one which distinguishes language from literature is that writing creatively can be integrated with other forms of writing as in the following examples: write imaginatively as well as write to inform, persuade and analyse; use literary techniques to achieve particular effects in writing; adapt the content and style of writing for different purposes and audiences.

7. To what degree should literary understanding extend to texts from different cultures and traditions? A traditional 'cultural heritage' view of teaching literature implies the formulation of a canon of key texts with an emphasis on respect and appreciation rather than critical engagement. The inclusion of a canon in a national curriculum is not incompatible with objectives oriented towards understanding of texts from other cultures: identify the distinctive quality of texts from other traditions; compare texts from different cultures; recognise similar themes in texts from different traditions.

The different literary theories implicit in various competence statements are not necessarily incompatible; the most appropriate account of literary competence may derive from an integration of different theoretical approaches. Above all, depending on the age of the students and the purpose of the list of competencies, the key ingredient may be awareness of different theoretical traditions.

In the case of literature, a set of competence statements may be a useful way of highlighting commonalities and differences. There is a sense in which a list of competence statements, contrary to the way they are often conceived, need to be seen more as a starting point rather than the end of a process. They are often thought to be a final and definitive way of capturing achievement in a particular domain (and sometimes criticised for that very reason) instead of being seen as a focus for the evolution of shared understanding.

Conclusion

It should be recognised that total objectivity, clarity and transparency is an elusive goal. Competence statements are by definition framed in language and, as indicated earlier, language itself is not totally transparent because its meaning is determined in use. This has important consequences because it means that the difference between devising statements to describe a simple occupational role and describing achievement in literature is one of degree rather than kind. Any framework for language education needs itself to be based on an appropriately rich view of language and meaning.

The following considerations then will help guard against the misuse of competence frameworks:

- Outcomes statements should not be divorced from processes of moderation and exemplification.
- Exemplification of competencies is often needed because language has its limits.
- Transparency will not be achieved by the continued atomisation of statements, trying to make them more and more precise.
- The degree of transparency that can be expected from competence statements is limited because of the nature of language.
- We should not expect competence statements to deliver more than they can but that is no reason to abandon their use.
- We need to be aware that the discourse of competencies can serve a rhetorical function which may promote certain practices over others and may close rather than open debate.
- The development of competence frameworks can be a focus for open sharing and negotiation of meaning and practice.
- Competence statements are not objective and neutral.
- It is not just the competence statements themselves that are value-laden but also the way that they are formulated and used.

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EUROPEAN FRAMEWORKS OF REFERENCE FOR LANGUAGE COMPETENCES

Introduction

Over the last few years, describing language competences has been the subject of several projects, including three major European developments: the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) developed within the “Education and Training 2010” work programme of the European Commission, and the Council of Europe Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Descriptions of language proficiency have been produced within each of these projects:

- CEFR – descriptive scheme and scales for foreign language use/learning;
- PISA – reading literacy (in “mother tongue”), in addition to literacy in mathematics and science;
- EQF – key competences for lifelong learning (communication in the mother tongue and communication in a foreign language, in addition to mathematical literacy and basic competences in science and technology, digital competence, learning-to-learn, interpersonal and civic competences, entrepreneurship, and cultural expression).

In this paper I present the results of a comparative study analysing the approaches and descriptive parameters used in these three frameworks.

In conclusion, I indicate the relevance of the findings of these projects for the development of a European framework of reference for language(s) of school education.

1. Documents analysed

The following documents were analysed for the purpose of this study:

- *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (Council of Europe 2001);
- *The PISA 2003 Assessment Framework* (OECD 2003);
- *Towards a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, SEC(2005) 957* (European Commission 2005a);
- *Proposal for a recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning, COM(2005)548* (European Commission 2005b);
- *Proposal for a recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, COM(2006) 479* (European Commission 2006).

2. Aspects analysed

The analysis of the frameworks proposed in the documents focuses on the following elements:

- Function;
- Approach;
- Parameters / categories of description;
- Descriptors;
- Levels.

3. The Council of Europe *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)*

The CEFR was developed by a Council of Europe international working party with a view to promoting transparency and coherence in language learning and teaching in Europe. After piloting, it was officially published in 2001¹, the European Year of Languages. In addition to the two official Council of Europe versions in English and French, the document is now available in 34 languages. Further language versions are in preparation.

The document consists of two parts:

- the *Descriptive Scheme* is a tool for reflecting on what is involved not only in language use, but also in language learning and teaching. Parameters in the descriptive scheme include: skills, competences, strategies, activities, domains and conditions and constraints that determine language use;
- the *Common Reference Level* system consist of scales of illustrative descriptors that provide global and detailed specifications of language proficiency levels for the different parameters of the descriptive scheme. The core of the Common Reference Level scales is a compendium of ‘can-do’ descriptors of language proficiency outcomes.

Through the CEFR learners, teachers, examiners, administrators, policy makers and educational institutions are encouraged to refer their efforts to a common European framework. The scales of illustrative descriptors can be used to support self-directed language learning (e.g., raising the learner’s awareness of his or her own language skills and the strategic actions to be undertaken). In order to facilitate co-operation between educational institutions in Europe and to provide a basis for the mutual recognition of language qualifications, the CEFR can be used in planning of examination content and specifying of assessment criteria. It can also be used in policy making as a means of ensuring coherence and transparency through the different sectors or stages in language education. Many European countries have used the opportunity of the appearance of the Framework to stimulate curriculum and examination reforms in different educational sectors.

¹ *Cadre européen commun de référence pour les langues: apprendre, enseigner, évaluer*, Editions Didier 2001; *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages : Learning, teaching, assessment*, Cambridge University Press 2001.

3.1. The Descriptive Scheme of the CEFR

The CEFR adopts an action-oriented approach towards language use, embracing language learning. The descriptive scheme focuses on the actions performed by persons who, as individuals and as social agents, develop a range of *general* and *communicative language competences*.

General competences of a language user/learner comprise four sub-categories:

- *Declarative knowledge* ('savoir') resulting from experience (i.e. empirical knowledge) or formal learning (i.e. academic knowledge);
- *Skills and know-how* ('savoir-faire'), implying the ability to carry out tasks and apply procedures;
- *Existential competence* ('savoir être') comprising individual characteristics, personality traits and attitudes towards oneself and others engaged in social interaction;
- *Ability to learn* ('savoir apprendre') is the ability to engage in new experiences and to integrate new knowledge into existing knowledge.

The *communicative language competences* of a user/learner involve knowledge, skills and know-how for each of the following three components:

- *Linguistic competence* deals with the formal characteristics of a language such as phonology, morphology, lexicon and syntax;
- *Sociolinguistic competence* concerns the socio-cultural conditions of language use e.g. politeness rules or social group repertoires;
- *Pragmatic competence* covers the functional use of language (in specific scenarios), for example how to act in a given social event or how to participate in a job interview.

On the basis of general and communicative language competences the language user/learner applies skills and strategies that are suitable for performing tasks in the following oral/written language activities:

- *Reception*
- *Production*
- *Interaction*
- *Mediation* (i.e. summarising, paraphrasing, interpreting or translating)

The contextualization of these language activities in specific domains implies activating language processes of producing and receiving spoken/

written discourse (texts). The language activities happen within domains of language use such as:

- *Public domain*
- *Personal domain*
- *Educational domain*
- *Occupational domain*

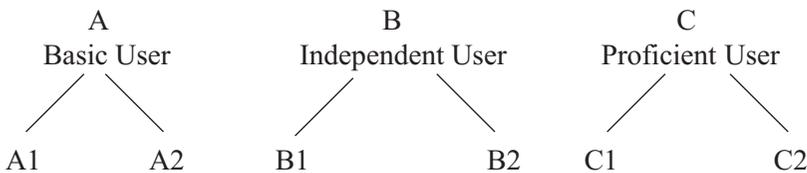
In performing language activities the language user/learner needs to activate those strategies which seem most appropriate for carrying out the tasks to be accomplished in the pertinent domain. Ultimately, the (self-)monitoring of the process of language use and language learning results in the reinforcement or modifications of competences.

3.2. Common Reference Levels of language proficiency

With a view to enhancing the usability of the CEFR a simple and global division is made between three main user levels:

- The *basic user* has acquired the most elementary expressions, but in communication is dependent on the willingness of his or her interlocutor to adapt to the attained level – interlocutors assistance is necessary;
- The *independent user* can handle daily language practice, is mostly able to interact without too much effort and is generally able to follow a normal speech tempo – some consideration needs to be given to the fact that it is not his/her native tongue;
- The *proficient user* has hardly any or no difficulty in the use of the target language – no consideration needs to be given to the fact that it is not his/her native tongue.

A ‘hypertext’ branching approach (see below) is proposed to define finer levels and categories to suit local needs while still relating back to a common system:



The six ascending proficiency levels are specified in terms of ‘can-do’ statements which were the result of a project of the Swiss National Science Research Council that took place between 1993 and 1996. (North 2000) The starting point of the project was a detailed analysis of 41 scales of language proficiency from the internationally available sources. Those ‘can do’ descriptors were selected which would fit into the different parameters of the descriptive scheme. They were then scaled through a combination of intuitive, qualitative and quantitative methods. As a result, the descriptive scheme of the CEFR could be enriched with two illustrative Reference Scales with varying degrees of specificity:

- a global scale for the Common Reference Levels;
- a self-assessment grid.

