

## Guidance Document 3

# CDC and Assessment

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## Who is this document for?

This guidance document is aimed at the following readerships:

- teachers at all levels of education;
- teacher educators;
- policy makers with responsibility for assessment in education;
- professional test developers designing assessments for use in relation to the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (henceforward, the Framework).

## Purpose and overview

The guidance document starts with some conceptual clarifications and an introduction to a set of key principles that need to be considered when assessing competences for democratic culture (CDC). It then explores the implications of the value foundations of the Framework for assessment practices. This is followed by a description of a range of assessment approaches and methodologies, covering their strengths, challenges and risks. The document concludes with some examples of how the assessment of dynamic clusters of competences can be conducted and recommendations for further reading.

## Why is assessment important?

If the Framework is to be used in education systems and be systematically applied through education practices in schools and classrooms, it is important to assess learners' progress, achievement and proficiency. This is because assessment provides vital information about the learning process that teachers can use to facilitate learners' further progress. In addition, assessment has significant effects

on the behaviour of learners and teachers who attribute greater importance and pay more attention to areas of the curriculum that are assessed. The assessment of CDC is therefore important for the effective inclusion and promotion of the Framework in formal education.

The Framework aims to contribute to the development of education practices for empowering learners, and for this reason the choice of suitable assessment approaches and methods requires particular attention. Some assessment methods, even if they are useful for measuring learner achievements in other domains, are not necessarily compatible with teaching and learning that focuses on democratic practices and respect for human rights. Some methods may also lack transparency, be disrespectful (or be perceived as disrespectful) to learners and may harm learners' personal integrity and future prospects. For this reason, it is vital that users of the Framework choose appropriate assessment approaches and methods.

## Some issues in assessment

### Assessment and evaluation

A major problem with everyday discourse about assessment is that “assessment” is assumed to be synonymous with “testing”, but testing is only one form of assessment.

A second problem is that “assessment” is confused with “evaluation”, a confusion made more common by the fact that in some languages – for example French “évaluation” – the same word is used for both assessment and evaluation.

In this chapter, “assessment” refers to the systematic description and/or measurement of a learner's level of proficiency or achievement, whereas “evaluation” refers to the systematic description and/or measurement of the effectiveness of an education system, institution or programme (which might consist of a course of study lasting several years, a series of lessons over several days, or even just a single lesson or learning activity). Assessment and evaluation are related because the results of assessments can be used as one element of an evaluation. Assessment helps teachers to understand if and to what degree the teaching process actually supported them in developing the intended competences, thus informing the planning and adjustment of the next steps in the teaching. For more elements on evaluation, see the accompanying documents in this volume on pedagogy, teacher education and the whole-school approach.

### The purposes of assessment

Assessment can serve a wide variety of purposes. The following is a non-exhaustive list of these purposes, each of which may stand alone or be combined with others:

- To obtain a description and understanding of learners' progress in the development of their competences.
- To decide whether learners are making expected progress in their mastery of the intended competences.
- To identify learners' present progress and future learning goals, so that subsequent teaching can be tailored to enable learners to achieve those goals.
- To identify any specific learning difficulties that learners might be experiencing, so that subsequent teaching can be tailored to aid learners in overcoming those difficulties.
- To evaluate teachers' practices in order to provide feedback on how their teaching might be adjusted in order to achieve greater effectiveness.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of a particular intervention or programme of teaching and learning.

The outcome of a single assessment can be used to serve more than one purpose, and the results from assessment can be used in different ways and at all stages of teaching and learning processes.

### **Assessment as a means of empowering learners**

The Framework is informed by the overall Council of Europe approach towards education for democratic citizenship and human rights education (EDC/HRE), with a particular focus on the empowerment of learners as active democratic citizens. The Framework is based on the three principles of transparency, coherence and comprehensiveness, and takes a holistic perspective on democratic learning processes (see Guidance Document 2 on pedagogy) and institutional contexts (see Guidance Document 5 on the whole-school approach). This means that education processes and contexts should reflect the values of democracy and human rights, and that they should cater for experience-based learning across the whole range of CDC. These dimensions of empowerment have particular implications for the assessment of CDC.

First of all, teaching, learning and assessment of CDC should be viewed and organised as one coherent process. Methods of teaching and learning need to be appropriate for developing the competences one wishes to assess. Co-operation skills, for example, can best be developed through learning activities which allow and encourage learners to co-operate. This means that co-operation should also be part of the assessment process. Opportunities to interact with others, to engage in discussions and to participate in decision making create contexts in which co-operation skills can be displayed by a learner and observed by an assessor.

Second, the holistic perspective refers to the coherence between teaching and assessment methodologies. For example, a learning unit based on co-operative learning methodology (for a description, see Guidance Document 2 on pedagogy) may be followed by a type of assessment in which learners' individual reflections on their own achievements are combined with peer assessment in order to maintain an atmosphere of mutual support and trust. Empathy is another example. In order to develop empathy and respect, learners need to have the opportunity to put themselves "in another person's shoes" and this then informs the assessment practice.

The above examples are linked to the issue of empowerment. First, assessment should enable learners not only to become aware of their achievement or level of proficiency in CDC, but also to reflect on the learning process that resulted in this particular outcome. Second, assessment should determine what is needed in order to develop these competences further. Third, assessment should enable learners to take appropriate action in relation to their own learning. In other words, assessment should contribute to learners' ownership of their learning process.

To this end, assessment should be informed by a set of principles allowing learners to experience the procedure as valid, reliable, fair, transparent and respectful. These principles are presented in the following section.

## **Principles of assessment**

In order for education assessments to be acceptable to learners and, in the case of young learners, their parents or caregivers, it is important that they meet a number of criteria. These criteria include validity, reliability, equity, transparency, practicality and respectfulness.

