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Thinking Allowed

The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*: A research agenda

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Editorial note

This new strand in the journal provides a space for contributors to present a personal stance either on future research needs or on the perceived current applications of research in the classroom. Like much of our current content, it echoes the historical uniqueness of this journal in terms of its rich and expert overview of recent research in the field of L2 teaching and learning. However, this new strand takes such research as its starting point and attempts to look forward, using these findings both to debate their application in the language learning classroom and also to suggest where research would be best directed in the future. Thus, the objective of both papers is eminently practical: contributors to the ***research agenda*** *will present suggestions for what research might usefully be undertaken, given what is currently known or what is perceived to be necessary. In the* ***research into practice*** *papers there will be critical appraisal both of what research is, and is not, getting through to the language learning classroom and practical suggestions made for improving such outcomes.*

1. Introduction

In 2006 I wrote a state-of-the-art article (Little 2006) on the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR; Council of Europe 2001). Five years on, the present article offers a personal response to the question: What kind of research agenda might accompany the CEFR through the next decade? I have chosen to focus on what I take to be the CEFR's key challenge and to propose research tasks that can be undertaken by individuals, small teams or networks working at any educational level. I begin by explaining what I mean by 'the CEFR's key challenge': that we should use the Framework to 'democratize' L2 education. Then I consider five aspects of the CEFR that invite reflection, exploration and/or further development as part of a general response to that challenge. Although the reflection and research tasks that I identify might usefully be undertaken for their own sake, they are also relevant to the second part of my research agenda, which is concerned with small-scale projects that use the CEFR to develop curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in interaction with one another. I write as a committed but sometimes

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critical user of both the CEFR and its companion piece, the European Language Portfolio (ELP).

2. The CEFR's key challenge

According to its authors the CEFR was designed to serve two functions. It is a framework for ACTION, providing 'a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe' (Council of Europe 2001: 1); and it is a framework for REFLECTION, providing 'the means for educational administrators, course designers, teachers, teacher trainers, examining bodies, etc., to reflect on their current practice with a view to situating and co-ordinating their efforts and to ensuring that they meet THE REAL NEEDS OF THE LEARNERS TO WHOM THEY ARE RESPONSIBLE' (ibid.; emphasis added). This notion of responsibility to learners is especially significant. The Council of Europe's L2 education projects have always aimed to

> make the process of language learning more DEMOCRATIC by providing the conceptual tools for the planning, construction and conduct of courses closely geared to the needs, motivations and characteristics of the learner and enabling him so far as possible to STEER AND CONTROL HIS OWN PROGRESS. (Trim 1978: 1; emphasis added)

It is thus no accident that the Council of Europe first introduced the concept of learner autonomy to the world of L2 learning (Holec 1979), no accident that learning precedes teaching and assessment in the CEFR's sub-title, and no accident that the ELP was developed as a means of mediating the CEFR's ethos to L2 learners.

In my 2006 article I suggested that the single most innovative feature of the CEFR is its capacity to bring curriculum, pedagogy and assessment into much closer interdependence than has usually been the case. This capacity arises from its action-oriented approach to the description of L2 proficiency. Each 'can do' descriptor may be used to specify a learning target, select and/or develop learning activities and materials, and shape the design of assessment tasks. What is more, learners themselves are drawn into this cyclical dynamic by the checklists of 'I can' descriptors that are used for goal setting and self-assessment in the ELP. This characteristic of the CEFR challenges us to attempt the democratization of L2 education by (i) developing curricula/curriculum guidelines/syllabuses that reflect learner needs and explicitly accommodate learner initiative and control; (ii) implementing those curricula in ways that foster learner autonomy; and (iii) working towards an assessment culture in which external tests and exams exist on a continuum with teacher assessment, peer assessment and learner self-assessment.