The following is an example of the global specification for the levels B1 and B2 (Independent User):

B2	<i>Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.</i>
B1	<i>Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.</i>

(Council of Europe 2001: 24)

The Common Reference Levels are specified further through ‘can-do’ descriptors for understanding, speaking and writing, that is for each of the following six language activities in the descriptive scheme:

- Listening;

- Reading;
- Spoken Interaction;
- Written Interaction;
- Spoken Production;
- Written Production.

Relating these six language activities to the six proficiency levels results in a self-assessment grid with general descriptors of learning outcomes. For example, the general descriptor for listening comprehension on *Breakthrough Level* (or level A1) is formulated as follows:

I can recognise familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family, and my immediate concrete surroundings, when people speak slowly and clearly.

(Council of Europe 2001: 26)

Below is an example of the general descriptor used for reading comprehension on *Mastery Level* (or level C2):

I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles, and literary works.

(Council of Europe 2001: 27)

The global scales of the Common Reference Levels are exemplified in detail by a set of 54 specific descriptors that provide detailed information and insight. Some examples of specific descriptors for listening comprehension skill of the basic language user/learner (Level A1) are the following²:

Can follow speech which is very slow and carefully articulated, with long pauses for him/her to assimilate meaning.

Can understand instructions addresses carefully and slowly to him/her and follow short, simple directions.

(Council of Europe 2001: 66-67)

The CEFR has been developed as a common reference tool across languages; it is non-language specific, in other words it does not refer to a specific language but describes what one **can do** in a foreign or second

² More detailed information on general and specific descriptors can be found in the studies of North & Schneider 1998 and North 2000.

language. The Common Reference Levels are described for individual languages in linguistic detail in separate documents, referred to as “*Reference level descriptions for national or regional languages*”, such as *Profile Deutsch* (Glaboniat, Müller, Rusch, Schmitz & Wertenschlag 2005) or *Niveau B2 pour le français*, (Beacco, Bouquet & Porquier 2004), etc. The Common Reference Levels are also illustrated for a number of languages on DVDs and CD-ROMs (samples of oral and written performances and items for testing comprehension skills, all calibrated against the Common Reference Levels). These documents and tools are part of the *toolkit* currently being developed by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe³. The European Commission contributes to this development through its project aimed to produce a reading and listening item bank at level B1 in English, French and German.

4. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an internationally standardised assessment scheme developed jointly by participating countries and administered to 15-year-olds in schools. The survey was implemented in 43 countries in the first assessment in 2000 and in 41 countries in the second cycle in 2003. At least 58 countries are expected to participate in the third assessment in 2006. Tests are typically administered to between 4,500 and 10,000 students in each country. The assessment takes place in three-yearly cycles. The first two cycles, PISA 2000 and PISA 2003 have been completed. The PISA 2006 cycle is well underway and further assessments beyond 2006 are being planned.

In all PISA cycles the domains of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy are assessed. The main focus of PISA 2000 was on reading literacy (in mother tongue or language of school education), in the sense that it included an extensive set of tasks in this specific domain (with the other domains sufficiently represented). In PISA 2003, the emphasis was on mathematical literacy and an additional domain on problem

³ More information on these and related projects can be found at: www.coe.int/lang and www.coe.int/portfolio (accessed 21.3.2007).

solving was introduced. For the PISA 2006 cycle, the focus is on scientific literacy.

PISA assesses how far students near the end of compulsory education have acquired some of the knowledge and skills that are considered essential for full participation in society. The assessment is based on “*a dynamic model of lifelong learning in which new knowledge and skills necessary for succesful adaptation to a changing world are continuously acquired throughout life*”; it focuses on “things that 15-year-olds will need in the future” and seeks to evaluate “*what they can do with what they have learned*” (OECD 2003: 9). The Programme was developed with the following aims:

- to monitor outcomes of educational systems;
- to provide a basis for collaboration on educational policy;
- to provide input for standard-setting and evaluation;
- to support the shift in policy focus from educational inputs to learning outcomes

The results are reported with reference to five identified levels of proficiency (reading literacy levels). The reference levels are presented on five separate subscales and one combined scale. In addition, illustrative task descriptions (similar to the “can-do” statements of the CEFR) are given for each level.⁴

4.1. PISA – defining literacy

PISA is based on a concept of ‘*human capital*’ defined by the OECD as “*the knowledge, skills, competences and other attributes embodied in individuals that are relevant to personal, social and economic well-being*” (OECD 2003:14). The aim of PISA is: “*to measure how well young adults, at the age of 15 and therefore approaching the end of compulsory schooling, are prepared to meet the challenges of today’s knowledge societies*”. Literacy is defined in general as mastery of processes, understanding of concepts and ability to function in various situations (contexts).

⁴ More information on PISA can be found at: www.pisa.oecd.org/ (accessed 21.3.2007).

4.2. PISA – reading literacy

Within PISA, reading literacy is understood as “*the capacity to understand, use and reflect on written texts, in order to achieve one’s goals, to develop one’s own knowledge and potential, and to participate in society*” (OECD 2003:15). Reading proficiency of the candidates is measured in relation to processes, contents, and contexts of application (identical to the ‘domains of language use’ of the CEFR), with the following sub-categories used to set the test tasks:

- Processes (aspects of reading literacy):
 - ◀ Retrieving information;
 - ◀ Forming a broad understanding;
 - ◀ Developing an interpretation;
 - ◀ Reflecting on content of text;
 - ◀ Reflecting on form of text.
- Content (knowledge and understanding):
 - ◀ Continuous texts (narrative, expository, descriptive, argumentative/persuasive, injunctive/instructive);
 - ◀ Non-continuous texts (charts, graphs, diagrams, maps, forms, advertisements).
- Context of application (situations):
 - ◀ Personal
 - ◀ Educational
 - ◀ Occupational
 - ◀ Public

4.3. PISA – levels of reading literacy

The analysis of the first round of PISA carried out in 2000 produced a framework of five levels of reading literacy. It turned out that 2/3 of candidates in PISA 2000 scored between 400 and 600 points, so the mean score was set at 500 points, with the following cut-off scores for the levels:

- ◀ Level 1: 335 – 407 points
- ◀ Level 2: 408 – 480
- ◀ Level 3: 481 – 552
- ◀ Level 4: 553 – 625

◀ Level 5: over 625

The five identified levels were then specified by global descriptors derived from test tasks with the corresponding difficulty scores to produce a reading literacy levels map. The above listed categories of description (processes – content – context) were collated to five groups of descriptors used to define a level – three of them related to reading processes/aspects, two to text format/type:

- Retrieving information;
- Interpreting texts;
- Reflecting and evaluating;
- Continuous texts;
- Non-continuous texts.

Here is the description of Level 2 of the map:

Retrieving information	Interpreting texts	Reflecting and evaluating
<i>Locate one or more pieces of information, each of which may be required to meet multiple criteria. Deal with competing information.</i>	<i>Identify the main idea in a text, understand relationships, form or apply simple categories, or construe meaning within a limited part of the text when the information is not prominent and low-level inferences are required.</i>	<i>Make a comparison or connections between the text and outside knowledge, or explain a feature of the text by drawing on personal experience and attitudes.</i>
Continuous texts: <i>Follow logical and linguistic connections within a paragraph in order to locate or interpret information; or synthesise information across texts or parts of a text in order to infer the author's purpose.</i>		
Non-continuous texts: <i>Demonstrate a grasp of the underlying structure of a visual display such as a simple tree diagram or table, or combine two pieces of information from a graph or table.</i>		

(OECD 2003:127)

Based on the results of PISA 2000, a composite test item map was produced to illustrate the relation of the test tasks to the descriptive categories and to document the difficulty level of a specific performance. Two examples of Level 2 items follow:

Score ⁵	Item	Types of Processes (Aspects)			Text format	
		Retrieving information	Interpreting	Reflecting and evaluating	Continous	Non -continous
477	UNDERSTAND the strucutre of a TREE DIAGRAM		○			■
447	INTERPRET information in a single paragraph to understand the setting of a NARRATIVE		○		■	

(OECD 2003:124)

5. European Qualifications Framework

The concept of a European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) was developed within the “Education and Training 2010” work programme of the European Commission as a meta-framework of reference for educational qualifications as outcomes of lifelong learning. It was published by the Commission as a Staff Working Document in 2005 (European Commission 2005a).

The objective of the planned implementation of the EQF is to facilitate the transfer and recognition of qualifications held by individual citizens by linking qualifications systems at the national and sectoral levels and enabling them to relate to one another internationally, too. The EQF is intended to facilitate citizens’ mobility for work and study alongside the European Credit Transfer System and Europass. The Commission conducted a Europe-wide consultation on the EQF in 2005. During a conference co-hosted by the Commission and the Hungarian Ministry of Education in Budapest in February 2006, an analysis of stakeholder responses to the consultation was presented and generated recommendations, which have been taken into account by the final proposal on the EQF. Particular emphasis has been given to the refinement and simplification of the reference level descriptors. In September 2006, the Commission adopted the final version of the proposal for a recommendation of the European Parliament and of the European

⁵ Indicating the difficulty level of the item.

Council on the establishment of the EQF (European Commission 2006). The recommendation foresees that Member States relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF by 2009. The Member States are asked to designate a national centre to support and coordinate the relationship between the national qualifications system and the EQF. The adoption of the EQF proposal by the European Council and the European Parliament is expected before the end of 2007. In the meantime, a call for proposals was issued to develop and test the principles and mechanisms of the future EQF as well as to exchange experiences in developing national and sectoral frameworks, and test the principles and mechanisms of such frameworks, using the EQF as a common reference point.