### **Validity**

Validity means that an assessment should accurately describe and/or measure a learner's level of proficiency or achievement of the intended learning outcomes, and not of some other unintended

outcomes or extraneous factors. A valid assessment is one that assesses what it is intended to assess. For example, an assessment task designed to assess a set of CDC might require the learner to comprehend linguistic material and to produce a verbal response. However, such a task might then actually be assessing learners' linguistic competence rather than their democratic competence, with the result that only the more linguistically able learners are credited with a high level of democratic proficiency. Similarly, when the frequency of students' contributions is measured in an assessment task that requires learners to collaborate, interact and talk with peers, those learners' personalities might be assessed rather than their democratic competence.

It is vital to use assessment methods in relation to the Framework that assess learners' democratic competence and not unintended factors. Only valid assessments allow accurate and fair conclusions to be drawn about the learner's level of proficiency or achievement. Invalid assessment methods should not be used because such methods provide misleading descriptions of learners' level in specified competences. This could then divert learners' future learning in an inappropriate direction, undermine their trust in the education process, or even endanger their willingness to engage in further learning.

A common misperception is that validity applies only to quantitative assessment. However, it is not only scores or grades that may be invalid. Qualitative assessments can also be invalid if the assessment is influenced by irrelevant factors.

### **Reliability**

Reliability means that an assessment should produce results that are consistent and stable. A reliable assessment is one that is dependable in its outcomes and those outcomes should be replicable if the same assessment procedure were to be administered again to the same learner and by a different assessor.

There are various reasons which can make an assessment unreliable. For example, an assessor might be tired, or might be unclear about the precise meanings of the learning outcomes that are being assessed. If the same assessor were less tired, or more knowledgeable about the meanings of all the learning outcomes, then different results might be obtained.

Reliability is different from validity. Even when an assessment method is known to be reliable, it might not be valid (that is, it might not accurately describe the achievement of the intended learning outcomes but of some unintended factor, such as the learner's linguistic capabilities or personality, as described above). On the other hand, if an assessment is unreliable, it cannot be valid. This is because if an assessment procedure is unreliable, something other than the learner's competence level (for example the assessor's level of alertness) is influencing the outcome of the assessment.

As with validity, it is often thought that reliability only applies to quantitative assessments. This is incorrect. The results of qualitative assessments can also be either reliable or unreliable. For example, they would be unreliable if the judgments made by an assessor vary over time and are inconsistent.

### **Equity**

Equity means that assessment should be fair and should not favour or disadvantage any particular group or individual. An equitable assessment method ensures that all learners, regardless of their demographic or other characteristics, have an equal opportunity to display their level of competence.

Inequity in the assessment can arise for a variety of reasons. For example, an assessment requiring learners to have access at home to a wide range of information sources could discriminate against

those who do not have such opportunities. An assessment that requires learners to have background knowledge of the culture of the majority cultural group could discriminate against learners from minority groups. Assessment methods that are unfair to and discriminate against disadvantaged learners or those belonging to different kinds of minorities should not be used.

### **Transparency**

Transparency means that learners should receive in advance explicit, accurate and clear information about the assessment. A transparent assessment procedure is one in which learners are informed in advance about the purpose of the assessment, the learning outcomes that are going to be assessed, the types of assessment procedure to be used, and the assessment criteria. Methods which require learners to make guesses about what is required of them in order to perform well in the assessment are not transparent.

Transparency is an important principle informing democratic processes and a democratic culture. For this reason, the assessment of CDC should always follow this principle and use methods that are comprehensible to learners.

### **Practicality**

The principle of practicality means that any assessment method that is used should be feasible, given the resources, time and practical constraints that apply. A practical assessment procedure does not make unreasonable demands on the resources or time that are available to the learner or the assessor. The limitations that render a method impractical are also likely to render that method unreliable and invalid.

### **Respectfulness**

A further principle of particular importance in the context of the development of competences for democratic culture is respectfulness. Assessment informed by respectfulness may motivate those being assessed to accept and understand the assessment and its purposes. This principle applies to all assessments that take place in relation to the Framework. Because the principle of respectfulness is not usually included among assessment principles, it is dealt with in greater detail here than the other principles.

Assessment procedures should always respect the dignity and the rights of the learner who is being assessed. Learners' rights are defined by the European Convention on Human Rights<sup>1</sup> and the Convention on the Rights of the Child,<sup>2</sup> and they include, inter alia, the rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of expression and freedom from discrimination. Assessment methods or procedures (and any other education practices) that violate one or more of these rights of learners should not be used.

In its interpretation of the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Court of Human Rights explicitly allows freedom of expression even in cases where the views that are expressed are regarded as offensive, shocking or disturbing, because freedom of expression constitutes one of the essential foundations of a democratic society. However, the Court also holds that, in the case of forms of expression that spread, incite, promote or justify hatred based on intolerance, it may be necessary to sanction or even prevent such forms of expression. This is because tolerance and respect for the

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: [www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Available at: [www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf).

equal dignity of all human beings constitute a further essential foundation of a culturally diverse democratic society.<sup>3</sup>

The principle of respectfulness therefore means that learners should not be sanctioned or censured in an assessment merely because the views which they express in that assessment are offensive, shocking or disturbing. However, learners may be censured in an assessment if the expression of their views spreads, incites, promotes or justifies hatred based on intolerance. If they do express hate speech, they should be challenged, and these expressions should be used as a learning opportunity to explore how the learner might be helped to develop empathy, mutual respect and a sense of human dignity for all. Thus, assessment, if conducted in respectful ways, can turn a problematic behaviour into a turning point in the education process.

In the case of assessments based on the Framework, education practitioners therefore need to make careful judgments concerning assessments in which learners are found to express opposition to valuing human dignity and human rights, valuing cultural diversity and valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and rule of law. It is crucial that such opposition is only taken into consideration in the assessment when the learner spreads, incites, promotes or justifies hatred based on intolerance.

