A QUALITY MATRIX FOR CEFR USE: Examples of practices

1 OVERVIEW

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Country: Ireland   **Institution**: Alpha College, Dublin
Type of context: Programme/school level

Educational sector: Adult

Main focus: Teaching Practices; Learning/Self-Assessment;
Classroom Teacher Assessment

SUMMARY

Name: Objectives and scenario-based task/projects

Abstract:
Flexible, CEFR-based curriculum implementation and assessment in a private English language school for learners on an intensive language learning stay

Stage: Planning, Implementation, Assessment

Theme: Teaching

CEFR aspects used: Levels, descriptors, action-oriented scenario/projects

Main features of this example:
- CEFR-based syllabus, with Can-do objectives
- Module plans with Can do objectives, shared with learners
- CEFR-based scenarios for projects, integrated in the course
- Assessment with CEFR-based criteria of performance in the scenarios

Quality principles demonstrated: Transparency, Coherence, Inclusiveness, Sustainability

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

2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Background: We have been working on linking our curricula, syllabi, and assessment practices more closely to the CEFR for some years. As a member of Eaquals, our school has been inspired by Eaquals CEFR Special Interest Projects (SIPs) that ran from 2007-2015. Most of our documents are under constant review, and reflect changes made in response to decisions reached at in-house teacher development and training sessions and practical trialing of material in the classroom context, as well as in response to newly published resources.

I have submitted three documents designed to support teachers in their lesson planning, objective setting, and in-class assessment of students. These documents are displayed in the classroom and provide support to the learner also in regard to clearly setting out the desired learner outcomes.

Stated aims:
The aim was to create a set of CEFR-based documents which support both teacher and learner by clearly defining what a learner can do with language at each level, what language items and competences will be worked on in order to achieve this, how learning can be achieved, and how this learning can be assessed.

Weekly Aims:
- To provide language in terms of CEFR descriptors to enable teachers to communicate objectives and outcomes precisely with students and colleagues.
- To maximise learner motivation and learning outcomes by defining real-world objectives and not isolating discrete language items which will be taught in class.
- To support the teacher in lesson planning by identifying the desired learner outcomes without being over-prescriptive.

Syllabus Aims:
- To provide a brief profile of the competences expected of the average learner at each level in terms of receptive, productive, and interactive skills.
- To provide a general checklist of language items and language usage expected at each level that can be referred to by the teacher in lesson planning, and by the learner for self-assessment purposes.

Scenario Project Overview:
- To provide a theoretical breakdown of the stages of the project.
- To enhance teachers' awareness of the level-specific competences needed to be worked on in order for learners to successfully achieve the project's aim.
- To provide a model of how projects can be integrated into classroom practice.
- To clearly identify criteria for in-class assessment.

Steps/stages:

1. Syllabus

Our syllabus began many years ago as a listing of the type of language typically taught by course books at each level. This was carried out by consulting three different titles. In a later development, this list was crossed-checked with the specific course book in use and areas not covered by our book were highlighted as needing supplementation by the teacher. Our current document is an upgrade of the same idea, this time linked to the Core Inventory of General English (British Council/EAQUALS) and Cambridge's English Profile. As well as a checklist, each syllabus now includes a brief profile of a learner at each level, with the inclusion of 'Can-do statements' in the areas of Reception, Production, and Interaction.

2. Weekly Objectives

Following on from an earlier version which attempted to assign certain skills and language work to specific days, our current Weekly Objectives document outlines the objectives learners will work towards achieving in class that week in terms of 'Can-do statements'. Although teachers use a set course book in class which identifies discrete language items, for approximately 50% of lesson time, teachers respond to learners' needs on a weekly basis and so this document is general rather than specific in content. For our Academic English weekly objectives, we have also consulted the Global Scale of English Learning Objectives for Academic English by Pearson.

3. Scenario Project Overview

We have a 12-week project syllabus, which runs in conjunction with our General English syllabus. Our weekly project document borrows the format used in the Scenario Assessment Tasks template presented in the Core Inventory of General English (British Council/EAQUALS). However, over the last 5 years, we have adjusted this document to reflect our specific in-class practices. We aimed to make this a workable document that would be practical as well as informative and motivating for busy teachers. It includes one example of how a project can be staged and includes information on the competences learners will need to successfully complete the tasks. Teachers refer to this for lesson planning. Criteria for in-class assessment are also outlined, which informs the teachers' evaluation and feedback on learners' progress. Teachers are also encouraged to adapt the project as they see fit in response to students' needs, using this as a model.

