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Using the CEFR Companion Volume to enhance teacher agency in school-based language curriculum making

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In this workshop we are going to talk about:

- What teacher agency is in school-based curriculum development
- Four steps to achieve agency:
 - Engage
 - Focus
 - Design and develop
 - Reflect and evaluate
- Discussion from your own educational context using practical examples

Curriculum trends

Prescriptive curriculum: detailed specification of knowledge content = input
Prescriptive methodologies
Centralised policy, national control over education
Teachers' role: transmit knowledge

Output-based curriculum: learning outcomes
Assessable outcomes, performance-oriented
Accountability (inspections, international rankings)

Curriculum as social practice: a multi-layer system
More generic goals
Learner-centered

The teacher as agent of change and professional developer of the curriculum

FROM...

- CEFR level as label
- Descriptors as tick-off list
- Text books ARE the curriculum
- Teaching to the test

⇒ Losing sight of the big ideas

TO...

use the CEFR and its key aspects as reference tool to enhance teacher agency in curriculum making

What is teacher agency?

Critical engagement with educational aims and values to shape curricular practices at school, based on those aims and values

Teachers as **agents of change** = reflective and enquiring attitude, critical engagement with educational principles and policies allows continuous improvement

Collaborative agency = constructive alignment in curriculum development through discourse/dialogue

Inhibiting factors

- Output-driven curriculum that leads to (perceived) lack of autonomy and trust;
- Lack of cultural / discursive environment, and of promoting professional thinking due to structural and contextual constraints.

School curriculum development reduced to the implementation of a curriculum as defined by someone else (for instance, Ministry of Education, National testing board)

School-based curriculum development

Use the CEFR for...

- ☑ Professional dialogue
- ☑ Critical collaborative professional construction of meaning

reason, such as:

- subject innovation, core/choice
- continuous learning lines
- coherence in educational offer
- customise, tailor to needs
- formative/summative assessment

change:

- ambitions, profiling, vision
- curriculum at school, class and pupil level

curriculum
design

teacher
development

school
organisaton
development

competences:

- subject content
- pedagogy
- curriculum
- design and research
- collaboration
- change management

but also:

- commitment
- willingness to change
- ownership

Preconditions

school culture:

- cooperation
- shared curricular leadership
- respect and trust
- energy and space

school infrastructures:

time, budget
communication
consultation
the school as a teaching,
learning and design environment

Fostering teacher agency with the CEFR

Go through the four steps:

1

ENGAGE

2

FOCUS

3

DESIGN AND DEVELOP

4

REFLECT AND EVALUATE

Engage

- **Explore together the theory behind the CEFR to engage with its big ideas**
- Consider fitting pedagogies
- Address constraints and conditions

The main concepts of the CEFR in a nutshell

- ***Action-oriented approach***: language teaching and learning driven by action
- The language user as a ***social agent***
- **Mediation**: facilitate communication and understanding
- ***Plurilingual and pluricultural approach***: languaging across the barriers of languages and cultures, and language and cultural varieties

See also:

[CEFR](#), chapter 2

[Webinar series](#) 2021 and 2022

The action-oriented approach means to...

... use one or more languages / language varieties to accomplish a rich task,
and within the task act in order to:

- understand (reception),
- co-operate (interaction), and
- work on a product (production).

'Social agents' ...

... 'act with language' together with others,
... work together towards a goal,
... take initiative, make decisions,
... within conditions and limits,
... use all their resources: cognitive, emotional, linguistic and cultural,
... develop strategies,
... plan, produce results, create a product,
... monitor their actions

Mediation

Holistic view of language use and language acquisition, as it happens in real life.

"The other three modes of communication are idealizations without Mediation.

Communication between people tends to be messy – and Mediation in the CEFR Companion volume helps us to encourage our students to develop skills to move past these barriers and gaps in communication." (conversation with L. Cohen, Head of the English Dept. Free University, Raanana, Israel)

Mediation to...

- ...create a multilingual and pluricultural space in which to communicate and learn;
- ...reduce gaps and tensions;
- ...build bridges to the new, the other;
- ...work together to build new meaning;
- ...pass on information (and simplify, elaborate, illustrate, adapt);
- ...act as a mediator.

“The social agent mediates while languaging, because languaging is the manifestation of mediation.” (B. North)



Mediation of concepts: think things through together

For example: discuss what should be in a video, a game, a web page



Mediation of communication: regulate oneself and others, get a grip on thoughts, emotions and behaviour

For example: discuss why a group work did not turn out so well



Mediation of texts: enable the understanding of a text, for oneself and for or with others

For example: summarise (from several sources), explain, translate...

Engage

- Explore together the theory behind the CEFR to engage with its big ideas
- **Consider fitting pedagogies**
- Address constraints and conditions

CEFR: not prescriptive... not neutral!