The principle of respectfulness does not only involve respecting the human rights of learners, it also involves respecting the dignity of learners. As such, assessments that are linked to the Framework should also observe the following general rules:

- Learners should not be placed under continual stress by being constantly assessed.
- Learners have a right to privacy and confidentiality, especially in relation to their values and attitudes.
- There is a need for sensitivity when revealing assessment results to learners.
- Feedback to learners from assessments should focus on positive rather than negative outcomes, mainly on learners' achievements rather than their deficiencies.
- There may be cases and issues where assessments should not be conducted because the issues or topics are too sensitive for the learners concerned.
- Special precautions should also be taken where the outcomes of an assessment will be used to decide if a learner can continue to the next level of education.

In addition, users of the Framework may wish to consider whether, in order to respect the dignity of learners, learners have a right for the values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours which they have exhibited at earlier points in their development to be forgotten. It may be argued that there should be no permanent track record of learners' values, attitudes and beliefs, because this violates their right to privacy. Alternatively, it may be argued that only acceptable or positive values, attitudes and beliefs should be traceable through assessment records (and that these records should therefore not document any unacceptable speech or behaviours that have violated or aimed to violate other people's dignity or human rights, because this documentation could later harm the learner). A third possibility is that, if learners engage in behaviours or hold values, attitudes or beliefs that are democratically unacceptable, but then progress in their development, they should have the right for their previous behaviours, values, attitudes or beliefs to be removed from the records of their education. Users of the Framework will need to consider the range of possibilities and decide upon the course of action that is most suitable in their own education context, bearing in mind the need to

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<sup>3</sup> See: European Court of Human Rights (2016), *Hate speech*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg. Available at: [www.echr.coe.int/Documents/FS\\_Hate\\_speech\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/FS_Hate_speech_ENG.pdf).

ensure that assessment should always respect the dignity and rights of the learner who is being assessed.

Finally, it should be noted that four of these six assessment principles do not apply only to assessment methods. They also apply to the adequacy and appropriateness of the conclusions that are drawn from the results of assessments. Invalid, unreliable, inequitable or disrespectful conclusions about learners should never be drawn from an assessment that has been conducted in relation to the Framework. For example, using the outcomes from the assessment of a learner to make the claim that the learner is more or less competent than most other learners of his or her age is an invalid conclusion if there is no information available about the performance of a representative sample of learners on that same assessment. Similarly, overgeneralising the outcomes of assessing learners from a single classroom to make broad claims about differences between the competences of males and females or of majority and minority ethnic groups would be both invalid and inequitable.

## Approaches to assessment

In addition to thinking through the implications of these six assessment principles, users of the Framework will need to consider the specific approach that they might use for assessing CDC. There are contrasting approaches to assessment, some of which form dichotomies and some continua. In general, types of assessment can be characterised using these dichotomies and continua.

**Table 1: Concepts and contrasts**

High-stakes (e.g. national examinations)	Low-stakes (e.g. confidential portfolios)
Achievement (e.g. end-of-course test)	Proficiency (e.g. test in a real-world context outside the school)
Norm-referenced (e.g. examinations for selection to next stage of education)	Criterion-referenced (e.g. portfolio demonstrating a profile of competences)
Summative (e.g. end-of-course examination)	Formative (e.g. mid-course assessment)
Objective (e.g. computer-based test)	Subjective (e.g. observation of behaviour)

### High-stakes and low-stakes assessment

One important continuum is between high-stakes and low-stakes assessment. High-stakes assessments are assessments which yield results that are used to make important decisions about the learner and therefore have significant consequences for the learner. Examinations by national testing, leading to certification which opens doors for further study or workplace opportunities, are at the high-stakes end of this continuum. Portfolios or journals of learning which are confidential to a learner and to those to whom they give permission of access, are at the low-stakes end, because they are not used by others to make decisions. Assessments where a teacher provides feedback only to the learner – with or without a grade – lie in the middle of the continuum, as do other variations of “assessment by others”, with different kinds of feedback. “Peer assessment” – with observation and feedback in private – lies nearer still to low-stakes, as does “self-assessment”. «Teacher assessment” in tests, with grades made public, lies near the high-stakes end of the continuum, especially if it influences progression through an education system and other life chances.



Users of the Framework will need to consider the extent to which they should use high-stakes assessments. It may be judged that it is important to lift education for democratic citizenship out of the status of a less prioritised matter in education, and that this can be best achieved by using high-stakes assessments. High-stakes assessments are much more likely to have significant effects on the behaviour of both teachers and learners. If something is not subjected to high-stakes assessment, then it is more likely to be undervalued and not receive the attention that it requires from teachers and learners. However, if an assessment has high stakes, then it is essential that the assessment methods that are used have high reliability and high validity. It would be unethical to make significant decisions about a learner's future on the basis of unreliable or invalid assessment outcomes. Hence, any decision to use high-stakes assessment should only be made if it is judged that reliable and valid assessment methods are available.

Conversely, it could be argued that the only suitable assessment types for the Framework are those that lie towards the low-stakes end of the continuum, and that high-stakes assessment should never be used, in order to ensure that the principle of respectfulness is maintained. This argument might apply especially to the assessment of learners' values, particularly given the concerns about learners' rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion that were discussed above. Exactly the same argument might also apply to the assessment of learners' attitudes, given that attitudes consist of multiple components and interrelations between them, and are complex and personal. Assessing attitudes could therefore be perceived as an assessment of the person rather than of the person's competences, and so high-stakes assessment could damage the person and their future prospects.

Users of the Framework might wish to consider employing a mixed set of assessment types, in which only low-stakes assessments are used in relation to values and attitudes, but high-stakes assessments are used in relation to skills, and knowledge and critical understanding.