The functions of the EQF will be:

- to enable qualifications to be related to each other;
- to facilitate the transfer and recognition of qualifications;
- to increase transparency and support mutual trust among stakeholders;
- to promote quality assurance.

The EQF level descriptions are based on learning outcomes. These are defined in terms of knowledge, skills, and wider competences – personal and professional, such as: autonomy and responsibility, learning competences, communication and social competences⁶. The outcomes are specified on an eight-level scale reflecting stages in a lifelong learning process. The eight levels cover the entire span of qualifications from those achieved at the end of compulsory education to those awarded at the highest level of academic and professional or vocational education and training. The levels are presented on three scales specifying each level in terms of description of abilities, educational context in which they are usually provided and their value (recognition)⁷. A set of eight **key competences** to be learned, updated and maintained throughout life is integrated in Level 2.

⁶ In the final version of the proposal 'competence' is described only in terms of 'responsibility and autonomy', (European Commission 2006:17).

⁷ In the final version of the proposal only one scale is used – specifying learning outcomes in terms of 'knowledge', 'skills' and 'competence', relevant to each of the eight level. (European Commission 2006: Annex I).

5.1. EQF – elements

The overarching concept of the EQF is based on the following three elements:

- Common reference points;
- Tools and instruments;
- Set of common principles and procedures (addressing quality assurance, validation of formal and informal learning, guidance and counselling, and promotion of key competences).

The common reference points are provided in the form of eight levels, each presented on the three scales. It is planned to implement them through the following tools and instruments:

- An integrated European credit transfer and accumulation system for lifelong learning (ECTS⁸ for higher education and ECVET⁹ for vocational education and training);
- The Europass Scheme, comprising:
 - ◀ CV;
 - ◀ Language Passport;
 - ◀ Certificate Supplement;
 - ◀ Diploma Supplement;
 - ◀ Europass Mobility;¹⁰
- A database on learning opportunities (the Ploteus internet Portal on Learning Opportunities throughout the European Space¹¹).

5.2. EQF – levels and scales

The EQF specifies 8 levels of qualifications, related to educational stages:

- Levels 1-2: compulsory education;

⁸ www.ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/socrates/ects/index_en.html (accessed 21.3.2007).

⁹ www.ecvetconnexion.com/ (accessed 21.3.2007).

¹⁰ By 2011, all new qualifications and Europass documents, in particular the diploma supplement and the certificate supplement, should contain a clear reference to the appropriate EQF level. For more information on Europass consult: www.europass.cedefop.europa.eu/ (accessed 21.3.2007).

¹¹ www.europa.eu.int/ploteus/portal/home.jsp (accessed 21.3.2007).

- Level 3: upper secondary or adult education;
- Level 4: end of upper secondary / post-compulsory education, “a gateway” to higher education;
- Level 5: completion of post-secondary or “short cycle” within the first cycle of higher education;
- Level 6: higher education, first cycle (B. A.);
- Level 7: higher education, second cycle (M. A.);
- Level 8: higher education, third cycle (Ph. D.)¹².

Three scales provide specifications for each of the levels:

- reference description (ability descriptors);
- supporting information (educational context);
- indicators of qualification (recognition value).

5.3. EQF – Key Competences

The EQF at Level 2 includes a sub-framework of reference for competences to be acquired at the end of compulsory schooling but also learned, updated and maintained throughout life¹³. It was developed with a view to supporting national policies as part of EU Lisbon strategy “Education and Training 2010”. The following eight qualifications have been identified as key competences:

1. Communication in mother tongue¹⁴;
2. Communication in foreign languages;
3. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology;
4. Digital competence;
5. Learning to learn;
6. Interpersonal, intercultural and social competences, civic competence;

¹² Levels 5-8 contain a clear reference to – without being identical with – the levels defined in the framework for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in the context of Bologna process (www.bologna-bergen2005.no/, accessed 21.3.2007).

¹³ Listed initially under ‘skills’ on Level 2 of the eight reference levels of the EQF and subject for a separate recommendation proposal – COM(2005) 548 (European Commission 2005b).

¹⁴ “It is recognised that the mother tongue may not in all cases be an official language of the Member State and that ability to communicate in an official language is a pre-condition for ensuring full participation of the individual in society.” (European Commission 2005b:13).

7. Entrepreneurship;
8. Cultural expression.

Each key competence has been specified in terms of three categories:

- Knowledge;
- Skills;
- Attitude.

5.3.1. EQF – Key Competences – Communication in mother tongue

Communication in mother tongue has been defined as “*the ability to express and interpret thoughts, feelings and facts in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing), and to interact linguistically in an appropriate way in the full range of societal and cultural contexts – education, work, home and leisure*” (European Commission 2005b:13). The three descriptors specify this key competence in the following way:

- Knowledge of basic vocabulary, functional grammar and the functions of language; awareness of the main types of verbal interaction, a range of literary and non-literary texts, the main features of different styles and registers of language, and the variability of language and communication in different contexts;
- Skills to communicate in oral and written forms in a variety of communicative situations and to monitor and adapt own communication to the requirements of the situation; abilities to write and read different types of texts, search, collect and process information, use aids, formulate and express one’s own arguments in a convincing way appropriate to the context;
- A positive attitude towards communication in the mother tongue: disposition to constructive and critical dialogue, appreciation of aesthetic qualities and a willingness to strive for them, and an interest in interaction with others.

5.3.2. EQF – Key Competences – Communication in a foreign language

This key competence has been defined in a similar way as communication in the mother tongue, supplemented by “*skills such as mediation and*

intercultural understanding". In addition, it is said that "an individual's level of proficiency will vary between the four dimensions (listening, speaking, reading and writing), different languages and according to their background, environment and needs/interests" (European Commission 2005b:14)¹⁵.

The three descriptors specify this competence similarly to the competence in mother tongue:

- Knowledge of vocabulary and functional grammar and an awareness of the main types of verbal interaction and registers of language; of societal conventions, and the cultural aspect and variability of languages;
- Skills to understand spoken messages, to initiate, sustain and conclude conversations and to read and understand texts appropriate to the individual's needs; to be able to use aids appropriately, and learn languages also informally as part of lifelong learning;
- A positive attitude involves the appreciation of cultural differences and diversity, and an interest and curiosity in languages and intercultural communication.

6. A summary of findings

	CEFR	PISA	EQF-Key Competences
Function	descriptive meta-framework	international assessment framework	descriptive meta-framework
Approach	competence-based, action oriented	competence-based	based on learning outcomes
Subject for description	foreign/second language use and user/learner	reading literacy	language competence (in mother tongue and foreign languages) as qualification

¹⁵ In a 2004 report of the Working Group it has been recommended that the levels of proficiency to be aimed at should be in accordance with those described in the CEFR.

	CEFR	PISA	EQF-Key Competences
Categories of description	general competences, communicative language competences, language activities and strategies, tasks and purposes, domains, text types, themes, situations (contexts of use), conditions and constraints	processes (aspects) of reading, knowledge and understanding of reading content, text types, context of application (situations)	knowledge, skills, attitude
Levels	6 main common reference levels (+3 sub-levels) of language proficiency	5 levels of reading competence	Level 2 (the end of compulsory schooling) on an 8-level scale of qualifications (related to educational stages)
Scales	Global scale, Self-assessment scale, 54 scales of illustrative descriptors	Reading literacy levels map, with 5 sub-scales; Composite item map	Three EQF scales: reference description (ability descriptors); supporting information (educational context); indicators of qualification (recognition value)

The set of European frameworks of reference for language competences is growing. Stakeholders in the field of language education can now refer to two descriptive meta-frameworks: one comprehensive one for learning, teaching and assessment of foreign languages (the CEFR), and one for competences in mother tongue and foreign language viewed as key qualifications in a lifelong learning process (the EQF-key competences). The third one, PISA, is an example of how language competences may be assessed internationally.

The CEFR and the PISA are competence-based and the EQF focuses on learning outcomes. Their common target group of learners may be

defined as young adults (at the end of compulsory education). They all refer to the educational concept of lifelong learning.

Conclusions

An analysis of the elements of the three frameworks produces the following overarching structure of a framework for language competences:

- a descriptive scheme;
- reference levels and scales;
- tools and instruments for implementation;
- an assessment scheme;
- guidelines and procedures for quality assurance.

The need for closer co-operation at international level regarding the integration of the various proposals for European reference frameworks seems to be apparent – not only because of differences in the use of terminology (*competence, domain, situation, content, context, purpose, benchmark, etc.*) – but in order to provide stakeholders with a coherent, user-friendly educational concept.

While working on a possible framework of reference for language(s) of school education (LE), the following issues seem to be of importance in this context:

- To what extent is a competence based approach suitable for LE?
- Which elements of the overarching framework structure might be developed for LE?
- What other elements might be needed?
- How to relate an LE framework to the existing frameworks?

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FUZZY CRITERIA IN THE MOTHER TONGUE CLASSROOM

Introduction

Conceived as a didactic enterprise, portfolio evaluation has great potential for the development of resources for communication and for cultural and social identity and understanding. The article argues that the turning point for these potentials is reflection as a new resource for meaning making, and that reflection as a communicative domain can be seen as both didactically constitutive of language as a school subject and as an essential general competence supporting the development of language across the curriculum. Reflection is seen as both process and product and as covering individual reflection as well as reflective communication between students. Reflection links extra curricular experience and knowledge resources with curricular learning objectives and activities. These claims are based on a larger qualitative research study which was recently concluded. The article highlights didactic processes of portfolio evaluation through which reflection was developed, and especially a specific aspect of this, students' own work with quality criteria.

