A QUALITY MATRIX FOR CEFR USE: Examples of promising practices

1 OVERVIEW

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Country: Austria **Institution:** CEBS (Center for vocational languages)

Type of context: National & Programme/school level **Educational sector:** Upper Secondary (Vocational)

Main focus of your project: Classroom Teacher Assessment, Teacher Education

sUMMARY

Name: Plurilingual oral exam with L2 & L3

Abstract:
The focus of the project is the implementation of a plurilingual oral exam at several types of Upper Secondary Vocational Colleges in Austria. The overall aim is to give learners the opportunity to show evidence of their oral plurilingual competences (between L2 and L3) in an official leaving examination and thus to raise awareness in schools of the importance of these competences. As part of the project, a framework document called "Designing and Implementing Plurilingual Oral Exams" has been published and a series of teacher development workshops have been designed and carried out. There are some schools where students have already taken this exam.
This project is combined with another one, which focuses on the teaching of plurilingual competences in class.

Stage: Implementation; Evaluation

Theme: Assessment; Teacher education

CEFR aspects used: Levels, plurilingualism, mediation, descriptors, defined assessment criteria

Main features of this example:
- Test specifications and assessment grid based on the CEFR
- Focus on plurilingual competences
- Option for learners in their official leaving examination at Austrian Upper Secondary Vocational Colleges
- Exam tasks embedded in a situational framework
- Accompanied by teacher development workshops

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

2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Background:
The project was a logical next step in a development which had started in the 1990s, where a new curriculum and new regulations made it possible to offer a plurilingual oral exam at upper secondary level at one type of Upper Secondary Vocational College. The CEBS team had also successfully introduced "*Plurilingual Communication and Language Switch*" as part of the national language contest for students at Upper Secondary Vocational Colleges.

The introduction of new regulations for final exams in the school year 2015/16 gave us the opportunity to make a plurilingual oral exam available to a greater number of Austrian Upper Secondary Vocational Colleges, as the educational authorities agreed to this idea.

Stated aims:
For years, linking teaching and assessment to the CEFR as well as familiarisation of teachers with the CEFR have been an essential feature of our work at CEBS. We started this project because we felt the need to take up what the CEFR says about plurilingualism and mediation and to develop these ideas further. The test specifications and the assessment grid are based on the CEFR. We used the CEFR as our basis to work out new descriptors, which the CEFR did not yet include at the time. The recent publication of the Companion Volume gives us the opportunity to reassess our work. We will compare our current framework with the new descriptors in order to ensure that it is at the height of new developments in the field of plurilingual approaches.

The main goals of the project are as follows:
- to emphasise that language diversity and plurilingualism are part of the European identity
- to ensure that learners have the choice to show their plurilingual and intercultural competences in a high stakes school-leaving exam, thus allowing them to expand their individual portfolio
- to increase awareness among teachers and learners for the essential features of plurilingual and intercultural communication
- to increase acceptance of this type of exam among teachers and stakeholders
- to create a model which is feasible in the present school context, but has the scope to be widened and thus include languages which are not yet addressed in the current form of the exam or not even part of school curricula
- to ensure that the exam tasks produced at schools reflect basic common principles and are related to the CEFR
- to ensure that criteria are available to teachers that allow them to assess plurilingual competences
- to ensure that teachers are familiar with and can make appropriate use of an assessment grid based on the CEFR designed to assess plurilingual competences
- to ensure that teachers are able to act effectively as interlocutors in a plurilingual exam where they have a clearly defined role in a plurilingual situation
- to enable teachers who have taken part in teacher development workshops to share their knowledge and skills with others
- to contribute to cross-curriculum teaching of subjects which, until now, have been taught separately

Steps/stages:
1) School year 2013/14:
The start of the project was at the beginning of the school year 2013/14. Before this, the CEBS team had already produced a framework for monolingual oral exams based on the CEFR in order to ensure that oral exams at Upper Secondary Vocational Colleges have common features. In Austria, the tasks for high stakes oral exams are designed within the schools, and performance is assessed by the learners' own teachers. The team began to work on a written document (framework) which was intended to help teachers design and carry out plurilingual oral exams at their schools as part of the Austrian Upper Secondary Level Oral Matriculation and Diploma Examination, the official school-leaving examination at Austrian Upper Secondary Vocational Colleges. For reasons of practical feasibility the present exam combines the mandatory school

subject of English with a mandatory second foreign language presently taught at Austrian schools and chosen by the students.