The CEFR has mostly not been used in this way, but separately in relation to assessment, curriculum and (via the ELP) pedagogy. The major international testing agencies have been quick to adopt its reference levels as a common metric, with evident gains in transparency and comparability, though linking a test to the CEFR does not guarantee that it shares the CEFR's communicative orientation. Ministries of education frequently associate their L2 curricula with the CEFR's reference levels, though in most cases the association is a matter

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of assertion rather than something that emerges clearly from a reading of the curricula themselves. And teachers and learners who have worked with the ELP have been able to experience the benefits of regular learner self-assessment based on 'I can' checklists, though self-assessment may prove difficult to sustain if it has no obvious point of contact with the formal examinations that mark the end of so many L2 programmes. The overwhelming tendency to make only partial use of the CEFR means that it has the least impact where it should make the greatest difference: in the L2 classroom. We urgently need research and development that seek to remedy this: to begin with, on a small scale.

3. Five aspects of the CEFR that invite reflection, exploration and/or further development

Anyone who wishes to implement a research agenda concerned with the interdependent development, implementation and evaluation of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment will need to begin by engaging with central features of the CEFR and reflecting above all on their pedagogical implications. In this section I discuss five features that have figured prominently in my own attempts to use the CEFR's descriptive apparatus not only to specify language learning outcomes but to frame language learning/teaching discourse. In doing so, I suggest four reflection tasks and five research tasks.

3.1 The CEFR and L2 pedagogy

True to Council of Europe traditions, the authors of the CEFR repeatedly insist that they are not prescribing what should be done but presenting their readers with tools that may help them to make their own decisions. Accordingly, despite the task-oriented implications of the 'can do' approach, they insist that 'it is not the function of the Framework to promote one particular language teaching methodology, but instead to present options' (Council of Europe 2001: 142). Among the options they present is the one that is enacted in the great majority of L2 classrooms in national education systems around the world: teaching 'by a combination of presentations, explanations, (drill) exercises and exploitation activities, BUT WITH L1 AS THE LANGUAGE OF CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT, EXPLANATION, ETC.' (ibid.: 143; emphasis added). Now, this approach can certainly be used to teach the activities specified for A1 (mostly discrete tasks) and A2 (simple routines): vocabulary items, chunks, fixed phrases and scenarios can be introduced on the basis of their equivalents in the learners' L1, memorized, and practised in role plays. But the approach already falls seriously short at level B1: learners will be able to 'enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life' (Council of Europe 2001: 26) only when they have used the target language (TL) extensively, as the preferred medium of classroom communication.

At the higher CEFR levels descriptors imply academic and/or professional use of the TL. For example, at level B2 the learner-user '[c]an read with a large degree of independence, adapting style and speed of reading to different texts and purposes, and using appropriate reference sources selectively' (Council of Europe 2001: 69); at level C1 the learner-user '[c]an give elaborate descriptions and narratives, integrating sub-themes, developing particular

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points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion' (SPOKEN PRODUCTION/SUSTAINED MONOLOGUE; ibid.: 59); and at level C2 the learner-user '[c]an produce clear, smoothly flowing, complex reports, articles or essays which present a case, or give critical appreciation of proposals or literary works' (ibid.: 62). These descriptors invite the conclusion that instructed L2 learners will advance significantly beyond A2 only when they use the TL for sustained communication, whether in their 'general language' classroom, a CLIL programme, advanced study or professional activity. In the light of these considerations, and bearing in mind that the CEFR itself describes L2 learning as a variety of language use (Council of Europe 2001: 9), its methodological neutrality seems curiously misplaced.

Reflection task 1: In relation to the L2 learners you are concerned with (taking account of their age, the length and general aims of their course, their proficiency level at the beginning of the course, their target proficiency level, etc.), identify descriptors in the CEFR's illustrative scales that correspond to (i) desired learning outcomes and (ii) the varieties of TL classroom discourse required if achievement of those outcomes is to be embedded in TL communication.

Note that the CEFR allows us to specify learning outcomes and explore varieties of TL discourse from two perspectives: communicative activities (Chapter 4) and communicative language competences (Chapter 5). Note also that it is not necessarily appropriate to expect learners to achieve the same CEFR level in all communicative activities, especially at the more advanced levels.

3.2 Descriptors for classroom language

Reflection task 1 will quickly reveal that although education is one of the CEFR's four domains of communication (the other three being private, public and occupational), its descriptors do not explicitly embrace classroom communication, especially classroom communication in which learners themselves are active agents. This lack can be remedied, however, by adapting existing descriptors to capture the contribution that teachers as well as learners make to classroom communication. With regard to the teacher's contribution, it is necessary to take account of not only the type but also the level of TL discourse appropriate to the learners in question. Common sense suggests that at the lower proficiency levels teachers should restrict their own TL use to the level immediately above the one their learners are aiming for. In this way they will maximize not only the comprehensibility of their utterances but also the effectiveness of the scaffolding they provide for their learners.