Users of the Framework will need to consider these various possibilities and decide upon the course of action that is most suitable within their own education context, bearing in mind the need to ensure that the principle of respectfulness is observed.

### **Achievement and proficiency assessment**

Assessment by teachers is usually achievement assessment where the teacher seeks to establish what and how much a learner has learned from the teaching. It is usually closely tied to a syllabus or programme of learning, for example as presented in a textbook. Achievement assessment contrasts with proficiency assessment, which reports on the level of performance demonstrated by a learner in general, without reference to a particular course of learning. Proficiency assessment is often tied to demonstration of knowledge, understanding and skills when applied to situations outside the classroom, for example through simulations or project activities that take place in the local community. For this reason, proficiency assessment is useful to employers and it may therefore be high-stakes. Proficiency assessment takes into account achievement resulting from teaching and learning but also includes the results of learning outside the classroom.

Both achievement and proficiency assessment may be suitable for CDC since they have different purposes: to inform teachers and learners about learners' success in a course of learning, and to inform teachers, potential employers or other stakeholders about individuals' broader capacities. However, if proficiency assessment is to be used to inform external stakeholders about learners' broader capacities, then it is essential to use highly reliable and valid assessment methods for this purpose because of the high stakes that are attached to the outcomes of the assessment. It is also



important to take into account the principle of respectfulness when considering the use of high-stakes methods so that such methods are only used if they are respectful of the dignity and rights of the learner.

### **Norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessment**

Performance on assessment tasks, whether in tests or other kinds of assessment, can be graded by norm-referencing or criterion-referencing. The former involves comparing the performance of an individual against the performance of a reference group of that person's peers. The performance of the reference group is sometimes standardised into a normal "bell curve" distribution, in which a minority are near the lower end of the range, a majority are on both sides of a mid-point (the average), and a minority are near the top of the end of the range. By comparing an individual's grade against the grades of the reference group, that individual's performance can be situated in relation to the full range of performance that is possible. In order to do this, however, it is essential that the individual is given the same tasks under the same conditions as those that were given to the peer group in order to generate the distribution. In addition, it is important that a large representative sample of peers drawn from the full ability range is used to establish the distribution. Finally, the peers should have the same demographic characteristics as the individuals who are to be tested. For this reason, a great deal of preparatory work is required before norm-referencing can be used.

A subtype of norm-referencing is cohort-referencing. This occurs when a learner's performance in an assessment is compared against the performance of other learners within their group (cohort), and only a fixed proportion of the cohort taking the assessment are allowed to obtain particular grades (for example only 30% can get an above-average grade, 40% can get an average grade, while the remaining 30% have to get a below-average grade). Because the learner's outcome depends not only on how well they themselves perform but also on how well others in their cohort perform, exactly the same level of performance can result in grades that vary significantly from one cohort to another.

Criterion-referencing requires learners' performance to be assessed against a set of pre-specified criteria. The outcome is determined solely on the basis of the learner's own performance, and not in relation to how other learners perform on the assessment task. Using criterion-referencing in proficiency assessment requires descriptions of levels of increasing proficiency, with clear and explicit criteria being specified for each level of proficiency. Proficiency may be described holistically or broken down into a set of different elements.

The descriptors that have been developed for the Framework can be used as assessment criteria for three levels of proficiency – basic, intermediate and advanced. The descriptors have been through an extensive testing process to ensure that they are reliable and valid and can therefore provide a sound basis for criterion-referencing.

It could be argued that ranking learners through norm-referencing or cohort-referencing is contrary to the principle of respectfulness as these methods do not focus on the learner, their existing capacities and what can be built on and strengthened in the further education process. Instead of giving the individual learner a sense of his or her own capacities, norm-referencing and cohort-referencing can lead to a notion of deficit, and to a competitive perspective. Especially for low-performing learners, this can be extremely discouraging. The message "Look, you have improved your communication skills since we talked last time" can be devalued by the information "but you are still below average".

From the perspective of co-operative learning principles, norm-referencing and cohort-referencing have the disadvantage that learners, rather than being encouraged to find out the best in everyone,

are prompted to compare themselves with each other and to compete. Given these concerns, users of the Framework may wish to consider whether they should employ norm-referencing or cohort-referencing in relation to CDC assessment.

### **Formative and summative assessment**

Formative assessment (that is, assessment for learning) is a process of gathering and interpreting information about the extent and success of an individual's learning, which the learner and/or their teacher can then use to set further learning goals and plan further learning activities. The purposes of formative assessment presuppose that learners can benefit from results when given as feedback. This requires raising learners' awareness of their learning, of the competences to be achieved, and of the opportunities for learning. The criteria must be specified in a form which is useful in further planning, that is, be specific enough to identify weaknesses to be remedied and strengths to be developed.

Formative assessment contrasts with summative assessment (namely, assessment of learning) where the purpose is to summarise the learner's achievement or proficiency at a given point in time. Summative assessment is often used at the end of a programme of study, although it can also be used during a programme to enable learners and/or their teachers to take stock of their achievement or proficiency at that point in the programme. Summative assessment can be criterion-referenced, norm-referenced or cohort-referenced. It is sometimes assumed that summative assessment is equivalent to high-stakes assessment. This is not necessarily the case, for example, when summative assessment is used during a programme solely to provide information about the learner's current level of achievement or proficiency.

Although the terms "formative" and "summative" are often used as if they describe different kinds of assessments, the outcome of a single assessment might be used to serve more than one purpose. For this reason, these two terms are not descriptions of different kinds of assessment but rather of the different uses to which the information arising from an assessment is put. The same information, gathered using the same assessment method, is called "formative" if it is used to help learning and teaching. It is called "summative" if it is used for summarising and reporting learning. Both formative and summative assessment may be suitable for CDC depending on the purposes to be served.