“One thing should be made clear right away. We have NOT set out to tell practitioners what to do, or how to do it. We are raising questions, not answering them.” (CEFR 2001, Notes to the user)

- No prescriptive pedagogic approach prescribed
- But: language learning driven by action:
 - Enable language learners to act, accomplish tasks and achieve goals with language in real-life situations, often in cooperation
 - Purposeful, rich cooperative tasks with a concrete product or outcome
- WHAT and HOW

Engage

- Explore together the theory behind the CEFR to engage with its big ideas
- Consider fitting pedagogies
- **Address constraints and conditions**

Engage

Essential preconditions

- National and school educational policy
- Time and support
- Professionalisation
- Examples from practice, materials
- Assessment competence

Engage – DISCUSSION (BREAKOUT ROOMS) - 20'

Padlet: https://padlet.com/d_fasoglio/u8a9b6i48m1d9me6

YOU AS A LANGUAGE USER

1. Which of the main concepts of the CEFR Companion Volume do you recognize in the way you use languages in your daily and professional life?

YOU AS LANGUAGE PROFESSIONAL

2. What do the main concepts of the CEFR Companion Volume mean for the language curriculum you work with?
 - How far are they from your own practice?
 - What goes well?
 - What do you find difficult, what do you miss, why?

Engage – DISCUSSION (BREAKOUT ROOMS) - 20'

Padlet: https://padlet.com/d_fasoglio/u8a9b6i48m1d9me6



Fostering teacher agency with the CEFR

TWO: FOCUS

- **Identify area of interest or concern**
- **Formulate enquiry question**
- Frame in general educational principles of equality and sustainability
- Frame in general curricular principles of coherence and horizontal & vertical alignment
- Consider content, pedagogy and assessment

Focus

What are specific areas of interest or of concern in your context? Do they relate to pedagogy, content, or outcomes?

For example:

- Improve pupils' reading skills
- Improve pupils' oral skills
- Tailor curriculum to increasing number of pupils with another home language
- Meet specific needs, for example in pre-vocational education
- Inbed digital communication in the curriculum

Focus

Formulate your enquiry question.

For example:

- How can we develop more effective teaching contents in our school for our multilingual classes?
- How can we make better use of literature education?
- How can we embed mediation in the examination programme?

Focus

Make a list of actions that can allow you to answer your question.

For example:

- Teacher interviews
- Student interviews
- Develop new teaching materials
- Develop new assessment tools

Focus

- Identify area of interest or concern
- Formulate enquiry question
- **Frame in general educational principles of equality and sustainability**
- Frame in general curricular principles of coherence and horizontal & vertical alignment
- Consider content, pedagogy and assessment

PROMOTION OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Equal opportunities:	Role of the CEFR:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• tune to a diverse pupil population• gear teaching to pupil population• provide tailor-made solutions where necessary• customised solutions for pupils who<ul style="list-style-type: none">• for whatever reason, have difficulty with, for example, certain language skills;• are linguistically talented and/or have a multilingual background (for example another home language)• have specific needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• differentiate proficiency levels to be reached;• differentiate in language activities tailored to students' needs;• mobilise, value and develop plurilingual and pluricultural resources;• include a broader range of languages.

Focus

- Identify area of interest or concern
- Formulate enquiry question
- Frame in general educational principles of equality and sustainability
- **Frame in general curricular principles of coherence and horizontal & vertical alignment**
- Consider content, pedagogy and assessment

Ensure consistency

Horizontal & vertical alignment:	Role of the CEFR
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous learning line from lower to upper secondary, from secondary to higher education, from pre-vocation to senior vocational education • Smooth transition from one educational strand to another • Coherence in contents, goals and assessment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> within a subject, within a subject area, between related subjects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe language proficiency levels as specifically as possible for the different languages, skills and educational levels in order to facilitate progression to subsequent education; • further education, or the employment sector, know what proficiency level can be expected of students • make visible, on the one hand, what belongs to the core of all language subjects and, on the other hand, what the language specific perspectives are; • make similarities and differences between languages visible, for instance in proficiency levels.

Focus

- Identify area of interest or concern
- Formulate enquiry question
- Frame in general educational principles of equality and sustainability
- Frame in general curricular principles of coherence and horizontal & vertical alignment
- **Consider content, pedagogy and assessment**

Focus – DISCUSSION (BREAKOUT ROOMS) - 15'

Padlet: https://padlet.com/d_fasoglio/6j89hmnula0c0xs2

Identify ONE area of interest or concern in your language curriculum and formulate your enquiry question.

How can you use the CEFR to answer your question?