Reflection task 2: Use the results of reflection task 1 to consider (i) how to reformulate descriptors for spoken interaction and spoken production in order to capture essential features of the TEACHER's share of classroom discourse, and (ii) how to extend the scope of the descriptors in order to include features of LEARNING discourse, bearing in mind the CEFR's commitment to learner autonomy.

This may lead into research task 1, which entails further development of the illustrative scales:

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Research task 1: Adapt existing descriptors to develop new scales for spoken interaction and spoken production that focus on learner talk and teacher talk as components of classroom discourse calculated to promote L2 learning through L2 use.

3.3 Descriptors for written interaction

The decision to develop the CEFR was taken in 1991 (Council of Europe 1992), and its descriptive scheme and the definition of the proficiency levels were essentially complete by the time the first draft was issued for discussion in 1996 (Council of Europe 1996). It is thus hardly surprising that the CEFR's description of language use begins to seem a little out of date, especially as regards electronic communication. The CEFR mentions e-mail and 'on-line or off-line computer conferences' (Council of Europe 2001: 82) but not texting or the internet. What is more, the descriptors in the three illustrative scales for written interaction ('OVERALL WRITTEN INTERACTION; CORRESPONDENCE; NOTES, MESSAGES & FORMS' – ibid.: 83–84) take no account of the abbreviated language characteristic of electronic communication. This brings us to the second of our research tasks:

Research task 2: Develop descriptors for e-mail, texting, chatting and other forms of electronic communication (written interaction).

In the first instance this task may best be achieved by reformulating existing descriptors to accommodate the specifics of electronic communication. Orientation is provided by introductory discussions of the linguistic features of such communication (e.g. Crystal 2009), but also by ethnographic studies of its use (e.g. Ito et al. 2010). Because conventions are language-specific, it is probably necessary to work towards generalizations from the particular usages of two or more languages. The collection of examples is something that learners themselves could be involved in. If, for example, learners of French at an English school have exchange arrangements with learners of English at a French school, both sides of the partnership could collect and exchange examples of L1 text messaging. By comparing the examples they would learn much about the medium in their respective L2s as well as in their L1s.

Reflection task 3: Consider the existing descriptors for listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing from the perspective of internet communication generally. What kinds of internet communication are possible at the different CEFR proficiency levels?

This task is an essential preliminary to updating the CEFR's description of language use to take account of the ubiquity of internet use. It is also an extension of reflection task 2, given that electronic communication generally and the internet in particular provide a multitude of new ways in which L2 learning can be embedded in L2 use. It may lead into research task 3:

Research task 3: Expand the descriptors in the illustrative scales and/or develop new descriptors that reflect the varieties of internet communication available to learners at successive proficiency levels.

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3.4 The learning trajectory described by the CEFR: BICS and CALP

The CEFR's scales reflect the L2 learning progression aimed at by education systems across Europe, and the activities specified for A1, A2 and to some extent B1 reflect the typical content of communicative textbooks. At these first three levels, reading, spoken production and writing are clearly subordinate to listening and spoken interaction. At level B1, for example, the learner is a free agent in spoken interaction ('I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life [. . .]'; Council of Europe 2001: 26) but more limited in his/her written communication ('I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions'; ibid.: 27). From B2 upwards, on the other hand, the skills of reading, spoken production and writing are much more fully developed, mostly (as noted in section 3.1) in terms that associate L2 proficiency with academic or professional L2 use.