Recent updates reflect the newly published Companion Volume of New CEFR Descriptors- specifically the descriptors for Collaboration and Online interaction, which are particularly relevant to the types of projects carried out in class i.e. group video presentations, with an increasing amount of preparation happening online.

Timeline:

Once decisions have been made about the efficacy and relevance of templates, there is still a considerable time involved in producing workable documents. However, some can be produced quicker than others. The time limits below are relatively generous, based on a school that has

General English classes at 6 levels at least, and assume you are working on other projects at the same time.

1) Syllabus: 1 month
2) Weekly objectives: 6 months (if all levels are to be covered)
3) Project: 6-12 months (if all levels are to be covered)

People/roles:
The process of developing these documents involved a balance between a top-down and bottom-up approach and has been very much a collaborative project involving a lot of adjustments over a number of years. Ian Brangan, as Academic Manger in Alpha for many years, oversaw the initial adoption of the CEFR and EAQUALS standards in our curriculum. As Director of Studies, Aoife Harrington, worked on CEFR training and the standardisation of assessment processes, and through regular in-house development meetings and training sessions, teachers became more fluent and confident in CEFR application. In-house Special Interest Groups, involving senior teachers, trialed CEFR based resources and worked on developing further assessment tasks. The practicality and workability of final documents were then brought to teachers for consultation and agreed upon changes made.

Quality Assurance procedures employed:

- Monthly CEFR training and assessment training sessions
- Standardisation of assessment sessions involving samples of learner performance
- External inspections e.g. Eaquals

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

https://www.eaquals.org/resources/the-core-inventory-for-general-english/ - specifically the scenario concept
CEFR Companion Volume with New Descriptors- specifically the descriptors for Collaboration and Online interaction

3 RESULTS

What was achieved:
Learner-centred implementation of a CEFR-descriptor based curriculum, with a focus on flexibility for the teacher to take account of individual needs, and creative project work for learners.

Impact: Training in the CEFR benefits all aspects of teaching.
- Communication of learning/teaching aims: It provides teachers with the language to speak more precisely about language level and student performance. They in turn can communicate this to students.

- Draws focus onto strategic and pragmatic competences as well as the linguistic competences teachers at times may concentrate on too much.

4 ADVICE AND LESSONS LEARNT:

- Have regular CPD sessions dealing with specific aspects of the CEFR. Don't try to fit too much into one session i.e. isolate a scale to focus on one at a time e.g. spoken interaction.
- Show practical examples in conjunction with looking at the descriptors e.g. video recordings of students speaking in a range of set-ups- in groups, with a partner, individually, and written texts.
- Encourage teachers to evaluate the precision of the descriptor and attempt to phrase an alternative/additional descriptor if they deem it necessary. Some teachers can feel that the language used in descriptors can be off-putting for students and should be simplified or put in other words. Asking them to analyse the CEFR descriptor language will focus their attention on the efficiency and precision utilised.

B1 SYLLABUS 2017

The syllabus consists of three strands; the course book which, at this level, is Cutting Edge Third Edition Intermediate; the Weekly Project, which focuses on the productive skills, and students' needs. Below is an outline of the language that should be covered at this level.

This student is working towards achieving CEFR level B1 in English. This is the level at which the learner is able to maintain interaction and express what they want to say comprehensibly, even though pausing for grammatical and lexical planning is evident. At this level, learners can expect to be able to cope flexibly with problems in everyday life, and can enter unprepared into conversations.	

Receptive Skills	**Listening** Can understand what is said to me in everyday conversations, but I sometimes need help in clarifying particular details. Can understand the main points in TV programmes on familiar topics when the delivery is relatively slow and clear. **Reading** Can understand the main points in straightforward factual texts on subjects of personal or professional interest well enough to talk about them afterwards.	
Interactive Skills	**Spoken Interaction** Can start, maintain and close simple face-to-face conversation on topics that are familiar or of personal interest. Can give or seek personal opinions in an informal discussion with friends, agreeing and disagreeing politely. **Written Interaction** Can write emails, faxes or text messages to friends or colleagues, relating news and giving or asking for simple information. Can write a short formal letter asking for or giving simple information.	
Productive Skills	**Spoken Production** Can briefly explain and justify my opinions. Can relate the main content of short texts I have read. **Written Production** Can write about my everyday life in simple sentences (people, places, job, school, family, hobbies, etc.), using basic linkers and sequencers. C**an** talk in detail about my experiences, feelings and reactions.	