Focus – DISCUSSION (BREAKOUT ROOMS) - 15'

Padlet: https://padlet.com/d_fasoglio/6j89hmnula0c0xs2



Fostering teacher agency with the CEFR

THREE: DESIGN AND DEVELOP

Make choices

Design and trial new approaches related to your enquiry

Design and Develop

Observe and reflect:

- What goes well and should stay?
- What should be enhanced?
- What is missing?

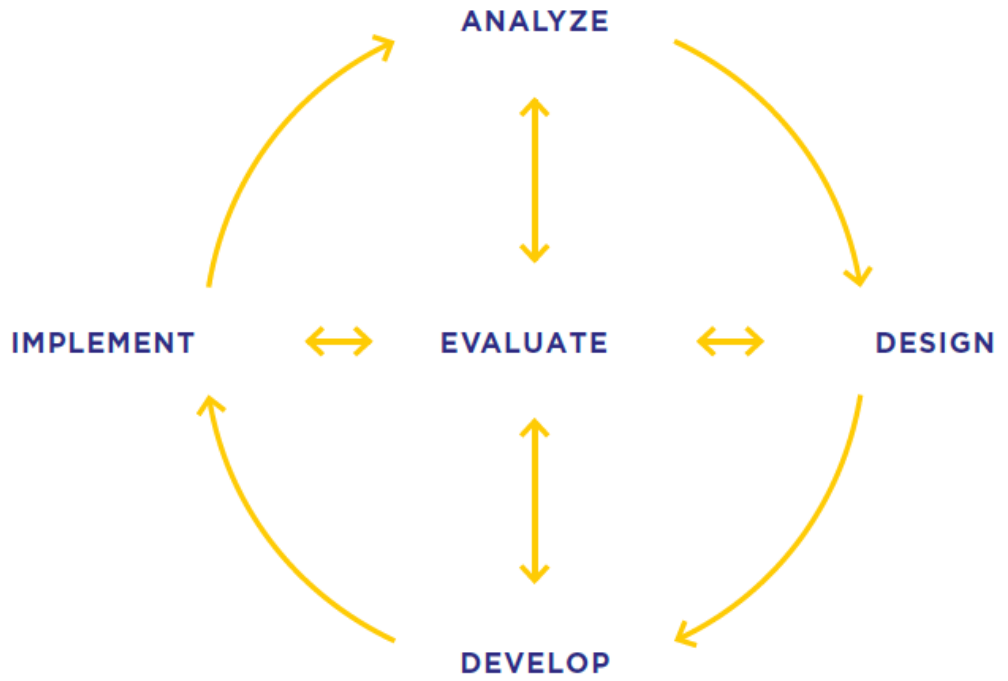
Fostering teacher agency with the CEFR

THREE: DESIGN AND DEVELOP

Make choices

Design and trial new approaches related to your enquiry

Iterative design process (ADDIE-model)



Design and Develop

Keep the focus on your curricular goal, for instance

- sharpen vision on language learning and use;
- improve alignment between rationale, targets and content
- improve horizontal and vertical alignment;
- clarify learning objectives and tailor them to learners' population;
- lay focus on specific aspects of language use, such as creative texts or online communication;
- enhance a feedback culture.

Design and Develop

1. Decide which scales of the CEFR are relevant for your purpose.
2. Decide for what purpose to use the CEFR descriptors, for instance:
 - to get ideas for the development of rich collaborative language tasks: figure out situations, actions, communicative goals to be achieved;
 - to define criteria allowing to draw conclusions on learning outcomes;
 - to stimulate pupils to discussion and reflection on how they use language, work together on a task, facilitate communication.