Now, the CEFR distinguishes between receptive and productive language use, and in the productive category between interaction (spoken and written) and production (spoken and written). North (2007: 658) explains that this division was inspired in part by Cummins's (1983) distinction between BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) The distinction was originally devised to explain why, in the language of schooling, non-native speaker (NNS) pupils may develop efficient BICS in a year or two but typically take much longer to catch up with their NS peers as regards CALP. The assumption is that BICS are the product of socially situated incidental learning in an immersion situation, whereas CALP is the product of intentional learning in a formal educational context (for discussion of incidental and intentional learning, see Hulstijn 2003). Progression from BICS to CALP is characteristic of L1 development under the impact of literacy and schooling, but when L2 learners are not living among speakers of their TL, their learning is necessarily situated within an intentional framework. At the same time, they cannot learn intentionally (consciously and explicitly) everything they need to know if they are to be spontaneously fluent in their TL. A major role must also be played by incidental learning, which by definition achieves maximum impact when learners are able to use their L2 in authentic communication that causes them to focus on meaning rather than form. This brings us back to the considerations raised in section 3.1 and prompts a fourth reflection task:

Reflection task 4: What kind of L2 teaching approach is apt to produce a progression from learning outcomes predominantly associated with BICS to learning outcomes associated with CALP? And how, within a framework of intentional learning, can we best create opportunities for the varieties of incidental learning that stem from learners' willing involvement in spontaneous TL communication?

Answers to the first of these questions may indicate a need to develop CALP-oriented descriptors for the lower CEFR levels (cf. reflection task 2 (ii)). This provides us with research task 4, which interacts with reflection task 2 and research task 1:

Research task 4: On the basis of the results of reflection task 4, develop CALP-oriented descriptors for levels A1, A2 and B1.

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In order to answer the second question in reflection task 4, it may be necessary to engage with the literature on language learner autonomy (e.g. Dam 1995; Little 2007).

3.5 The CEFR and plurilingual repertoires

Since the publication of the CEFR in 2001, plurilingualism (the capacity to communicate in two or more languages at any level of proficiency) has come to occupy an increasingly central place in the language education work of the Council of Europe. In particular, 'plurilingual and intercultural education' is a foundational concept for its *Languages in/for Education* project (for details, see www.coe.int/lang). A plurilingual repertoire includes the individual's L1, of course, whereas the CEFR was developed to support the learning, teaching and assessment of L2s. This prompts the question: To what extent can its descriptive apparatus be applied to plurilingual repertoires that include L1?

The following descriptor for B2 writing can clearly be used to describe L1 as well as L2 skills: 'I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests' (Council of Europe 2001: 27). In addition to activity scales, the CEFR provides scales that address different aspects of linguistic and strategic competence. We are told, for example, that a learner at level B2 '[h]as a good range of vocabulary for matters connected to his/her field and most general topics, [c]an vary formulation to avoid frequent repetition, but lexical gaps still cause hesitation and circumlocution' (Council of Europe 2001: 112), '[s]hows a relatively high degree of grammatical control, [d]oes not make mistakes which lead to misunderstanding' (ibid.:114), and '[c]an use a limited number of cohesive devices to link his/her utterances into clear, coherent discourse' [. . .] (ibid.: 125). Each of these descriptors can be applied to L1 as well as L2 proficiency. Indeed, taken together, they portray the kind of L1 writing performance that educational systems require of their pupils towards the end of secondary schooling.

The crucial difference between L1 and L2 proficiency evidently has to do with the strength and depth of that incidentally acquired competence on which BICS depend. When the focus shifts to academic language skills underpinned by literacy and developed intentionally (CALP), the distinction begins to break down – though perhaps less rapidly in relation to grammar than in relation to lexical and discourse competence. This is an issue that requires extensive exploration, perhaps starting with the psychological literature on incidental and intentional learning, implicit and explicit knowledge (see, for example, Hulstijn 2003, Paradis 2004), and taking account of Hulstijn's (2007) theory of Core Language Proficiency.

Research task 5: Explore the ways in which existing descriptors can be applied to L1 use and identify which parts (if any) of the CEFR's descriptive scheme cannot be applied to L1 use. In what ways may the CEFR's language quality/competence scales (Chapter 5) be relevant to L1 development? What should be added to the descriptive scheme to take full account of the varieties of L1 use, especially in educational contexts?

This is a research rather than a reflection task because it demands extensive exploration of a wide range of literature. Its urgency is all the greater because it has not been undertaken by the Council of Europe's *Languages in/for Education* project, which tends to insist on the

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irrelevance of the CEFR to its concerns. Paradoxically, some of the studies published by the project provide an important resource for anyone undertaking the task (e.g. Beacco et al. 2010, Beacco 2010, Vollmer 2010).