FUNCTIONAL LANGUAGE

Precision: When explaining something, I can make the listener understand the points that are most important to me.

1~ Describing places		7- Asking for and giving advice	
2~ Describing past experiences and storytelling		8- Expressing obligation and necessity	
3- Describing feelings, emotions and attitudes		9- Making offers and arrangements	
4- Expressing opinions		10- Checking understanding	
5- Expressing agreement and disagreement		11- Initiating and closing conversation	
6- Talking about films and books.		12- Managing interaction .i.e. interrupting, changing topic, resuming, or continuing	

VERB FORMS
Accuracy: Can use some simple structures correctly in common everyday situations.

Past simple v past continuous		Phrasal verbs- separable/inseparable	
Used to		Simple passives	
Would- expressing habit in the past		Reported speech- range of tenses	
Past perfect		Modals of possibility	
Future- will/going to for prediction		Modals of deduction	
Future- present continuous		Modals of obligation and necessity	
Future- going to		Ought to	
Future- future continuous		Need to	
Present perfect		Past modals- range	
Present perfect v past simple		Article- countable and uncountable nouns	
Present perfect continuous		Adverbs- wide range- time, place, frequency, manner,	
Conditionals: zero and first		Intensifiers: so, too, enough	
Conditionals: second and third		Gerund and infinitive verb patterns	
Conditionals: mixed		Complex question tags	

DISCOURSE MARKERS
Can join simple phrases with linkers and sequencers such as::

and		however		because		therefore		later	
first		After that		Finally		If		On the other hand	

VOCABULARY
Has enough vocabulary to communicate in simple, everyday situations.

TV and film		Health and the body	
Books and storytelling		Sports and free time	
People and appearance		Holidays	
News		Landscape and geography	
Food types and meals		The environment	
Lifestyle		Politics, society and change	
Machines and technology		Personality	
Travel and services		Education	
Clothes		Travel and transport	
Collocation		Idiomatic expression	

PRONUNCIATION
Can recognise and produce examples of the following, especially where different to L_1.

Homophones		Voiced and unvoiced sounds	
Simple word stress		/t/ /d/ /id/	
Single vowel sounds		Syllable counting	
Diphthongs		Intonation differences + - ?	
Schwa sound		Weak forms- prepositions etc.	
Long / short vowel sounds		Connected speech- contractions	

Weekly Objectives Level B1
Week 3

This document outlines the areas of the syllabus to be covered this week in class. Your teacher will supplement with material focused on your needs.

Revision: *Describing past habits and states* **Pronunciation:** Can identify personal pronunciation issues caused by native language interference and attempt to fix them.	**Grammar:** Can express himself/herself reasonably accurately in familiar predictable situations. **Listening:** Can understand straightforward information about everyday topics if spoken clearly in a familiar accent. **Project:** Can understand the main points of clear standard texts regularly encountered when planning a trip.
Vocabulary: Can maintain reasonable lexical control when speaking about family, hobbies and interests, work, travel, news and current affairs. **Reading:** Can find and understand the information I need in short texts. Can understand the main points in straightforward texts well enough to talk about them afterwards.	**Grammar/ precision:** When explaining something, can make the listener understand the points that are most important. **Speaking:** Can give descriptions on a variety of familiar subjects related to everyday and my interests. **Project:** Can find out and pass on uncomplicated, factual information, for example, related to travel and entertainment.
Vocabulary: Can give descriptions of places, cities and countries using a range of appropriate vocabulary with reasonable accuracy. **Speaking:** Can express and respond to feelings and attitudes such as surprise, happiness, sadness, interest and disinterest.	**Speaking:** Can talk in detail about my experiences, feelings and reactions. **Fluency:** Can keep a conversation going, but sometimes have to pause to plan and correct what I am saying. **Project:** Can find out and pass on uncomplicated, factual information.
Listening: Can understand straightforward information about every day, study- or work-related topics, identifying both general messages and specific details, provided people speak clearly in a familiar accent. **Speaking:** Can give a short, prepared presentation on my country and answer clear, follow-up questions.	**Interaction:** Can ask someone to clarify or elaborate what they have just said. **Project:** Can make arrangements on the telephone or in person e.g. booking flights, hotels, rental cars, restaurants, cinemas etc.
<u>**Progress Test: Review of the week**</u> **Speaking:** Can ask for information when travelling. **Writing:** Can write a description of a place you have visited.	<u>**Weekly Project**</u> Can give a short, prepared presentation on things that are important personally, and answer clear, follow-up questions