### **Subjective and objective assessment**

Given the sensitivity of assessing values and attitudes, the contrast between subjective and objective assessment is crucial. The former is usually thought of as assessment by a person (who could be the teacher, the learner themselves, a peer or an external assessor) whose subjectivity may affect their judgment, whereas objective assessment is thought of as removing subjectivity and possible bias in the person making the assessment, whether conscious or not.

Subjective assessment is often associated with qualitative data obtained from types of learners' performance which produce text that is read or an activity that is observed by a teacher or some other assessor and judged, usually against criteria. However, subjective judgments can also arise when quantitative data are collected, for example using rating scales. Subjective assessment requires teachers or other assessors to be properly trained in the methods of assessment that are to be used. If they are not, there is a danger that the reliability of the assessments will be compromised.

Objective assessment is often associated with quantitative data produced by learners responding to questions or similar stimuli where only one response is correct and can be easily judged as correct; in many cases this is done by a person (the teacher, the learner, a peer or an external assessor), although in some cases this can also be done mechanically (for example by a computer programme). However,

objective assessments can be made not only of quantitative data but also of qualitative data. This applies when the categories that are used to interpret or code the qualitative materials are clearly and explicitly defined and leave little room for ambiguity or personal interpretation (for example, if clear and transparent criteria are applied in a portfolio assessment, the assessment can be objective).

The descriptors that are provided by the Framework can be used to create a common understanding of criteria for assessing learners. For this reason, they can contribute to enhancing the reliability and hence the objectivity of the assessments that are made by different assessors.

### **Face validity and coherence**

In most educational assessments, there is a need for face validity as part of the coherence between teaching and learning and assessment, as discussed earlier. This means that the assessment tasks given to learners should resemble the tasks through which they have learned and should also have relevance to how the competences would be used outside the classroom. Learners should be able to see this for themselves.

Face validity is particularly important in CDC assessment. A learner will expect to see the relevance of what they are learning to their life in society. Some of the principles of assessment might be harder to ensure when “real-life” assessment tasks with good face validity are used, but it is important to maintain the principle of face validity nonetheless.

### **Summing up**

Users of the Framework need to consider numerous issues in the choice of assessment approaches. These choices should take into consideration different issues related to the assessment of values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical understanding. What is suitable for one set of competences might not be suitable for another. In addition, all of the assessment methods need to be valid, reliable, equitable, transparent, practical and respectful of the dignity and rights of the learners being assessed.

## **The importance of context for assessment in CDC**

In addition to the preceding general considerations, the choice of assessment methods needs to be informed by more specific considerations that arise from the characteristics of the competences that are included within the Framework and from the way in which these competences are likely to be acquired by learners.

These competences are unlikely to be acquired by learners in linear ways, and they are not something that a person acquires at a certain moment and then possesses for the rest of their life. In the Framework, competence is defined as the ability to mobilise and deploy relevant values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and/or understanding in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, challenges and opportunities that are presented by a given context. This means that context is always crucially important for assessment.

Education settings provide a broad variety of contexts in which CDC can be mobilised, developed and displayed. Furthermore, competences can be expressed in different ways in different contexts. For this reason, performing a single assessment of competences in a single context is not sufficient. Teachers and other assessors need to observe competences at different times and across different situations. They also need to take into account the fact that a specific task or education setting will activate the interplay of a number of competences that cannot be assessed individually. This means that, rather than generating an overall assessment, or even repeated assessments of all 20

competences, teachers should instead aim to build competence profiles of learners across multiple contexts.

In addition, the distinction between achievement assessment and proficiency assessment is relevant here. As we have seen, achievement assessment focuses on the performance of learners in relation to a specific education activity, task or programme, whereas proficiency assessment is an assessment reflecting the acquisition of competences whatever the source of learning. While teachers are often more interested in achievement assessment, users of the Framework may wish to consider whether assessment should be focused instead on proficiency, because contexts in the wider social, civic or political world beyond the school are particularly important and relevant for assessment in relation to the Framework.

All of the contexts that are used for assessment will be specific to the particular setting in which the assessment takes place. Assessment contexts cannot be specified in the abstract, and users of the Framework will therefore need to identify for themselves the contexts in their own local settings that are most suitable for assessment purposes.

### The dynamic nature of clusters of competences

A further complexity for assessment of CDC is that individuals need to mobilise and deploy their competences in a dynamic manner if they are to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands and opportunities that are presented by a particular context. Democratic and intercultural situations are not static. They change and develop in a fluid fashion as people interact with one another and adjust their behaviour in accordance with the varying demands of the situation. In making these adjustments, they often need to adapt their behaviour by mobilising and deploying further competences, perhaps no longer using others because the situation has changed. Some examples of how competences need to be applied through clusters in a flexible and dynamic manner are shown in the Examples section on pages 17 and 18.

This view of learners' competences presents challenges for assessment. It implies that learners need to be equipped not only with the ability to apply their competences in democratic and intercultural situations but also with the ability to adapt their application to new situational circumstances as these arise. As a consequence, assessment needs to provide a picture of how proficient a learner is in mobilising and applying a cluster of relevant competences to a range of contexts, and also of how proficient he or she is in adapting these competences as the circumstances within those contexts change. This means that assessment methods that provide only a static description of a learner's competences at one moment in time are unlikely to be adequate.

Users of the Framework will need to choose methods of assessment that are suitable for detecting the dynamic use of clusters of competences within and across contexts, and that can produce a profile of a learner's performance.

### The use of descriptors

In the Framework, descriptors for all 20 competences have been developed. These descriptors provide a set of positive descriptions of observable behaviours which indicate that a person has attained a particular level of proficiency in a specific competence. They have been formulated using the language of "learning outcomes". This means that they can be used not only for assessment purposes but also for curriculum development and pedagogical planning purposes, and therefore help to create coherence.