This article presents a case of classroom practice with portfolio assessment in Danish at the upper secondary school level. It discusses tensions between core concepts and phenomena in a possible framework for the languages of school education:

- Subject/discipline understood as language and subject/discipline understood as subject
- competence and *Bildung*,
- global descriptions and local complexity.

I suggest that *didactisation* is seen as a potential bridge between these poles. Didactisation does not dissolve the tensions, but establishes a reflective and communicative position from which both poles are kept in view. I further argue that evaluation, as conducted in this case at the classroom level, produced reflective and communicative positions bridging summative and formative evaluation well as didactic and curricular aims.

The case is part of a larger qualitative research study of a development project in Danish which was recently concluded (Krogh 2006). One important finding in the study was that assessment was transformed into *evaluation*. The term evaluation is understood as a more comprehensive concept ascribing value to the learning experience, first in the identification and understanding of the criteria and standards used, second by judging what is considered meritorious and third by synthesising the implications for future action” (Klenowski 2002: 30 f.). In the quotation Klenowski refers to *self* evaluation which is at the heart of portfolio evaluation in general and also in the present case. The focus of this article is on the didactic project of identifying and understanding criteria and standards – an essential part of self evaluation.

The portfolio class of my case attended the ‘Gymnasium’, a three-year upper secondary general course qualifying for admission to university and other higher education studies. In Denmark compulsory education ends at 16, but 90% of all school-leavers continue in some strand of upper secondary education, and 40% attend the Gymnasium. In the Gymnasium Danish is a three year compulsory subject with language and literature as its main elements. A recent reform of the upper secondary education stresses the importance of integrating language and literature and establishes media as the third element of the subject.

The process of developing ‘evaluation’ in the portfolio class actually turned out to have an integrative effect. The portfolios were basically tied to the students’ writing, but aspects of the evaluative practice spread to the oral activities and created a subject didactic evaluation culture which tied together literature and language as well as oral and written activities.

1. Quality criteria

Criteria and standards are key concepts in evaluation. Criteria are characteristic features through which *quality can be recognized* whereas standards provide the basis for *assessing degrees of quality* (Klenowski 2002: 28). Sadler (1983) identifies four classes of evaluation criteria in connection with scholarship in the arts, humanities and social sciences:

- *Regulative* criteria lay down rules for aspects such as length, layout, structure and conventions for language and spelling.
- *Logical* criteria originate in a broad cultural framework of academic work ascribing value to logical chains of reasoning like substantiating claims, problem solving, reaching conclusions. Quality is a matter of logic and precision.
- *Prescriptive* criteria are based on normative statements of quality which refer to existential features embodied in particular instances. They can be given labels such as ‘coherence’, ‘originality’ or ‘readability’. Turned into prescriptive criteria they tend to be circular. They can be recognized in concrete texts, but cannot be used for generating them.
- *Constitutive* criteria serve to define, and are characteristic of, the discipline. They are based on consensus among members of a guild – in this case the community of teachers in the discipline. The community share categories, concepts, and methodologies, often as tacit knowledge.

Regulative and logical criteria both refer to empirical facts of a performance, and standards can be quantified fairly easily. Prescriptive and constitutive criteria on the other hand are matters of degree. The judgements are subjective and rely upon the assessor’s being persuaded or convinced, and as to standards, quality is assessed along a continuum and cannot be quantified. Furthermore, Sadler stresses that although criteria and standards are necessary for evaluation purposes, in the arts and the humanities specific variation is not only inevitable, it is desirable: “It authorizes originality and creativity, and leaves open the possibility that the performance of the learner may be better than the teacher’s” (Sadler 1983: 67).

As both prescriptive and constitutive criteria can be studied and recognized by students, but are difficult to use for generating performances, Sadler advises that they are communicated through

studying examples, and that students are brought to use criteria themselves in peer and self evaluation, giving response and rewriting assignments

In the portfolio, class response and rewriting were established didactic features. In addition, self evaluation was practised in the presentation of portfolios when students argued for their selection of documentative texts and for the quality of their performances and learning processes. In the beginning the teacher would hand out response instructions with lists of evaluation criteria, but already in the first year she realized that the students tended to use these rather mechanically, reproducing her words instead of thinking for themselves. So she introduced a new practice, having the class develop evaluation criteria for tasks and assignments from models or former experience. The criteria were continuously revised and developed as the students put them to use in response sessions. The teacher organised and contributed to the discussions about criteria but didn't overrule the class. She accepted "fuzzy" criteria in the opening stages and regularly established processes of meta-reflection and discussions leading to revisions, thereby taking an essential didactic aspect of portfolio evaluation to the level of her general teaching practice. Klenowski quotes Dewey when arguing that the target, the product, must not be separated from the process:

In describing the criteria of good aims Dewey indicates that the term 'end in view' is suggestive of termination or conclusion of some process. 'Strictly speaking, not the target but *hitting* the target is the end in view' (Dewey 1916: 123). Dewey did not accept the separation of ends from means. This is true for the use of portfolios. It is not the product in isolation but both process and product that are important. Current assessment systems that support educational aims by focusing rigidly on targets to the detriment of student and teacher agency – choice of means and processes of action – *have got it wrong*. (Klenowski 2002: 4. The reference is to John Dewey, 1916: *Democracy and Education: An introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. New York: Macmillan).

An example will illustrate this didactic practice: During the first half year the teacher saw the need to qualify the oral presentations that students regularly gave in class in connection with group work. She initiated a discussion about "A good oral presentation", based on the experience with presentations which the class had gained up to that point. The class produced a list of criteria and used these as their basis when giving each

other responses. According to the teacher's reports the students quickly discovered that the list was insufficient and added content comments, but it wasn't until 10 months later that a new response sheet was produced in connection with a similar project on public speaking supported by power point.

In this project the class studied argumentation theory and carried out critical analyses of argumentative texts. They worked in pairs who chose a topic and, drawing on experiences with writing processes, developed presentations and performed these in class. This created the need for a revised list of criteria.

<p>A good oral presentation</p> <p>1. X's evaluation criteria from January 22, 2002</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Speak loudly, distinctly and freely. 2. Don't use technical language. 3. Vary language and voice. 4. Language economy - drop hot air. 5. Use the body: gesture - motion. 6. Keep eye contact with the audience. 7. Put questions to the audience. 8. Be committed. 	<p>A good oral presentation</p> <p>2. X's revised evaluation criteria November 2002</p> <p>Content:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear focus. • Clear structure. E.g. the four phases: the defining, the stating, the evaluating, the regulating. Catchy opening. Exit so that the listener knows that the presentation has ended and is given something to think about. • Interesting and instructive for the target group. • Argumentation for standpoints. <p>Language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak with effects e.g. use of rhetorical questions, support in Power Point. • Adapt your vocabulary to the audience. • Language economy. <p>Appearance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak loudly, clearly, at an even pace, freely and varied. • Have audience contact through eyes and language. • Use your body. • Commitment. <p style="text-align: right;">(Translation EK)</p>
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The two lists show a development from predominantly regulative and prescriptive criteria focussing on appearance and surface language features to a combination of regulative, logical, prescriptive and constitutive criteria, drawing on the students' new knowledge of rhetorical performance and argumentation.

This story illustrates the didactic processes of developing quality criteria. An important perspective of these is that they contribute to a gradual development of a *discourse community* of ‘student professionals’ in Danish, established through a prototypical series of didactic processes:

- Studying theory.
- Using theory in text analysis.
- Reflecting collectively on how to turn declarative knowledge of argumentative text practice into procedural knowledge, leading to a revised list of evaluation criteria.
- Producing presentations, drawing on writing-process knowledge and experience, declarative knowledge of argumentative text practice, and evaluation criteria.
- Presenting products / ‘public speaking’.
- Receiving and giving response.
- Reflecting on the quality of performance and learning process / self evaluation.

As could be expected not all students developed professional evaluation competence. Analyses of the students’ response show that the best quarter of the class in their third year succeed in giving responses almost at the teacher’s level, whereas the weakest quarter of the class operated mainly with regulative criteria and only mechanically with constitutive criteria. They did operate, however, and at the oral exam especially some of these students profited from their declarative knowledge about language features in texts. For the oral exam in Danish, students are given an unknown text which is parallel to texts they have studied in class. Even though the weakest students did find it difficult to translate their declarative knowledge into productive practice both in their own writing and in suggestions of improvements when giving response, still their competence in recognizing and describing language features had obviously been developed through the evaluative practice as demonstrated at the oral exam.

2. A ‘Bildung’ – approach

By letting fuzzy criteria pass, the teacher accepted and respected a local, premature understanding of both product quality and of Danish

as a subject, not in critical opposition to subject syllabus and general curricular objectives, but as a necessary way of getting there.

Brown (1997: 185ff.) discusses two distinctive emphases in British approaches to self assessment. One springs from the competency movement and stresses detailed objectives and learning outcomes. It is primarily concerned with preparation for employment and essentially instrumental, and at a deeper level it can be linked to notions of surveillance and social control. The second approach can be connected to ideas of 'Bildung' although Brown does not use this term. It stresses personal development through reflection and exploration with peers and teachers, and its concern is to support the learner in developing new forms of understanding. At a deeper level it can be linked to notions of humanism and constructivism¹.