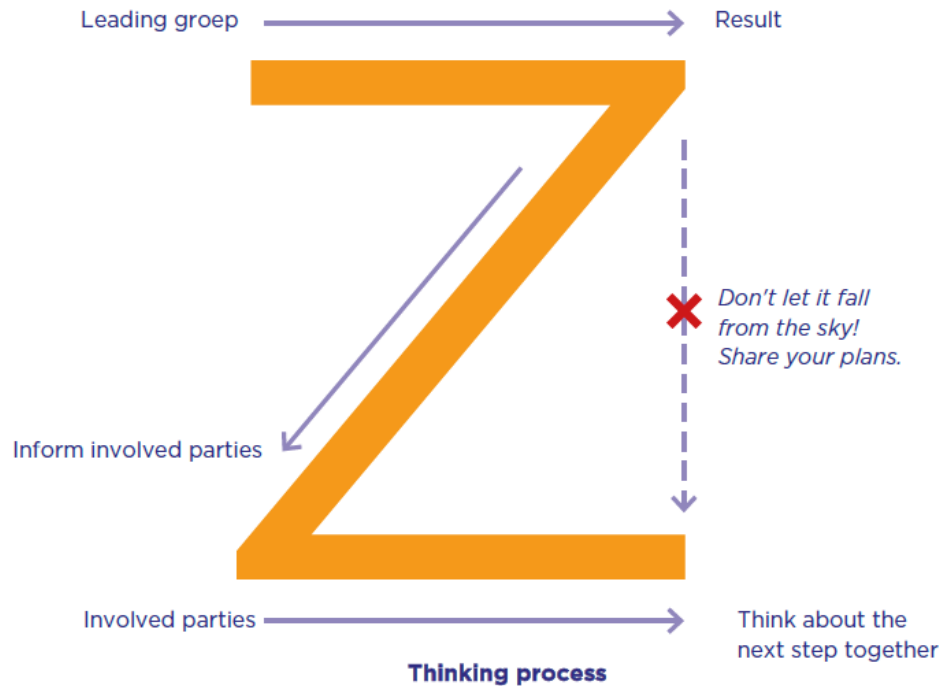
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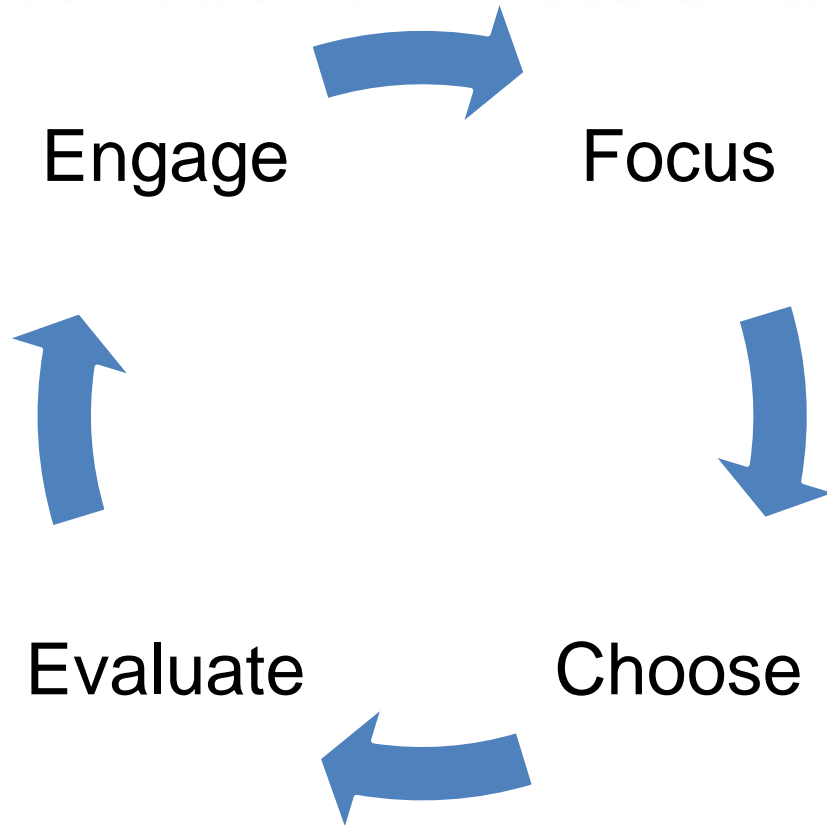
FOUR: COLLABORATIVE SENSE-MAKING

- Gather data
- Analyse, interpret, evaluate
- Involve students in the evaluation

Thinking process

Support (Z-movement)





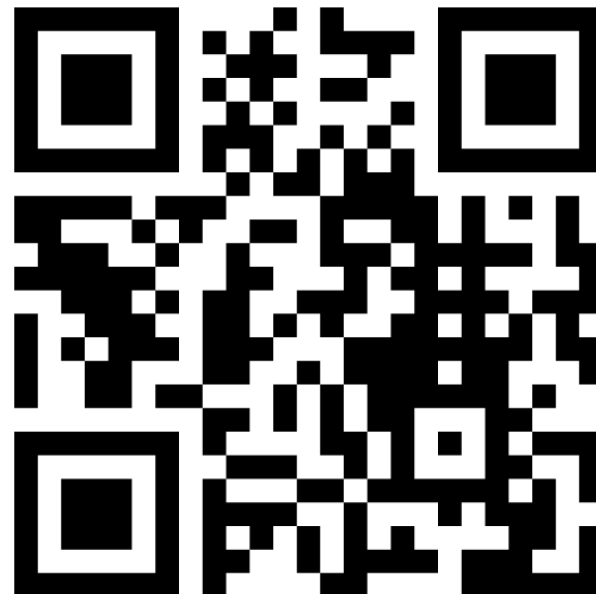


Design, Develop, Evaluate – DISCUSSION (BREAKOUT ROOMS) - 30'

1. Keep the CEFR scales at hand
2. Choose some of the examples in the handout and discuss the questions.

Provide your feedback!

<https://www.menti.com/5pgyeswod9>



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