A QUALITY MATRIX FOR CEFR USE: Examples of promising practices

1. OVERVIEW

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Country: Switzerland   **Institution**: University of Lausanne, Language Centre

Type of context: Programme/school level   **Educational sector:** Tertiary

Main focus of your project: Portfolio Use

SUMMARY

Name: Plurilingual Portfolio implementation – MAGICC project and ELP

Abstract: The project MAGICC (Modularising Multilingual and Multicultural Academic and Professional Communication Competence for BA and MA level – developed in the framework of the EU Lifelong Learning Programme) provides materials for online of face-to-face use that describe, develop, assess and document plurilingual, pluricultural competence. The development of MAGICC and other Portfolio-related working groups led to a successful integration of the European Language Portfolio – including the assessment of intercultural and learning to learn skills – in the course requirements for students at the Language Centre.

Stage: Planning; Implementation; Evaluation

Theme: Curriculum; Assessment; Teacher education

CEFR aspects targeted: European Language Portfolio (ELP), intercultural skills, plurilingual and pluricultural competence, communication strategies, learning strategies

Main features of this example:
- scenarios for the development of plurilingual and pluricultural competence related to tertiary education
- assessment of intercultural competence and lifelong learning skills with specific assessment criteria and grids
- sample tasks and rated performances
- portfolio implementation

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

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Background:
With the adoption of the Bologna process, 47 countries agreed to a set of standards including the adoption of competence descriptors, and that one credit = 25-30 hours of student work. We (in language education) have an incredible advantage because with the CEFR, we have not only have descriptors of competences, but also descriptors of levels of competence and this has a very wide-reaching and powerful impact. However, even if the use of the CEFR and the portfolio is considered the foundation of our teaching, the CEFR is unfortunately still largely seen from a monolingual, rather than plurilingual perspective. In addition, it is not widely understood how the plurilingual repertoire contributes to the construction of knowledge. Among instructors in other faculties and also language and communication teachers, the plurilingual repertoire as a resource is not necessarily widely understood or applied.

The implications of adopting plurilingual approach to language teaching at the post-secondary level in a context of globalization, includes a sensitization to intercultural competence and lifelong learning. We live in an international, globalized context. In such a multicultural context, other competencies are necessary. So all of our courses use not only language descriptors, but also focus on the development of intercultural competencies – for which grades are assigned. The ability to engage in independent learning is also assessed. Language and communication proficiency at the language centre are assessed according to a 70% / 30% split, in which 70% addresses language use aspects and 30% addresses intercultural competence and autonomous learning (including reflection on the learning process and self-assessment of work).

The Language Centre develops the plurilingual skills of university students from the various faculties at the university and staff members of the university. Students have the option to integrate language courses into their study program, and most faculties grant ECTS credits within their programs for the development of plurilingual competence. This is the result of considerable campaigning by the Centre, arguing that plurilingual competency is advantageous not only to their own personal development, but also to society and the economy at large. The languages offered include: English, German, Swiss German, Spanish, Russian, Italian, Chinese and French and students may take the languages they choose after taking a placement test. There are 35-40 teachers.

Language courses are geared towards the needs of the students. For example, in a course for those taking a Master's of Nursing program, students want to focus on strategies to reading articles in English, so there will be collaborative work on these strategies (with wikis etc.). In other instances, students may not know specifically what their professional needs will be. In these cases, the main focus is on more general work, study related skills and competencies (e.g., academic writing, presenting your research in English, workplace communication in German, etc.) Course content is adapted to the needs of the students and based on needs analyses.

Stated aims:
Development of the plurilingual competence of the university students, and not a specific level in only one language.

Steps/stages:
The implementation of the CEFR and the ELP is a long process. This has been work that we have been doing for the past 15 years. This journey has been a very long effort and it is not yet complete. At the very beginning, we learned how to work with descriptors, how to categorize and even write descriptors. The issue was to transfer this experience to newer, more difficult areas: plurilingual and pluricultural competence, and communication strategies.

1. ***Setting up a task force***
   First, a taskforce was launched to develop both (a) the capacity among teaching staff and (b) a bank of resources to help them teach and evaluate according to this new approach.

2. *Defining learning outcomes and assessment criteria*
   In conceptual framework of MAGICC there are three foci for each skill (e.g. for Reading: linguistic, intercultural, and strategic competence respectively). Learning outcomes and assessment criteria were defined systematically for these three aspects for each skill at three levels. What was new for teachers was going beyond purely linguistic competence and creating assessment criteria also for intercultural competence and strategic competence. Nothing like that had existed before. The definitions for intercultural competence were based on the INCA project, adapted to the university context.

3. *Developing illustrative scenarios*
   The next step was developing pedagogical scenarios integration the three foci for which a standardised template was produced. These scenarios are based on the needs of university students (e.g., reporting in an international project meeting, presenting a proposal in a business context, and so on). There is an overview of all the scenarios. The scenarios have a focus on strategies, activities that address language and communication features, and the intercultural component, interactive/negotiation activities, and reflective activities - all from a multilingual perspective. There is a wide range of activities that can vary in complexity and time commitment (e.g., writing an abstract of an article, hosting a meeting of business partners, or other activities).

4. *Filming the scenarios*
   The same scene can be filmed and observed from the perspective of different foci: language and communication, intercultural and learning to learn. One might ask, 'What happens as they communicate in a third language?' 'What are they doing to ensure that communication is effective?' (e.g., if they don't know a word, what do they do: change languages? use gestures?)