Alpha College of English – Scenario Project Week 3   B1– Itinerary
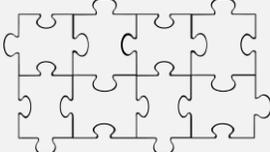
Context	Final Product	Project Staging
Customer service representatives from transport, cultural, entertainment, and service industries. Classmates, host families	An itinerary for a visit to Ireland to be published to an online blog.	**1. Driving question: What is the 'best fit' weekend cultural itinerary for a specified group of participants?** Learners are shown an example of an existing itinerary e.g. https://youtu.be/OUnWAlQvSTU and discuss who the itinerary would best suit, why, and what elements they might change should the profile of the travellers differ. The teacher should provide a couple of profile cards outlining varying preferences and limiting conditions. This prepares learners to collaborate to find compromises and solutions. **2. Sustained Inquiry**: Form groups and set parameters for the project e.g. duration of visit, budget, and timeframe for completion. To save time, teachers may want to assign pre-decided profile cards of travel participants with varying conditions and preferences. **3. Student voice and choice:** Learners decide what form their final product will take e.g. video presentation or interactive google map. Learners decide what has to be done, who will do it, and set targets for research, drafting, and editing.
Texts	**Activities**	**4. Reflection, critique, and revision:** Learners have daily 'check-ins' to discuss progress, and also to reflect on what they are learning, how they are learning, and why. The teacher reflects on the efficacy of the project objectives and staging in terms of learner outcomes, and identifies areas where learners may need focused language support to be integrated into General English lessons. Learners should also experience peer feedback sessions where they can trial drafts or elements of their project with members of different groups, and be encouraged to seek feedback from outside the classroom e.g. host family members or admin staff at Alpha College. This is an important stage in building confidence in their final product. **5. Public Product:** Students present the work they will make public. Teachers should ensure that assessment and evaluation of a learner's language level is a continuous process and not reliant purely on the final product. Students, not the teacher, make the final product public.
Broadcast and recorded texts/ Posters and notices / Leaflets / Programmes / Online blogs/ Brochures /Menus / Emails/Flyers	Spoken interaction Written interaction Written production Online interaction Mediation- collaboration	

Level	B1
Can-Dos*	**Can** collaborate on a shared task, for example, formulating and responding to suggestions, asking whether people agree, and proposing alternative approaches. **Can** organise the work in a straightforward collaborative task by stating the aim and explaining in a simple manner the main issue that needs to be resolved. **Can** post online accounts of social events, experiences and activities, referring to embedded links and media, and sharing personal feelings. C**an** engage in online collaborative or transactional exchanges that require simple clarification or explanation of relevant details, such as registering for a course, tour, event, or applying for membership.
Criteria*	
Spoken Production Giving Information	Can report straightforward factual information on a familiar topic, for example, to indicate the nature of a problem or to give detailed directions, provided I can prepare beforehand.
Propositional Precision	Can convey simple, straightforward information of immediate relevance, getting across which point I feel is most important.
Spoken Fluency	Can express myself with relative ease. Despite some problems with formulation resulting in pauses and cul-de-sacs, I'm able to keep going effectively without help.
Range	I have enough language to get by, with sufficient vocabulary to express myself with some hesitation and circumlocutions on topics such as travel, and hobbies and interests, but lexical limitations cause repetition and even difficulty with formulation at times.
Accuracy	Can communicate with reasonable accuracy in familiar contexts. I have generally good control though with noticeable mother tongue influence. Errors occur, but it is clear what I am trying to express.

Competences		
Strategic	Manage interaction (interrupting, changing topic, resuming) Ask for clarification or elaboration. Repeat an utterance in a different way if not understood Confirm understanding by echoing. Use similar meaning word for unknown lexis and invite correction. Rehearse new language and expressions Attempt to reach a consensus	
Pragmatic	Functional	Describing plans Discussing pros & cons Justifying opinions by giving examples Expressing agreement / disagreement Presenting a plan
	Discourse	Connecting words expressing cause and effect, contrast Linkers: sequential time
Linguistic	Grammatical	Present simple for schedules Comparatives and superlatives Present perfect simple & continuous Conditionals (1st) Modals of obligation- present and past
	Lexical	Travel and Services Entertainment and Culture Collocation Phrasal verbs (high frequency), Descriptive language- use of adverbs and adjectives