Assessments based on observation of the behaviours specified in the descriptors can reveal the proficiency of learners, if they take place over a reasonable period of time and across different settings. Such assessments can also indicate the themes on which teachers need to focus their interventions and can be used to inform the design of education activities. In other words, assessments based on the descriptors can be used for both summative and formative purposes.

It is important to avoid the misuse of descriptors for assessment. The list of descriptors should not be used as a checklist on which to mark the behaviours that are displayed by a learner, or to calculate an overall score on that basis. The goal is not to have learners display a maximum number of behaviours that are specified by the descriptors per se. Rather, the descriptors should be used to assess the proficiency and progress of learners using methods that can capture profiles of clusters of competences as these are dynamically mobilised, applied and adjusted across multiple contexts.

Further information on the use and misuse of descriptors in assessment is provided in Volume 1 of the Framework (see Chapter 7 on “Descriptors – their uses and purposes”).

## Assessment methods

There are many assessment methods that are potentially available for assessing learners’ values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding. They include checklists, ranking and sorting tasks, Likert scales, multiple-choice questions, constructed-response questions, situational judgment tests, computer-based assessments, open-ended diaries, reflective journals, structured autobiographical reflections, observational assessment, dynamic assessment, project-based assessment and portfolio assessment.

However, some of these methods are unable to describe the dynamic mobilisation, deployment and flexible adjustment of clusters of competences across contexts. This renders them unsuitable for assessing learners’ competences as described in the Framework. Methods that may be excluded on these grounds are checklists, ranking and sorting tasks, Likert scales, multiple-choice questions, constructed-response questions and situational judgment tests. In principle, computer-based assessments may be appropriate, but the necessary software needs to be available. All of the remaining methods can meet the needs of assessing the activation, application and flexible adjustment of clusters of competences across multiple contexts.

The descriptors provided by the Framework can be used to systematise assessment. This is because they provide a coherent reference base through which a learner’s behaviour can be assessed against criteria specifying three different levels of proficiency for each of 20 competences.

### **Open-ended diaries, reflective journals and structured autobiographical reflections**

These methods require the learner to record and reflect on their own behaviour, learning and personal development. The record which is produced is usually a written text, but it could also include non-verbal self-expressions or art works. The reflections may be freely structured by the learner, or they may be structured through the use of a pre-specified format that has been designed to ensure that the reflections provide evidence on the specific learning outcomes that are being assessed. In using these methods to assess CDC, the format could therefore require learners to structure their narratives or reflections in such a way that they record and reflect on the full range of competences that they have deployed across a range of situations or contexts, and how they adapted or adjusted the competences that they were using as those situations developed.

However, a difficulty with using diaries, journals and autobiographical reflections is that they are vulnerable to socially desirable responding. In other words, learners might only record content that

they think will be viewed favourably by an assessor. For this reason, ensuring satisfactory validity can be a challenge when using diaries, journals or autobiographies for assessment purposes when the assessments are to be carried out by anyone other than the learner.

### **Observational assessment**

Observational assessment involves a teacher or other assessor observing learners' behaviours in a range of different situations in order to ascertain the extent to which the learner is deploying clusters of competences appropriately and is actively adjusting those clusters according to the changing situational circumstances. Using such a method requires the assessor to develop a plan of the range of situations to which the learner is to be exposed, and to make a record of the learner's behaviour in those situations. This could be a written record using either a structured observation sheet or a more open-ended logbook in which a description of the learner's behaviour is captured. Alternatively, a direct record can be made of the behaviour that is being observed using an audio or video recording, so that the assessment can be made after the event.

A potential vulnerability of observational assessment is that it can be affected by the attentiveness, preconceptions and expectations of the assessor, which can lead to selective perception and inappropriate conclusions being drawn about the learner. Here, class size can be an important factor. There can also be inconsistency in the assessments that are made across different situations or contexts. In other words, ensuring satisfactory reliability can be a challenge for observational assessment.

### **Dynamic assessment**

Dynamic assessment involves the teacher or other assessor actively supporting the learner during the assessment process in order to enable the learner to reveal his or her maximum level of proficiency. This is accomplished by exposing the learner to a planned range of situations or contexts in which the teacher interacts with the learner. The learner has to provide an ongoing commentary about their behaviour, the competences which they are using, and how they are adjusting their competences as the situation shifts and changes. The assessor probes the learner's commentary using questions and implicit and explicit prompts; the assessor also analyses and interprets the learner's performance, and provides feedback as required. The assessor's behaviour may lead the learner to perform at a higher level of proficiency than he or she might have displayed if no support had been provided.

This method has more restricted uses than observational assessment, because the situations that can be used for dynamic assessment will need to be ones that allow interaction with the assessor to occur. Furthermore, if the elicited performance requires assessor support to be sustained, the general validity of the method may be limited. Dynamic assessment is also subject to exactly the same challenges to its reliability as observational assessment.

### **Project-based assessment**

For the purposes of this document, project-based assessment is defined as an integral part of project-based learning (in contrast to assessment done at the end of student projects). It can be used to ensure that learners engage in activity not only in the classroom but also in the wider social, civic or political world. Thus, project-based learning (see Guidance Document 2 in this volume on CDC and pedagogy) is a very suitable approach for combining learning and assessment within the same process. To maximise learner performance, projects need to be based on issues or situations that are meaningful and engaging to the learners themselves, to have face validity. They also need to be constructed in such a way that learners have to apply values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding across



a wide range of situations. Projects can be undertaken either independently or in collaboration with other learners, and they can require learners themselves to undertake the planning and design work, decision making, investigative activities and problem solving as part of the project. A project normally leads to the creation of substantial products. Learners can also be required to provide documentation on the process of conducting the project and on the learning process, as well as critical self-reflections. In order to use this method, the project needs to be structured in such a way that the products and the accompanying documentation provide information about how clusters of competences have been mobilised and deployed across contexts, and about how they have been adjusted over time according to the needs of the situations encountered during the project.