5. *Assessment tools*
   One of the specific challenges among the staff at the University of Lausanne with the implementation of this focus on plurilingual education has been how to assess pluricultural competence. The MAGICC tool helps to develop the ability to assess intercultural skills (something that many teachers did not think possible) and communication and lifelong learning strategies. Yet the evaluation of the intercultural aspect was vital in order to highlight to students the importance of this component of language learning – if it is not evaluated, students get the impression that it is not important. Ten sample tasks with sample performances now provide the opportunity to discuss how to assess intercultural skills and to harmonize assessment.

6. *Teacher education*
   MAGICC includes transparency tools that can be used in teacher training in either face-to-face or online formats to help teachers, teacher educators develop their ability to use MAGICC with their students (e.g. future teachers).

People/roles:
- Centre management: reference framework for the approach and ongoing support and training from above
- Working groups / tasks forces: to develop the concepts and materials to address perceived difficulties
- External training
- Being connected to an external network

Other resources needed:
- Funding to allow working groups
- Time.

Quality Assurance procedures employed:
One should emphasize the elements of the basic Quality Assurance / Action Research cycle (plan, do, check, reflect & act). For example, having learned from the instructors' reaction to the requirement to evaluate intercultural competency that they felt both ill-equipped and silenced, one must study the reasons and then

take action. In Lausanne, a taskforce was launched to develop both (a) the capacity among teaching staff and (b) a bank of resources to help them teach and evaluate according to this new approach.

Timeline:
For the MAGICC project: 2011-14, for the work with the ELP since 2000.

Publications that have been used or produced related to this example:
www.unil.ch/cdl

Forster Vosicki, B. (2012) Overcoming the challenges of implementing the European Language Portfolio (ELP) in Higher Education. The experience of the University of Lausanne Language Centre. In: B. Kühn and M. L. Perez Cavana (eds): *Perspectives from the European Language Portfolio*, Routledge, London and New York, pp. 100-121.

3. RESULTS

What was achieved:
The project ***MAGICC Modularising Multilingual and Multicultural Academic Communication Competence***, developed in the framework of the EU Lifelong Learning Programme (2011-2014). This complements the CEFR for the higher Education Sector. The tools describe, develop, assess and document plurilingual, pluricultural competence http://www.unil.ch/magicc/home.html.

Impact:
There has been a marked improvement in the implementation of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) at the Language Centre. It has been a very long process and it was an enormous time commitment and it demands a lot of patience on the part of management, but in order to get large scale implementation of innovation, one must engage in sustained efforts to educate and work with all staff.

The portfolio was a vital component of a radical change in the instructional paradigm towards a truly action-oriented, learner-centred and plurilingual approach. At the beginning, there many negative reactions which were rooted in a lack of understanding of the purpose, process and potential of the portfolio. But the Centre Manager (Brigitte Forster Vosicki) persisted with working groups that examined different aspects of portfolio use, including ways to integrate portfolio use into the daily teaching practice. Now the ELP has been integrated as a learning outcome of the program and has become a core element of the program. Every student at the centre is able to create an ELP to document his/her plurilingual profile and reflect on their leaning process and very few people criticise it.

Resources on this theme:
http://www.unil.ch/magicc/home.html.

4 ADVICE AND LESSONS LEARNT:

Despite all of our efforts, it was a difficult process. It was very emotional. There was a lot of resistance for a long time. But, this is normal in a process of a major educational change. People ask why the implementation of the portfolio was difficult. It is difficult because it is such a significant paradigm shift, the necessary competencies are so new and different for many teachers (and students). It's not only knowing about the language but rather how to use the language in different contexts and situations. It is necessary to conceptualize communication. This implies many other elements – not just grammar and vocabulary. Competencies such as strategy use are new ideas and all this has to be developed explicitly. This can be destabilizing. This forces people out of their comfort zone. At that point you must both deconstruct and reconstruct the role of the language teacher, and what it means to learn a language.

It is important to act at many different levels
- Course documentation

- External visibility
- Curriculum
- Course structure and program structure
- The mentality of the students (who can also be very conservative in approach)
- The representations of the teachers

All this is necessary in order to make it possible to apply the philosophy and approach of the CEFR.

If the Portfolio is always thought of as an "extra", as optional, it will not be taken seriously. Students at the Language Centre have to produce an ELP in order to complete the program: being able to construct an ELP is one of the learning outcomes. This s a key element in the success of the portfolio at the Language Centre. If you only take some elements of the portfolio, use them from time to time and then move on, you miss the opportunity to really benefit from the full potential to develop competencies in a sustainable manner and a lifelong learning perspective.

You need to involve **all** staff members and help them to understand all aspects of why the change is being implemented (political, cultural, and pedagogical). We did the development together with the instructors. And, we also needed to simultaneously educate them, because they need to understand the meaning and the value of implementing the portfolio.

You need to really get to know innovative processes and be aware of the implications of the destabilization it causes (organizational, emotional.) and be ready to take charge in a constructive and validating manner. It is important to engage in ongoing learning, not just one workshop but regular reconnection with the project, with support on how to take the implementation further. It must be long-term over many years. There must be a balance of top-down and bottom-up. The creativity of practitioners must be allowed to emerge AND there is a need for both requirements and support from above (internal and external training); this is an ongoing process and takes years, but is very gratifying after a while for all parties implicated.