A QUALITY MATRIX FOR CEFR USE: Examples of practices

1 OVERVIEW

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Country: Japan

Institution: Bunkyo English Communication Center (BECC) at Hiroshima Bunkyo Women's University (HBWU)

Type of context: National

Educational sector: Tertiary

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

SUMMARY

Name: Curriculum renewal – undergraduate level

Abstract:
The project involved two curriculum renewal cycles undertaken by the Bunkyo English Communication Center (BECC) at Hiroshima Bunkyo Women's University (HBWU). The GE curriculum was fragmented and lacked cohesion. BECC management therefore made the decision that further curriculum renewal was required, and selected the CEFR as the overarching organising framework for a renewal project beginning in 2012. The practices involved creating CEFR-informed lesson handouts and materials, in-class assessments including vocabulary tests, speaking tests, and standardised testing

Stage: Planning; Implementation; Evaluation

Theme: Curriculum

CEFR aspects used: Levels. Descriptors

Main features of this example:
- Scaled descriptors
- CEFR-informed learning goals
- Curriculum planning and implementation
- CEFR-informed assessment, testing

Quality principles particularly demonstrated: Relevance, Transparency, Coherence

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2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Steps/stages:
The process of the first attempt at aligning the GE curriculum to the CEFR-J, a modified version of the CEFR, aimed at Japanese learners of English (see Tono, 2013), involved six main components:

1. The rewriting of course proficiency goals in the form of CEFR descriptors in order to increase clarity and transparency
2. Familiarising teachers with the CEFR and the CEFR-J, training teachers in 'Can Do' descriptor writing and norming the process of matching 'Can Do' descriptors with CEFR-J self-assessment grid bands.
3. Designing standardised tests of listening, reading and speaking
4. The writing and inclusion of learner 'Can Do' descriptors on all lesson handouts so that learners can self-assess their ability to achieve lesson target tasks at the start and end of every lesson, and getting expert feedback on these lesson 'Can Do' descriptors
5. The revising of activities in the self-access learning centre (SALC) so that they aligned with the CEFR-J and more closely supported the curriculum's classroom activities
6. The creation of a CEFR-aligned map of the curriculum which classified all lesson tasks according to descriptors on the CEFR-J self-assessment grid, meaning that lesson content was organisable by level of difficulty, language skill and topic.

Several steps for each component were taken towards the goal of aligning the GE curriculum to the CEFR-J between 2012 and 2014 and these steps are summarised in Table 1 of Bower et al. (2017a: 182).

After the first attempt, the team of 10 teachers and coordinators collected and analysed evidence, using both surveys of teachers and 300+ students, and observations of classes. Several limitations were highlighted (e.g. it was difficult to determine how balanced the curriculum was in its coverage of various language skills). A major decision was made to base the GE curriculum on the CEFR, as opposed to the CEFR-J, as there are better resources available based on the former.

A 3-year plan was created for the development of the new curriculum and its assessments: this included making new lesson handouts and materials, in-class assessments including vocabulary tests, speaking tests, and revised year end standardised testing. The syllabus was conceived as one course delivered over two years, with each year consisting of two semesters, and each semester consisting of 30 90-minute classes. The creation of a lesson structure allows each lesson to be clearly anchored to the CEFR: vocabulary used in lessons is CEFR based, the main task of each lesson is directly based on a task from the CEFR, the Eaquals (2015) bank of descriptors, or the Association of Language Testers in Europe (2002) 'Can Do' descriptors bank, and grammar points covered in the focus-on-form sections are selected from *Waystage 1990* (van Ek and Trim 1991b), *Vantage* (van Ek and Trim 2001) and the *British Council – EAQUALS Core Inventory for General English* (North et al 2010).

People/roles:
A team of 10 teachers and coordinators
300+ students

Publications that have been used or produced related to this example:
Bower, Jack, Runnels, Judith, Rutson-Griffiths, Arthur, Schmidt, Rebecca, Cook, Gary, Lusk Lehde, Lyndon & Foale, Azusa (2017). Using the CEFR-J and the CEFR as frameworks for renewal of an English language curriculum at a Japanese university: An action research study. In O'Dwyer, Fergus, Hunke, Morten, Imig, Alexander, Nagai, Noriko, Naganuma, Naoyuki & Schmidt, Maria Gabriela (Eds) *Critical, Constructive Assessment of CEFR-informed Language Teaching in Japan and Beyond* (The English Profile Studies series, volume 6), pp. 175-265. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

3 RESULTS

What was achieved:
A number of practices were effective and would be applicable in other institutions, including:
- workshops about the CEFR and 'Can Do' descriptors to help teachers understand some of the principles behind the approach of the CEFR
- writing course goals based on CEFR 'Can Do' descriptors
- using CEFR 'Can Do' descriptors to write 'Can Do' descriptors for individual lessons
- A standard lesson format and a feedback process helped to ensure lessons are well integrated with course goals and build upon one another.
- Basing other aspects of the curriculum, such as self-access learning centre (SALC) activities, vocabulary lists, and the choice of lesson grammar on CEFR-related resources has also contributed to the close integration and appropriate levelling of the curriculum.