However, project-based assessment also has its disadvantages. It is, for example, difficult to know whether the competences that are deployed during the project are deployed by the learner in situations beyond the project itself. This is a problem of validity. In addition, teachers and other assessors may find it difficult to assess the products and documentation that result from projects, and assessments can also be very time-consuming. Assessments may have low reliability if teachers have not been adequately trained to carry them out.

### **Portfolio assessment**

A portfolio is a systematic, cumulative and ongoing collection of materials that is produced by the learner as evidence of his or her learning, progress, performance, efforts and proficiency. The materials are selected for inclusion following a set of guidelines, and the learner has to explain and reflect on the contents of the portfolio. The guidelines specify the competences that are being assessed, as well as the learning outcomes and assessment criteria for which the portfolio needs to provide evidence. They may also specify the range of contexts from which the portfolio contents need to be derived. In addition, the guidelines might specify that the portfolio entries should comply with a particular format, and that they should contain particular types of evidence. Thus, the guidelines can be constructed to ensure that learners provide evidence of the mobilisation, deployment and flexible adjustment of competences across a range of contexts and situations. The use of an e-portfolio has the additional benefit of enabling learners to include electronic entries such as audio and multimedia files. Portfolios can be tailored to the needs of particular learners, levels of education, education programmes and education contexts.

There are several advantages to using portfolios for assessment purposes in relation to CDC:

- they help learners to demonstrate their proficiency while simultaneously providing the scaffolding that can facilitate their further development;
- they encourage learners to reflect critically on their own performance;
- they allow learners to proceed at their own pace;
- they can help learners to document the development of their competences as they are applied, adjusted and adapted in a variety of contexts inside and outside the classroom or school;
- they enable learners themselves to take ownership of the assessment materials;
- they can be used for both formative and summative assessment purposes.

One disadvantage associated with portfolios is that they are potentially vulnerable to social desirability effects, when learners select or change the contents of their portfolios so that they only contain material which they think will be viewed favourably by an assessor.



Assessment of portfolios requires specific training for assessors and can therefore be very difficult for teachers without training, with the result that reliability may be low. Portfolio assessments can also be very time-consuming to conduct.

### **Maximising validity and reliability in assessment**

Irrespective of the method that is used for assessing CDC, there are measures that can be taken to maximise the validity and reliability of assessments. These include:

- the provision of teacher education on the principles of assessment, and on the threats to validity and reliability that are associated with each individual method of assessment;
- the provision of banks of assessed examples that are drawn from across the full proficiency range;
- moderation meetings using blind assessment (that is, when the assessor does not know the identity of the learner whose performance or products are assessed);
- comparing, discussing and resolving teachers' judgments across the proficiency range.

In addition, when assessments are used for high-stakes purposes, further measures include:

- discussions between teachers from different institutions to compare their practices and assessment standards;
- regular/periodic review of assessment tools/forms/methods to adjust to changing contexts/education settings sharing assessed examples across institutions;
- external moderation.

### **Who should conduct the assessments?**

It is often assumed that assessments need to be conducted by teachers or by specially trained assessors. However, assessments can also be carried out by one or more peers, or by learners themselves, or co-assessment may be used (which enables peers or the learner to conduct the assessment but allows the teacher to maintain some control over the final assessment).

Peer assessment and self-assessment have advantages because they can lead to learners acquiring a much better and clearer understanding of assessment criteria (and hence of learning outcomes) and of the quality of work that is expected, and they can also improve learner engagement with the learning process. However, it is important to ensure that validity and reliability are not compromised when individuals other than a trained teacher or assessor makes the assessment, which is why co-assessment provides an attractive option.

## **Examples of dynamic clusters of competences**

In this section, we provide two examples to illustrate how democratic competence involves the dynamic mobilisation of clusters of competences that are applied and adjusted in a flexible and dynamic manner to meet the needs of democratic situations. The teaching of CDC needs to encourage the acquisition and utilisation of dynamic clusters of competences, while the assessment of CDC needs to use methods that can capture the flexible mobilisation, deployment and adjustment of clusters of competences according to situational needs.

### Example 1<sup>4</sup>

Activities and programmes related to the wider community are particularly well suited to develop competence clusters that combine the acquisition of new knowledge and critical understanding with the experience-based development of skills, attitudes and values. The encounter with unfamiliar people and phenomena is also a chance for self-reflection and adjustments of attitudes.

In this first example, the school conducts a project on religious diversity in the local community. Learners choose one of the religions represented in their city, which they will study over one week. First, they engage with some literature on this particular religion and critically reflect on how this religion is represented in a variety of media. Next, small groups of learners visit a place of worship connected to the religion on which they are focusing. Here, they work on an ethnographic observation task and talk to members and religious leaders of this religious community. Finally, learners work in groups in order to present their findings and experiences related to the religion and religious community to their co-learners.

During this process, a number of competences are activated, orchestrated and adjusted, as follows.

In the initial study phase, a number of competences are developed:

- Knowledge and critical understanding of culture, religion and history
- Autonomous learning skills
- Analytical and critical thinking.

During the course of the visit to the place of worship/encounter with members of the religious community, another cluster of competences is activated:

- Knowledge and critical understanding of culture, religion and history
- Skills of listening and observing
- Respect
- Communicative skills.

The encounter with the lived religion will probably challenge, contradict or conflict with some of the learner's existing assumptions. This requires a central competence in the Framework:

- Tolerance of ambiguity.