In the British competency approach self assessment is close to self accountability whereas in the 'Bildung' approach self assessment is closer to reflective learning and metacognition and can be described through the metaphor of an inner journey of discovery. The two approaches are incompatible in the sense that an instrumental accountability approach does not support 'Bildung' aims, but the opposite does not have to be the case. In the portfolio case a 'Bildung' approach supported competence objectives too. Even though the portfolio class performed only a little above average in their written exam, they performed well above average in their oral exam. What is more important, the student portfolios document that they developed both subject knowledge and general competences and values which are not recognized and measured in the Danish exam system. The 'added values' in subject knowledge were:

- declarative knowledge of language production, and
- competence in self evaluation.

The general 'added values' concerned collaboration, social responsibility, personal authority and regulation and student control of their own learning.

Wiliam (2000) suggests that public accountability controls in schools should focus on the degree of *improvement* between control visits instead of on test results. This idea can be transferred to assessment in mother tongue subjects. In the Danish 'gymnasium' the students are given four marks in Danish on their exam certificate, two for general written and oral proficiency and two for written and oral exam performance. General proficiency is assessed according to the same

¹ For a definition of the concept of 'Bildung' see also footnote 1 on p. 40.

criteria as the exam performance. Inspired by Wiliam I would suggest that mother tongue performance is assessed according to two different measures: one (the exam) based on level of performance, another (general proficiency) based on learning and evaluation competence. The latter would demand documentation of learning processes and reflection, taking into account Vygotsky's recommendation of looking for potentials of future development and learning when assessing children (Vygotsky 1978).

3. Reflection and didactisation

In 1998 Black & Wiliam published a survey of a substantial number of research and development projects on classroom assessment, leading to the conclusion that, when carried out effectively, informal classroom assessment with constructive feedback to the students will raise levels of attainment. As indicated in the words 'effectively' and 'constructive', classroom assessment is not just a set of new educational techniques. In fact, improving learning through assessment depends on a set of so called 'deceptively simple', key factors among which are the active involvement of students in their own learning and the need for students to be able to assess themselves and understand how to improve.

In the present case, applying portfolio assessment turned out to become a medium for change, not just of the teaching and assessing of writing, but of the didactic culture as a whole. The development of declarative knowledge of language production was brought to foreground and applied to literature studies as well as to oral and written assignments. The didactic enterprise that bridged language and literature, reception and production of language, declarative and procedural knowledge was *reflection*, both seen as individual reflection and as reflective communication. Reflection was an integrated part of the portfolio project in the forms of "reflection-in-action", i.e. reflective comments in connection with writing, and "reflection-in-presentation" in presentation portfolios (Yancey 1998). But in the first years these writings were never discussed or responded to as *texts*. In the third year, however, the teacher took up reflection in class and discussed the students' experiences with reflection as a text genre. This led to the development of a set of quality criteria for *good reflection*.

Good reflection

3. X, December 2003:

1. A discussion with oneself.
2. Formulation of new experience:
 - Successful elements → coming essays.
 - Points of focus/improvements → coming essays.
 - Genre limitations/potentials.
 - Why did I do as I did?

When stressing successful elements: „a good opening because...”

When suggesting improvements remember to concretise as much as possible.

(Translation EK)

Reflection is a discussion with oneself as the class put it. Reflection establishes interaction with existing experience and knowledge and may lead to strategies for future action. In the portfolio class, reflection was at the heart of both individual learning and the production of collective subject knowledge. It was institutionalized as an essential aspect of Danish as a subject and, as demonstrated, was developed as a text genre which could be evaluated according to certain quality criteria. Learning processes including reflections were documented in the students' presentation portfolios together with products. The portfolios were assessed holistically, and when commenting on the portfolios and the marks the teacher drew on both text quality and quality of learning processes.

Reflection constitutes a domain of meaning that can be seen as didactically constitutive for the *Language as Subject*. Mother tongue subjects differ from foreign language subjects in their fundamental didactic concern: to denaturalize and alienate the familiar in order to gain new insights and new understanding of identities, language and culture. This process takes place through reflection which again leads to new forms of understanding and communicating. The didactic concern of foreign language subjects is the opposite: to familiarize and naturalize the foreign language and culture, established through communication, supported by declarative knowledge of language and culture. Reflection as a language domain also constitutes a general competence with potential for *Language Across the Curriculum*. With reference to Ongstad this domain may be termed *didactisation*, covering reflecting *on* and communicating *about* subjects and subject knowledge (Ongstad 2004). Didactisation is the main

concern of subject didactics, reaching both *into* subjects as in the present case and also *out of* subjects for purposes of interdisciplinary cooperation and legitimation of subjects and subject knowledge.

In the portfolio class the students were put in the position of didacticising when developing criteria of products and processes and thereby defining and describing criteria for the use of subject knowledge. The students were concerned with their own and peers' performances, but the criteria constitute a language about what counts in the subject which can be turned outwards as well, in communication about the subject.

In more than one way this feature is interesting in connection with the Council of Europe's Language(s) of Education project. For one thing it can be brought to bear on the tension between cultural complexity and general frameworks. Reflection as a domain of meaning making may be developed as a bridge or translation between prescriptive and general goals and the cultural diversity that these address. As a didactic practice, reflection supports both cultural diversity and social cohesion. When extracurricular personal and cultural contexts are expressed as part of the didactic process, there is room for a more extensive dialogue.

In a newspaper interview in (Politiken, April 23, 2006), Danish literary critic Henrik Stampe Lund says that internationalisation makes a lot of people cross borders, whereas globalisation makes the local international. Pertaining to the project of developing a framework of language(s) of education this means that we must cultivate local complexity rather than reduce and simplify in order to obtain international standardization. Neither should we reduce language(s) of education to *language use* as inspired by the existing Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, but face the task of developing means of describing and comparing languages of education as full subjects.

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MANAGING DIVERSITY THROUGH A FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE FOR LANGUAGES OF SCHOOL EDUCATION.

I am very proud of my language folder. My teacher always calls it language portfolio, but that is such a posh word. I have learned a lot about languages. Every day, our teacher starts with a greeting. We then have to guess what language the greeting is in. We usually recognise the language of the greeting, because if you use a greeting often, you learn it very quickly. I like 'Ciao' most. Next week I'm getting a new rabbit and I am going to call it Ciao. Mom says that I should also let my rabbit eat spaghetti, but I don't think that is a good idea. I've got a recipe in my language folder. I cut the recipe from a box. At once I had 4 languages because the recipe was written in Dutch, French, German, and Italian. You could tell this from the flags of the country. If I go shopping again, I will try to find other things in other languages. Wednesday morning we are free to work with our language folder, and then I want to put new things into it. You also have to write a little story about these things. I do not find that very easy to do. Our teacher will help us, but she says that we should first try ourselves.

(Mark, 10 years old)

Introduction

In the passage above, Mark describes how he deals with languages in his European Language portfolio and how he reflects on his language

skills with language descriptors inspired by the Common European Framework of Languages. Mark is a pupil at a typical multilingual primary school in the Netherlands. He will grow up and live in an increasingly mobile Europe in which more than 365 different languages are spoken (Valeur 2006), and where old language borders are disappearing and new language borders are arising.

Europeans often speak languages other than their mother tongue at home or on the street, or they live in border regions where, in addition to the “official” regional language, other languages are used. It is important, therefore, to get a good insight into the way in which people learn languages within a European context. Moreover, it is important to know what levels of language skills are achieved when people learn languages in formal as well as in informal contexts. In order to cope with the European language (learning) situation, the Council of Europe in Strasbourg has initiated two influential tools: the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (henceforth: CEFR) and the *European Language Portfolio* (henceforth: ELP).

This contribution deals with diversity in the multilingual classroom. After a short description of the CEFR and the ELP, we present empirical findings that emerged from an investigation of the results of the implementation of these instruments in schools. The focus is on self-evaluation of language proficiency in the dynamic diversity of classroom practice.

The first part of this contribution deals with the multilingual classroom of primary school children. The dynamic diversity comes out in differences between monolingual and multilingual children, differences between boys and girls, and differences related to age. This contribution also goes into diversity in the classroom in higher education. The self-evaluation of students learning Italian as a second language is compared to formal teacher assessment.

We argue that specifying a framework of reference for languages taught at school requires a bottom-up perspective. A long-term contribution can only be expected if developers take into consideration the daily situation of the learning individual functioning in the active interaction of an attribution process both individually and together with others. A Framework of Languages of School Education should take into account the natural dynamism of diversity in the European classrooms.

1. Self-evaluation in the CEFR and the ELP

An important aspect of the CEFR is the elaboration of a European scale for language proficiency (CoE 2001). This language scale covers 5 language skills (listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, and writing). For each language skill, self-attributed descriptors are formulated, which results in 6 proficiency levels. For example, the descriptor for the language understanding skill at the basic level is formulated as in Table 1.

I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family, and my immediate concrete surroundings, when people speak slowly and clearly.

Table 1: Example of a general descriptor for understanding proficiency (Level A1) in the CEFR (CoE 2001)

With the aid of general descriptors such as these, anyone – the language learner him/herself, the teacher, the curriculum developer, but also the employer, the personnel officer, or the policy maker – can easily obtain information on an individual’s language proficiency. In terms of European and international affairs, this assessment of language proficiency levels may have great relevance.

The second instrument developed by the Council of Europe is a European Language Portfolio (CoE 2000). A language portfolio is a personal tool to document processes and outcomes of language learning and language planning. *The Principles and Guidelines* approved by the CoE (2000) recommend that three parts be identified in a language portfolio:

- 1) Language Passport: in this part, language users document their own language background, other languages that have been learnt at school or outside school, and an overview of official diplomas (such as exam documents, language course certificates);
- 2) Language Biography: this part consists of statements on language use, through which the language user can reflect on the proficiency in a specific language. The list of statements is related to the CEFR;
- 3) Language File: this part is a combination of documents consisting of, for example, certified documents showing the reports and studies the language user has generated in the course of his studies,

what studies he engaged in during a student exchange programme (if applicable); and documents concerning a particular language used during his studies for the projects and presentations he has participated in.