2) School years 2013/14, 2014/15:
During the development process, early drafts of the framework were presented to various groups of language teachers at face-to-face meetings, and they were asked for their feedback. In March 2015 we also had the opportunity to present our work to Brian North. The format of the examination includes both spoken production and spoken interaction, but in a mediating, plurilingual context. There are two interlocutors, one for the first foreign language (English) and one for the second (French); each behaves as if they speak only that language. The candidate must present information provided in German to each of the two interlocutors, in the appropriate language. The candidate also completes a collaboration task with both interlocutors, mediating linguistically between them. Candidates are assessed not only on the effectiveness of the communication, but also on the aspects of plurilingual competence that they demonstrate during the process of mediation.

3) School year 2014/15:
In order to promote the new exam and to give teachers the necessary support, national teacher training workshops were designed and organised in cooperation with our partner, the Private University of Education of the Diocese of Linz. The focus was on task design, assessment of performance and interlocutor training. Videos of mock exams were produced in the school year 2014/15, and the first teacher development workshop took place in April 2015. Participation was voluntary, so the participants were teachers who were highly interested and motivated. Thus the project team got valuable feedback from the participants for the final version of the framework.

4) October 2015 / July 2016:
Publication of the German and English versions of the framework respectively. The framework includes test specifications, example tasks, guidelines for task design, an assessment grid, guidelines for assessment, instructions for examiners and also a page with information for students. The assessment grid has descriptors adapted from the CEFR, plus descriptors on alternating effectively between languages, why helped inspire descriptors for Building on plurilingual repertoire in the CEFR Companion Volume.

5) 2016-2017
Further regional and national teacher development workshops took place in 2016 and 2017. One of the outcomes of these workshops are teachers who now offer similar workshops to their colleagues, with the support of the project team if it is needed. The project team has also run workshops on a local level and will continue to do so.

6) A logical next step is one of our new projects, which is closely linked to this one. We have designed and been running teacher development workshops to give language teachers background information and ideas for plurilingual approaches in their lessons.

People/roles:

Educational authorities:
Acceptance of the idea to include the option of a plurilingual oral exam in the new regulations for the school-leaving exam at Austrian Upper Secondary Vocational Colleges

CEBS-team:
The main participants of the project are the members of the team at CEBS in Vienna. The decision to go ahead with this project was taken jointly by the CEBS team. They were responsible for content and publication of the framework, and for the design and running of teacher development workshops.

Additional experts:
Additional advice was sought from experts who had previously been working with CEBS and who shared an interest in plurilingualism.
Teachers:

A number of teachers provided feedback during the development stages of the framework. They offered support in examining the validity, reliability and practicability of the assessment grid.
Four volunteer teachers were also involved in the production of videos for teacher development workshops, acting as interlocutors in videoed mock exams.

Learners:
Seven volunteer learners acted as test takers in videoed mock exams, which were used for the teacher development workshops.Some feedback was also provided by learners during the project.

Private University of Education:
Our partner, the Private University of Education of the Diocese of Linz, provided the organisational framework for teacher development workshops.

Quality Assurance procedures employed:
Peer review

Publications that have been used or produced related to this example:
Piribauer, G., Ute Atzlesberger, U., Greinix, I. Ladstätter, T. Mittendorfer, F., Renner, H & Steinhuber, B. (2015) *Designing and Implementing Plurilingual Oral Exams: Framework for the Austrian upper secondary level oral leaving examination at colleges for higher vocational education*. Vienna: CEBS

Publications that have been used: see reference list at the end of this document

3 RESULTS

What was achieved:
- It is too early to give a figure for the number of students have taken plurilingual oral exams at some of the schools
- About 150 teachers have taken part in development/training workshops for plurilingual exams up to now

Impact:
There is still some scepticism, but a rising number of teachers view plurilingual exams positively

Resources on this theme: the framework document:
Piribauer, G., Ute Atzlesberger, U., Greinix, I. Ladstätter, T. Mittendorfer, F., Renner, H & Steinhuber, B. (2015) *Designing and Implementing Plurilingual Oral Exams: Framework for the Austrian upper secondary level oral leaving examination at colleges for higher vocational education*. Vienna: CEBS

Available in German at: https://www.cebs.at/fileadmin/user_upload/service/WEGWEISER/MSP/Wegweiser-MSP-2015.pdf
English version available on request from CEBS

4 ADVICE AND LESSONS LEARNT:
- When introducing a new exam or new approaches, make sure teachers are included in the development stages in order to benefit from their expertise and to ensure greater acceptance.
- Also try to get feedback from learners.

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