Through the process of creating a presentation to be given to their peers, learners develop:

- Co-operation skills
- Communicative skills
- Self-efficacy.

Throughout the entire process, the following competences are involved:

- Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices
- Civic-mindedness
- Valuing cultural diversity.

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<sup>4</sup> Example contributed by Claudia Lenz, Norwegian School of Theology, Norway.

## Assessment

In this first example, a range of assessment methods could be applied and combined. The entire range of activities could be covered by project-based assessment. The learners could receive particular assignments to work on during and after each step of the project, allowing them to document and reflect on their learning process and on their ability to adapt their competences according to the situation. Learners could also keep a learning diary, following guidelines which focus on the specific values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding that are being developed and applied. In addition, they could use a guided self-reflection tool such as *the Autobiography of intercultural encounters*<sup>5</sup> to help scaffold their reflections. As some of the activities in the project are conducted in smaller learner groups, learners could also give feedback to each other and assess each other's competences. This would further help to familiarise them with the CDC descriptors. The products resulting from these various activities could also be incorporated into a larger portfolio that is compiled over an extended period of time (for example an entire school year).

### Example 2<sup>6</sup>

Contemporary mathematics education promotes an understanding of mathematics that moves beyond the rote memorisation of facts and procedures that was common in the 20th century. The focus is now on the development of learners' mathematical proficiency and habits of mind necessary to work collaboratively with others in analysing authentic world problems with mathematics. The ability to engage in mathematical discussions and arguments is crucial to making progress in problem solving, as well as in the interpretation and presentation of results.

An example of this approach is a project in which learners use mathematical reasoning to explore local and global water issues (e.g. accessibility, shortage, pollution or others). Learners use and improve proportional and algebraic reasoning skills, enhance statistical knowledge, and expand their understanding of mathematical representations. Starting with their personal water consumption, learners calculate the "water footprint" generated in each individual's home, in the homes of a group of learners, and in the homes of the whole class. These are then compared to discover patterns and potential problems. Groups of learners then investigate water issues in their communities and choose a specific one to study in more depth at national and global levels. Based on their findings and supported by well-founded (mathematical) arguments, learners develop solutions for the chosen local water issue.

Learners may also conduct experimental testing of their solutions (in class or on-site), presenting results to the community, taking action to raise awareness and advocate for solutions to the specific water issue they investigated.

Throughout the process, CDC are activated. For example, to participate in discussions, learners need to be able to express their mathematical reasoning so that others can follow their thinking, seek out other perspectives on approaching a problem, be open to thinking about what others have to offer, and ask questions that help them clarify someone else's rationale. They activate the following competences:

- Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices
- Skills of listening and observing

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<sup>5</sup> See: [www.coe.int/t/dg4/autobiography/default\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/autobiography/default_en.asp)

<sup>6</sup> Example contributed by Manuela Wagner and Fabiana Cardetti, University of Connecticut, USA

- Tolerance of ambiguity
- Co-operation skills
- Communicative skills.

Exploring and finding solutions to new problems involves comparing and relating different perspectives, developing new understandings to interact with new material and negotiating the content with others. They activate the following competences:

- Analytical and critical thinking skills
- Respect
- Conflict-resolution skills.

Learners learn to make critical judgments based on explicit criteria. They learn to support judgments with arguments that use mathematically sound insights and are backed by their interpretations and interactions with the relevant issues surrounding the problem. They activate the following competences:

- Knowledge and critical understanding of culture, religion and history
- Civic-mindedness
- Self-efficacy
- Autonomous learning skills
- Analytical and critical thinking skills.

## Assessment

As both CDC and other subject-specific competences are involved in this second example, a mixed-methods assessment approach could be applied. Learners could work on specific assignments covering different elements of the competence clusters throughout the project, and they could reflect on their learning process in a learning diary. At the end of the project, both the subject-specific skills and knowledge and some CDC could be assessed through presentations, oral or written examinations. Self-assessment, peer assessment and/or co-assessment could be used. Based on their observations and the learner reports, teachers could give learners formative feedback on their strengths and weaknesses, and on development opportunities. Alternatively, or additionally, the teacher could use a dynamic assessment approach to encourage learners to attain a higher level of achievement or proficiency. Once again, the products resulting from all of these activities could be incorporated into a larger portfolio that is compiled over an extended period of time.

## Conclusion

It is paramount for any assessment of CDC that it should be an integral part of learning environments and processes which empower learners – it should encourage and support the learner's self-esteem and help to identify perspectives for further learning.

Assessment should always be based on valid, reliable, equitable, transparent and practical methods. However, in the case of assessing CDC, it is also vital to ensure that the methods that are used are respectful of the dignity and rights of learners. In addition, equity and transparency carry particular importance in the case of assessing CDC. Any assessment practice that deviates from these principles would itself contradict the standards and values of an education that aims to strengthen and promote democratic values and respect for human dignity and human rights.

Assessment of CDC can contribute to increasing the status and visibility of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education within education systems that are dominated by measurable education outcomes. However, there are risks related to summative and high-stakes approaches, as well as challenges (particularly related to values and attitudes) which arise from the vital need to protect learners' freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

When considering appropriate assessments in the context of the Framework, educators need to bear in mind the strengths and weaknesses of the various approaches and methods. Mixed-methods approaches, including self- and peer assessment, might be most feasible in many cases.

Assessments that are conducted by external stakeholders can provide additional information about the overall achievements and progress of a cohort of learners, and, if anonymised, can avoid some of the risks related to the individual learner.

External assessment may be particularly helpful for evaluating the effectiveness of a particular education system, institution or programme. In a holistic view of democratic education, the assessment of CDC can also be a valuable source of information for teachers' evaluation of their teaching and can assist their planning and evaluation of teaching processes.

## Further reading

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