A language portfolio can fulfil three functions: it can be used as an instrument of evaluation, an instrument of documentation, and an instrument of planning. In a language portfolio, students can determine, document, and plan the development of their own language skills. First, the portfolio is an instrument for determining the level of language proficiency. Because this is done using European language levels, the student's language proficiency can be compared to that of other European students. The second function of a language portfolio is that of filing materials that are illustrative of the students' language proficiency. Finally, the language portfolio is a document for planning. With the language portfolio, students are able to guide their own language learning processes by indicating what they want to learn and how they want to learn it.

In the context of the present study, it is the second part of the ELP in particular that is important. In the biography part, language knowledge is activated through self-evaluation. Learner-oriented descriptors of language use are specified for 5 language skills and 6 proficiency levels.

Since 1998 the Netherlands has been gaining experience in developing a language portfolio for formal education. The Dutch projects are carried out under the auspices of the National Bureau of Modern Foreign Languages in collaboration with the European Platform for Dutch (Formal) Education. The objectives of these projects were to stimulate public support for the language portfolio within the framework of the Dutch education system and to investigate the effect of the use of the language portfolio on teachers and students. The language portfolio projects in the Netherlands focused on different target groups. Primary as well as secondary education and vocational training were taken into consideration when the use of a language portfolio was being examined. Practical experiences of children as well as teachers were taken into account.

In this contribution, the practical experiences of two target group specific language portfolios will be summarized: the language portfolio for primary-school children developed by Aarts & Broeder (2003), and the portfolio for language students in higher education developed by Sorce & Broeder (2005). The format and content of these language portfolios is adapted in order to fit the specific target group. New language descriptors related to the CEFR in each language portfolio have been

formulated for each of the 5 language skills and the 6 proficiency levels. For example, in the Primary Education portfolio, a descriptor for the A1-level of understanding proficiency is formulated as follows:

What am I able to do?	Explanation	I can do that	I want to be able to do that
<i>I can follow a simple conversation at home or at school.</i>	<i>Father and mother talking about family. The teacher says what you are going to do.</i>	<i>No A little bit Yes</i>	<i>No Yes</i>

Table 2: Example of a descriptor for understanding proficiency (Level A1) in the Primary Education Language Portfolio (Aarts & Broeder 2003: 29)

In the Higher Education portfolio, the literal descriptions for the language scale of the CEFR are included (e.g., for Understanding, Level A1, the descriptor given in Table 1). The CEFR descriptors are specified further for the pertinent target group. Two examples of a descriptor for the A1-level of understanding proficiency from the Higher Education portfolio are given in Table 3:

What am I able to do?		I can do that	I want to be able to do that
<i>To describe</i>	<i>I can understand a friend when he describes a girl to me that he has just met.</i>	<i>Not at all A little bit Very well</i>	<i>No Yes</i>
<i>To give instructions</i>	<i>I can understand someone who shows me the way to the theatre in the centre of the city</i>	<i>Not at all A little bit Very well</i>	<i>No Yes</i>

Table 3: Examples of descriptors for understanding proficiency (Level A1) in the Higher Education Language Portfolio (Sorce & Broeder 2005: 16)

2. Diversity in primary education

One language portfolio project carried out in the Netherlands was specifically carried out in multilingual classes in primary schools. Over a period of 8 years (1998-2006) every school year, 500-700 pupils participated in the project. The pupils were in grades 6 to 8, i.e., the last

three years of school, at ages 10 to 12. A detailed account of the findings of this language portfolio project can be found in Broeder (2001) and Aarts & Broeder (2004).

In the evaluation process, quantitative and qualitative methods were used in data acquisition. The pupils were asked to fill out questionnaires for us to obtain an outline of their situations at school and at home. In addition, they were given short questionnaires to indicate their personal appreciation of the language portfolio. The qualitative data consisted of multiple-case studies, semi-structured in-depth interviews with the teachers, the logbooks kept by the teachers themselves, and the observations made in the classrooms. The evaluation results of the overall student population in the school years 2000/2001 and 2001/2002 are summarized in Table 4.

How do you like the language portfolio?		
General		
Working with LP is nice	664/936	71%
Working with LP is easy	702/812	87%
LP is nice to have	669/875	77%
LP is important for me	320/676	47%
Language knowledge		
LP shows what I can do in a language	639/755	85%
I learn a lot through working with my LP	559/752	74%
Behavioural intention		
I would like to work with my LP more often	492/773	64%
I would like to show my LP to someone else	155/797	20%

Table 4: Pupils' assessment of their working with a language portfolio (N=1230 children, grades 7/8, aged 10-12, school years 2000/2001 and 2001/2002)

The majority of the pupil population assessed the language portfolio positively. Most pupils stated that they liked working with it (71%), that they found it easy to work with (87%), and that they liked having a language portfolio (77%). Only half of the population (47%) indicated that they found the language portfolio important. A relatively large number of pupils felt that the portfolio could show their skills in a language (85%). According to 74% of the pupils, the language portfolio

taught them a wide variety of things. In addition, 64% of the pupils wanted to work on the language portfolio more often. A remarkably low number of children reported that they would like to show the language portfolio to someone else. It appears that most of the children see their language portfolio as something personal, something for themselves. This empirical finding underlines the importance of an often-made remark in language policy papers on the European Language Portfolio: “the pupil is the owner”.

Multilingual and monolingual children

For the pupils’ self-assessment of their working with a language portfolio, a comparison is made between multilingual and monolingual children. The multilingual children indicated that another language besides Dutch was used at home. The largest subpopulation consisted of Turkish and Moroccan pupils. It turns out that every school year (since 1998) multilingual pupils in particular have taken a positive attitude towards the language portfolio. Through the language portfolio, these pupils can present themselves in a positive way and feel proud because their language knowledge is considered an asset rather than a source of problems (which is how teachers often look at these pupils’ first languages).

Boys and girls

An investigation was also made of gender effects in working with the Primary Education portfolio. The recurrent finding is that girls are more positive than boys about working with the language portfolio.

Self-evaluation of language knowledge

The self-assessment of reading skills in English and Dutch was compared with the teacher’s assessment of the pupils. Both assessments were carried out on the basis of the descriptors for reading proficiency in the language portfolio. In addition, the self-assessment of reading skills was compared with the pupils’ scores on formal tests for reading proficiency in English and in Dutch. The correlations between the three types of assessment for reading skills are given in Table 5.

	Self-assessment	
	English (n=138)	Dutch (n=109)
Formal assessment		
Test reading English	.266**	-
Test reading Dutch	-	.331**
Teacher assessment		
Reading English	.371	-
	-	.415**

Table 5: Comparison pupils' self-assessment of reading skills versus formal and teacher assessment (Pearson cor., ** <.01, * <.05, 2-tailed)

As can be seen in Table 5, there are (significant) positive correlations between the different assessments of reading. Similar findings emerged for the proficiency skills for other languages. In general, the findings prove that pupils of this age group – 10 to 12-year-olds – appear to be able to give an accurate evaluation of their own language skills compared to formal assessments and teacher assessments. In this respect, no differences were noted between boys and girls. The reliability of self-assessment for this age group could also be found for the other-language knowledge of the multilingual children, more specifically the Turkish and Moroccan-Arabic pupils. It is worth mentioning that the age at which (in the Netherlands at least) pupils at primary school are receptive to and able to carry out self-assessment of their language knowledge is around 9. The language portfolio has been implemented in several grade 4 classrooms (ages 8-9). The practical experience in these classes is that most of the pupils are not yet able to work with the self-assessment descriptors in the language biography part.

3. Diversity in higher education

The development of a language portfolio for higher education started in 2004. Several versions were developed. The first version was used in the school year 2004/2005 by a group of 39 adults learning Italian as a second language: 10 adults participated in a one-year evening course at an adult Education Centre (Volksuniversiteit) and 29 students

participated in intensive 13-week courses at Tilburg University. This version of the Higher Education portfolio was completely written in Italian. The self-assessment through descriptors of language skills in the language biography part was also done in Italian. On the basis of this first evaluation, improvements were made. The second version of the Higher Education portfolio (Sorice & Broeder 2005) was completely translated into Dutch, so that it could be used in classes for other languages (than Italian) as well. In the school year 2005/2006, this general Higher Education portfolio was used and evaluated by 51 students from 3 intensive 13-week courses at Tilburg University. The evaluation results of the overall student population in the school years 2004/2005 and 2005/2006 are summarized in Table 6.

How do you like the language portfolio?	
<i>(1= no, 2= more or less, 3 = yes)</i>	
General	
Working with LP is nice	2.06
Working with LP is easy	2.07
LP is nice to have	2.20
LP is important for me	2.11
Language knowledge	
LP shows what I can do in a language 2.36	
Through LP I think more about my languages	1.87
Directing own learning	
Through LP I know better what to learn	1.90
Through LP I know better how to learn	1.43
LP is a good addition to the language course	1.98
Behavioural intention	
I would like to bring LP to my next course	2.25
LP dossier makes me collect more documentation	1.87

Table 6: Students' assessment of their working with the Language Portfolio Higher Education (N=90 students)

In general the use of the language portfolio was evaluated positively by the adult learners. They liked working with the Higher Education portfolio (2.06) and considered it easy (2.07). They also said they found it important (2.11) and confirmed that the portfolio shows what they can do in a language (2.36). However, a more negative pattern emerges when

the use of the portfolio is related to the process of language learning. A minority indicate that through the portfolio they know better what to learn (1.90) and how to learn (1.43). Nevertheless, the portfolio is generally considered to be an asset to the language course (1.98) and, surprisingly, most students would like to bring their portfolio to the next language course (2.25).