These practices have helped to foster a good understanding and acceptance of the CEFR among the faculty, and may be helping to foster reflective learning among learners.

4 ADVICE AND LESSONS LEARNT:

Advice on this theme; things to remember:

The curriculum renewal steps involved can be clearly presented using the ADDIE model (Forest 2014). This model, whose name stands for Analyse, Design, Develop, Implement, Evaluate, provides educators with a series of steps for planning, implementing, and appraising a curriculum. The steps taken at the BECC, which we also recommend to other practitioners, are summarised below.

ANALYSE (pre-planning, thinking about your course)
- Identify audience: students' CEFR level.
- Identify objectives: choose CEFR 'Can Do' descriptors as overall curriculum goals.
- Choose number of course streams to match the levels of your students.
- Create a curriculum overview which describes the aims, pedagogical philosophy and methodological approach of the curriculum.

DESIGN (design your course on paper)
- Create a syllabus outline.
- Educate stakeholders on the new curriculum, the rationale for using the CEFR as the framework of reference for curriculum development, and how to make a CEFR-informed lesson.
- Select a 'Can Do' descriptor for each lesson.

- Solicit teacher ideas for lesson content on a unit-by-unit basis to provide a starting point for teachers to create individual lessons and to create a sense of ownership.

DEVELOP (develop course materials and assemble)
- Teachers develop actual lessons and assessments (including listening passages and videos, and translated self-assessment checklists).
- Give systematic feedback to ensure the consistency and quality of the formatting and structure of lessons. Feedback should also make sure that each lesson focuses on a specific CEFR-related 'Can Do' descriptor or statements.
- Allow time for lesson revisions and final checks.
- Once lessons are complete, each lesson designer adds more specific lesson information, such as the lesson target 'Can Do' descriptor, grammar, vocabulary and target language functions about each lesson, to the syllabus document.

IMPLEMENT (begin teaching)
- Begin using the new curriculum.

EVALUATE (look at course outcomes with a critical eye)
- After the entire curriculum is completed, begin the process of feedback and reflection with a view to making revisions.
- Use appropriate assessment tools to evaluate whether course goals are being met.

Some recommended steps to create a CEFR-informed curriculum from scratch include:
- Have a representative sample of students take a CEFR placement test. Suitable tests may include the OOPT (Pollit 2009, Purpura 2010), the English First Standard English Test (English First 2014), or the Cambridge English Placement Test (see English UK (2011) for a brief description).
- Decide on an appropriate number of course streams to match the levels of your students.
- Choose or adapt CEFR 'Can Do' descriptors as overall curriculum goals for each course stream.
- Make a curriculum overview document to explain the aims, pedagogical philosophy and methodological approach of the curriculum.
- Drawing on appropriate CEFR-related documents make a syllabus outline which shows the breakdown of units and lessons. Key documents for developing our syllabus outlines were *Waystage 1990* (van Ek and Trim 1991b) and *Threshold 1990* (van Ek and Trim 1991a).
- Make a timeline for developing lesson materials and assessments.
- Make CEFR-related resources for curriculum development easily available for teachers. As mentioned above, resources we found to be useful include vocabulary lists from the Cambridge English suite of exams (University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations 2012a, 2012b), the English Vocabulary Profile (University of Cambridge), *Threshold 1990* (van Ek and Trim 1991a) and *Waystage 1990* (van Ek and Trim 1991b), the *British Council – EAQUALS Core Inventory for General English* (North et al 2010), and examples of textbooks at the curriculum target CEFR levels.
- Give a workshop on the reasons for making the new curriculum, the rationale for using the CEFR as the framework of reference for curriculum development, and how to make a CEFR-informed lesson.

- Solicit teacher ideas for lesson content on a unit-by-unit basis to provide a starting point for teachers to create individual lessons and to create a sense of ownership. We found that Google Docs provide a convenient medium for this, as teachers can enter their ideas simultaneously from any internet-connected device.
- Teachers develop actual lessons and assessments.
- Give systematic feedback to ensure the consistency and quality of the formatting and structure of lessons. Feedback should also make sure that each lesson focuses on a specific CEFR-related 'Can Do' descriptor or statements.
- Allow time for lesson revisions and final checks.
- Organise the recording of lesson listening passages and videos.
- Organise the translation of lesson 'Can do' descriptors for student self-assessment checklists.
- Begin using the new curriculum. For a longer curriculum such as our GE curriculum it may be necessary to continue developing later units while using the first few units
- Once lessons are complete, each lesson designer adds more specific lesson information to the syllabus document, such as the lesson target 'Can Do' descriptor, grammar, vocabulary and target language functions about each lesson.
- After the entire curriculum is completed, begin the process of feedback and reflection with a view to making revisions.