Language effects on self-evaluation

There were only two remarkable differences between the subpopulation that worked with the Italian version and the subpopulation that worked with the Dutch version. In the Dutch version, the users thought more about their languages (1.64 for the Italian version; 2.07 for the Dutch version), and they were more inclined to collect documentation in the dossier part (1.54 for the Italian version; 2.20 for the Dutch version).

Individual differences

The population of adult learners that worked with the Higher Education portfolio was relatively small in comparison with the population that worked with the Primary Education portfolio. As result, it was impossible to investigate if there was a difference between the multilingual and the monolingual adults. As was the case with the children in the Primary Education portfolio, differences were found between male and female users of the Higher Education portfolio. The women were more positive than the men on the parameters given in Table 6.

Self-evaluation of language knowledge

The self-assessment of language knowledge for the adult learner population in the Higher Education portfolio was compared to the general assessment by the teacher. The self-assessment was based on the pool of descriptors in the language biography. Table 7 shows the correlations between teacher assessment and self-assessment for each of the 5 language skills in Italian.

Self-assessment Italian	Teacher assessment (formal test)
Understanding A1 (n=27)	.560**
Reading A1 (n=27)	.438*
Production A1 (n=27)	.579**
Interaction A1 (n=26)	.522**
Writing A1 (n=26)	.623**

Table 7: Comparison student' self-assessment of language skills versus formal assessment by the teacher (Pearson cor., ** <.01, * <.05, 2-tailed)

Table 7 shows significant positive correlations between the general teacher assessment on the one hand, and the adults' self-assessment on the other of each of the 5 language skills. The adult learners also appear to be able to give an accurate evaluation of their own language skills. In this respect, no differences were noted between men and women.

Conclusions and Discussion

This contribution presented empirical observations for the role and the effect of self-evaluation in the dynamic diversity of the classroom. The focus was on two different groups. The first group consisted of 10- to 12-year-old primary school children in multilingual classrooms. The second group consisted of adult second language learners. These learners all carried out self-assessment of their language skills. In both cases, self-assessment was carried out through descriptors of language usage and goals available in a Primary Education portfolio (Aarts & Broeder 2003) and a Higher Education portfolio (Sorce & Broeder 2005). The portfolios and descriptors were based on current European methodologies

initiated by the CEFR and the ELP (for a historical account, see Broeder & Martyniuk 2007).

Byram (this volume, p. 39–42) reflects on the needs and prerequisites for a Common European Framework of References specifically directed towards Languages of School Education. The diversity of classroom practice dealt with in the present contribution might provide some considerations for such a framework.

The age factor

- young learners (from age 9 onwards) as well as adult learners are able to give an accurate evaluation of their own language skills;
- young learners are more process-oriented in the language learning task. They want to know **how** to learn and ask for learning activities and tasks they can choose from (“*Teacher, what do you want me to do?*”);
- adult learners are more goal-oriented in the language learning task. They want to know **what** to learn and focus on proficiency levels (“*Teacher, how much time is needed to achieve level X?*”);

Multilingualism of the learners

- Multilingual students (young children in particular) took a positive attitude towards self-assessment of their language skills in the context of a portfolio. The language portfolio enables them to present themselves in a positive way because their language knowledge is considered to be an asset rather than a source of problems.

For developing a Common European Framework of References for languages of School Education, Byram points to the need to distinguish between etic and emic levels of description: useful knowledge resulting from a top-down and bottom-up view respectively. A top-down perspective is useful because an etic level of description might provide the means of analysing and reflecting on any education system and the language curriculum within it. The pitfall to be avoided is that an (objective) framework with an etic level of description is considered as a prescriptive end goal in itself. A framework for languages should also take into account emic descriptions that focus on the meaning of particular activities within a particular education system. The intrinsic dynamic diversity of specific learning contexts and learning processes are meaningful and appropriate to the European individuals in their everyday

language use. In this respect, claims from an (etic) Reference Framework for Languages of School Education should never be regarded as being superior to findings emerging from everyday practice in the diverse classrooms.

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THE VALUE OF VOCABULARY SIZE MEASURES IN A LANGUAGE FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE

Introduction

We already have a framework system within the area of languages, the one for modern/foreign languages – the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001), and the new proposal will want to learn from this. However, a Framework for Language(s) of School Education presents additional challenges to the foreign language system since it will want to include not just first languages but the many second and other languages which, in a linguistically diverse European society, learners will need to use for study at school. It is also clear that it will want to include the cultural loading and uses of language even more explicitly than the foreign language framework does and, perhaps, direct itself explicitly at the various literatures of the many languages of Europe.

While it may be different and larger in scope than the previous framework, the new framework will want, nonetheless, to do many of the things which the foreign language framework already aspires to. It will most probably want to set clear standards so users will know where learners stand within the framework. It may want to define performance and outcomes in an internationally comparable manner so that when users move from one country or language to another, their level and performance can be understood and their ability to fit into the new

educational system predicted accurately. It will probably want to encourage and assist in the setting up of systems of validation of competences, again so that users' knowledge and performance is transparent and understandable throughout Europe and beyond.

To achieve this, the CEFR for modern/foreign languages has produced a hierarchy of levels which allows exams and student attainment, courses and teaching materials in different languages to be ranked and compared, at least in principle. Evaluating language knowledge and performance in this way is highly challenging and the framework has had to adopt a system of description which is deliberately flexible and inclusive. There is much to admire and to imitate in the foreign language framework of levels, but it cannot be copied directly. A framework for languages of school education will have to produce language descriptors which can be normalised and moderated for age since children can be expected to undergo huge cognitive and linguistic development over the course of school education and what it is reasonable to expect at one age will be inappropriate at another. It might also need to be moderated in some way to give consideration to whether the language of school is also the language of the home. The undertaking will be a very considerable one.

1. Vocabulary Size and the Foreign Language Framework

The existing Framework has been constructed so we can, or should be able to, make interlanguage comparisons. English foreign language exams such as UCLES's First Certificate in English and the 'A' level French foreign language exam we use in Britain are both pitched at Independent, B2, level and learners who pass through these two exams should, in some meaningful sense, be equivalent in level. We should know from the grade descriptors at this the kind of competences which learners at this level should possess. However, I would argue that this system is not as robust as might be thought, and not as robust as it could be. The absence of any quantifiable or objective measures of language knowledge and competence in the CEFR makes for odd mismatches between languages, leads to misunderstanding, and at worst is open to abuse. The attempt to make the Framework as inclusive and as flexible as possible has resulted in an emphasis in the Framework document which is skills-based almost to the exclusion of the evaluation

of language knowledge. It is almost as though it is a system which has tried to divorce competence from knowledge such as vocabulary knowledge.

This is not entirely correct, of course, since the early materials which laid the basis of the Framework document, for example the *Threshold* materials in English (Van Ek and Trim 1990) and the equivalent *Un Niveau Seuil* in French (Coste *et al.* 1987), included well constructed vocabulary lists. However, these lists are omitted from the Framework document itself and reliance is placed on skills descriptors. The danger with such a system, and the absence of quantifiable or fixed measures of knowledge, is that it is often possible to place a learner or an exam in any one of several bands. While the CEFR itself may be language neutral and apolitical, its application is not, and is in the hands of Ministries and publishers who have their own agendas. Currently, the rationale for exactly what is placed where in this system often appears to have more to do with aspiration or convenience than with the scientific application of language descriptors although it should be noted that specifications (including vocabulary) for some languages are in preparation which might be expected to help toughen up this system.

This can be illustrated by comparing the placement within the Common Reference Levels of the CEFR of the Cambridge ESOL exam system and the British School foreign language exam system when a common and quantifiable measure, such as vocabulary size, is used for comparison. Cambridge ESOL's hierarchy of exams pre-dates the language Framework and appears to have been placed within the Framework system of levels almost regardless of the descriptors. There have been no adaptations of level or content that I am aware of to make the existing exams match the Framework descriptors except for the addition of the *Starters*, *Movers* and *Fliers* exams at A1 to provide a Cambridge ESOL exam at each Framework level. In comparison to the Framework descriptors the standard required to pass these exams seems very demanding. For Cambridge ESOL, the Framework classification appears to be a convenient nomenclature for characterising their exam hierarchy within an increasingly competitive international market. In Britain, faced with the same challenge of positioning an existing foreign language system within the Framework, the placements appear to be made in hope or intention rather than on any empirical basis. There is considerable debate in Britain concerning the standards of foreign language exams and persistent accusations of declining standards even from the government's own Quality Control Agency

(QCA 2002a and b). Nonetheless, Department of Education’s website gives a very generous estimation of our national exams in this Framework (Milton 2006). The British system does not include an exam at every level but the age 16 GCSE exams are placed at A2 and B1 levels while the ‘A’ level exams, taken by specialist language students at 18 are placed at B2 level. The way these exams are placed against each other is shown in Table 1.

CEFR Level	Cambridge ESOL exam	UK FL exams
A1	Starters etc	
A2	KET	GCSE Lower
B1	PET	GCSE Higher
B2	FCE	‘A’ level
C1	CAE	
C2	CPE	

Table 1: Cambridge ESOL and UK FL examination placement within the levels of the CEFR

In principle the exams at A2, B1 and B2 should be comparable but the doubts about the placement of these exams are hard to demonstrate with the current Framework descriptors. Once vocabulary size measures are added to the table, however, the differences which were suspected become very clear. Vocabulary size is a measure which has been shown to be a good predictor of general language level and to correlate well with exam performance especially in tests of reading, writing and grammatical knowledge (for example, Meara and Buxton 1987). In this example I have chosen to compare the Cambridge ESOL exam suite with the French foreign language exams used for GCSE and ‘A’ level in Britain because these two languages have the advantage of being directly comparable in many ways. Comparable corpora have been developed in each language allowing frequency lists to be developed and comparable vocabulary size tests developed in each language. The way vocabulary is constructed and varies though inflection and derivation are fairly similar in each language and there is nothing like the differences that would be seen if these languages were compared with, say, Finnish which has a much greater variety of inflected forms. Much of the vocabulary is

cognate and very similar between the two languages. While it would be a surprise if the vocabulary knowledge of learners passing each exam in the two systems were identical, scores at each Framework level should be similar. In Table 2 I have placed the approximate mean vocabulary sizes from learners taking these exams in EFL (from Meara and Milton 2003) and in French (Milton 2006) alongside the CEFR levels.

CEFR Level	Cambridge ESOL exam	EFL vocabulary	UK FL exam	French vocabulary
A1	Starters etc	<1500		
A2	KET	2000	GCSE lower	800-1000
B1	PET	3000	GCSE higher	800-1000
B2	FCE	3500	'A' level	2000
C1	CAE	4000		
c2	CPE	4500		

Table 2: UCLES and UK exams and the approximate vocabulary size of exam takers

The scale of the differences here reveal how unsatisfactory the current use of the Framework is. The suspicion that the French foreign language exams might be generously placed against the EFL exams is borne out and it appears that Britain's French speakers are, indeed, far less knowledgeable and able, than EFL learners at the same Framework level.

2. Vocabulary Lists and the A2 and B1 levels

It is not the purpose of this paper to criticise the language learners or the teaching and testing systems employed in Britain or in those schools around the world which use the Cambridge ESOL suite of exams. In fact, our research has suggested that learners in a number of countries and languages make remarkably similar progress in terms of the rates at which they learn vocabulary and any differences appear to be the product of the classroom time devoted to learning (Milton and Meara 1998). Rather, the purpose of this paper is to illustrate that despite the application of the CEFR system of levels to these exams the differences between the

exams systems is enormous and these exams are not comparable in the way that was intended when the Framework was devised. The current Framework system of levels, in the absence of quantifiable knowledge measures is not robust enough to allow the kind of inter-language and international comparisons which were intended.

It was mentioned earlier in this paper that the earlier works on the level specifications do include vocabulary lists which may give an indication of the vocabulary size which was expected at the A2 and B1 levels. The Waystage A2 levels in English and French (for example, Van Ek 1990) both include wordlists, derived from the same thematic and notional functional descriptions, with about 1000 words. The Threshold B1 levels (Van Ek and Trim 1990, Coste *et al.* 1987) both contain wordlists with about 2000 words in them; French is slightly less than 2000 and English slightly above. The figure of 2000 words at this level, the lower of the Independent B band, seems particularly appropriate since research in both English and French suggests there is a real threshold at this level of vocabulary knowledge (Seaton 2004). The 2000 word knowledge threshold is usually the level which both teachers and learners identify where gist understanding is possible in reading and listening. Below that level learners do not recognise enough words in any given text to grasp meaning consistently. But above that level, and it usually corresponds to about 80% coverage of normal texts, enough words are known for passages of lucidity to emerge. While not everything will be understood, far from it, learners can begin to function relatively independently, as the descriptors suggest they should. If these figures are also included in the Table of exams and vocabulary knowledge (see Table 3) it emerges that both the Cambridge ESOL and British foreign language exams are pitched differently from these levels. Cambridge ESOL's exams appear to be pitched well above the levels implied by the Framework materials and the British exams well below. For the British learners in particular this seems pity since they are not credited with what they do know in a foreign language, rather they are discredited for failing to achieve the standards expected outside Britain and implied by the Framework. It reinforces the idea that the British are bad at foreign languages.

Despite the presence of the CEFR and despite its explicit application to foreign language exams in English and French and foreign languages, it appears that exams and learners are no more equivalent and qualifications are no more transparent than they were before the creation of the Framework. In the absence of something like a vocabulary

measurement, the Framework may be obscuring the differences between exams in different languages and systems rather than helping the creation of equivalences. By adding a vocabulary size metric it becomes possible to see not only where the differences exist between the placement of exams and courses in different languages, but it also becomes possible to see how to adjust the level or placements of the exams concerned so that their fit is better. The addition of a vocabulary metric to a language framework, I would argue, makes the whole Framework far more robust than if any such metric is left out.

3. Vocabulary levels and the language of education

I would argue, too, that there are many ways in which a vocabulary metric can enhance, and provide the same robustness, in a Framework of Reference for the Language(s) of School Education. In a linguistically diverse Europe, it is becoming clear that learners will pass through the education system with a wide variety of language backgrounds and experience, and it cannot be assumed that they will all be learning through their mother tongues, nor that they will be equally competent. In a first or second language, as in a foreign language, vocabulary size can be a good general indicator of language knowledge and competence. It also appears that vocabulary knowledge of the language of education, particularly at the outset of the educational process, is also a very strong predictor of how successful learners will be when passing through the educational system. In characterising the language of learners within any educational system, vocabulary knowledge is a crucial measurement and cannot be ignored.

Studies in the USA have shown that learners entering grade school, do so with a wide variety of vocabulary knowledge. Studies suggest that children age 5 to 6 may have vocabularies varying in size from about 2500 to 5000 word families in English (Baker *et al.* 1997). Low vocabulary size at this age is particularly associated with social disadvantage and various kinds of learning disability, as well as with learners whose home language may not be the language of education, or who may be entering the education system from abroad. Whatever the cause of vocabulary deficiency, its effects are potentially very considerable. Learners with low vocabularies may not understand what the teacher says or the written

materials which they are expected to engage with. Even at this low age, such learners may be unable to participate in the educational system through the effect of their language knowledge, and vocabulary deficiency has for some time been considered in the USA a primary cause of academic failure (Becker 1977). Every other aspect of the educational system may be dependent on the level of vocabulary knowledge at the outset. It is crucial to recognise this if remedial action is to be taken. Providing measures of this kind within the proposed framework document would be an asset to users of the document in identifying learners at risk and identifying courses of remedial action.

It is thought that vocabulary differences at 5 and 6, set in train what is known as the Matthew effect (after Matthew 25: 29). Learners with large vocabularies at the start of the educational process grow their vocabularies much more quickly than those with smaller vocabularies, and end the educational process even more advantaged than they were at the start. Thus, learners at this age may grow their vocabularies at 600 to 1200 word families per year through the educational system (Beimiller 2001). Lexical growth in native speakers is thought to associate with the amount of reading which is undertaken. Learners who already have large vocabularies will be able to read with much greater ease and facility than those with smaller vocabularies, they will read more and encounter more new words, and so grow their vocabularies at the upper end of the range. Learners with smaller vocabularies will struggle to read, will read less and encounter fewer new words. This may well have an effect on the level of educational achievement which is possible. College entrants in the USA are thought to require 11,000 to 14,000 word families to cope with the demands of academic work, and graduate students 17,000 to 20,000 (Biemiller 2001). A study of the vocabulary to be found in university text books suggests that very large vocabularies are indeed needed to gain the kind of coverage necessary for comprehension. It is feasible, within a framework structure, to define the levels of vocabulary knowledge likely to be necessary for study and different levels of achievement.

These figures often suggest that direct intervention with learners, such as programmes of explicit vocabulary teaching, is possible. This often attracts criticism because vocabularies are so large that it appears there is insufficient time in the educational system to teach the volumes of words needed by learners. There is some evidence, however, that targeted vocabulary interventions of certain, specific kinds can be effective. Corpus analysis of university texts in English has provided an

Academic Wordlist of 570 word families which contribute disproportionately to academic text (Coxhead 2000). The experience of teaching this list to foreign language users of English suggests that educational performances can be enhanced even if the overall vocabulary size of users remains smaller than that of educated native speakers. Where many students in education in Europe may be using a language which is not their mother tongue, this kind of information can be very important, and may make the difference between being able to stay within the educational system and achieve full potential, and dropping out not through lack of innate ability but merely through lack of specific linguistic knowledge. While this approach to academic English may not work for all languages a feature of the proposed Framework might even be to identify specific vocabularies necessary for study.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that the proposed Framework for the Language(s) of School Education would be enormously enhanced by the inclusion of vocabulary measures. It may not want to define absolutely what levels and sizes should be, but the presence and use of the methodology of measurement in this area will be of benefit. This is because vocabulary knowledge is central to the learner's ability to interact with the educational system, to progress through the system, and achieve their full potential. To omit it from the Framework in its entirety would be a mistake. At present, we have some idea of the quantities of vocabulary which are involved in using English at school and university but little comparable knowledge of the level required for study in other languages. As a result there is a need for research in this area especially in languages other than English but, fortunately, the necessary methodologies for data collection now largely exist. A second benefit of the inclusion of vocabulary metrics, is that it will give the Framework a solidity and robustness which it will lack without quantitative measure. The example of the foreign language Framework suggests that the interlanguage comparisons, which are the purpose of the Framework, become difficult to control and regulate without these measures and the validity and usefulness of the Framework suffers as a consequence.

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