4. Towards the 'democratization' of L2 education

According to Trim (1978: 1; cf. section 2 above), the Council of Europe aims to 'make the process of language learning more democratic' by enabling learners to 'steer and control' their own progress, and it seeks to achieve this goal by developing 'tools for the planning, construction and conduct of courses closely geared to the [learner's] needs, motivations and characteristics'. How exactly are learners to steer and control their own learning? In their introductory 'Notes for the user', the authors of the CEFR envisage that learners themselves could use the descriptive apparatus, presumably to analyse their own needs, conduct an informal audit of their current level of proficiency, identify their learning goals and construct their own programme of learning. A more realistic answer to the question, however, is the one that I gave earlier, in my introductory discussion of the CEFR's key challenge. We should use the CEFR to develop curricula that are tailored to our learners' needs, explicitly accommodate learner initiative and control, and define learning outcomes (and perhaps also aspects of the learning process) in terms of 'can do' descriptors. We should then implement those curricula in ways that set out to encourage learner initiative and facilitate learner control, using a version of the ELP or similar instrument with 'I can' checklists whose descriptors derive directly from the 'can do' descriptors of the curriculum. And we should base formal assessment procedures on communicative tasks that again stem directly from the curriculum, rating performance against scales derived from the language quality/competence scales in Chapter 5 of the CEFR.

Three things commend this integrated use of the CEFR. First, it results in curricula that go far beyond linking learning outcomes to the CEFR levels (for example, via statements like 'School leavers are expected to achieve B2 in their first and B1 in their second foreign language'). Their use of 'can do' descriptors serves to emphasize the communicative orientation not only of learning targets but also of the teaching/learning process. Second, integrated use of the CEFR overcomes one of the major obstacles to large-scale use of the ELP: the lack of an obvious connection between the official curriculum and the 'I can' descriptors. Far from being an optional extra, the ELP (or a similar instrument) now has the function of mediating the curriculum to learners as well as providing them with the means to steer and control their learning. And third, integrated use of the CEFR guarantees a close and explicit relation between self- and other-assessment. Examination preparation no longer entails a change in the direction of classroom activity, because self-assessment and formal examinations are now shaped by the same considerations and apply closely similar criteria.

Integrated CEFR projects can be carried out in any formal L2 learning context and with learners of any age, from primary to university and beyond. But in the first instance they need to be conceived and executed on a small scale, to ensure that the articulation between

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curriculum, pedagogy and assessment is thoroughly developed and critically explored. 'Small scale' might mean a network of primary or secondary schools, an organization responsible for teaching the host community language to immigrants, or a university foreign language department. How the project is carried out and how its various components are designed will obviously vary from context to context.

In planning, implementing and evaluating an integrated CEFR project, which entails six further research tasks, it is important to take account of the issues raised in section 3: (i) the pedagogical implications of the CEFR's 'can do' approach; (ii) the extension of the descriptive apparatus to include the interactive L2 use that characterizes classroom discourse calculated to stimulate L2 learning; (iii) the adaptation of the descriptive apparatus to take better account of electronic communication; (iv) the BICS/CALP distinction and its relevance to the context in question; and (v), in the case of projects that support the learning of the language of schooling by pupils/students for whom it is not their home language, the relation between what such learners must achieve and what is required of their NS peers.

4.1 Developing CEFR-based curricula

Research task 6: For your chosen learner group, develop a CEFR-based curriculum that reflects the learners' needs, explicitly accommodates learner initiative, recognizes that language learning is a form of language use, defines communicative outcomes in 'can do' terms, and describes the varieties of classroom discourse apt to promote learning.

As North (2007: 656) has pointed out,

> The CEFR is a concertina-like reference tool, not an instrument to be 'applied'. The idea is for users to divide or merge activities, competences, and proficiency stepping-stones that are appropriate to their local context, yet can be related to the greater scheme of things and thus communicated more easily to colleagues in other educational institutions and, in simplified form, to other stakeholders.

At the same time, of course, every effort must be made to maintain the integrity of the levels. Adaptation of the CEFR is not simply a matter of retaining some elements and discarding others; rather, it entails a process of contextualization and appropriation that cannot be achieved without research.

Small-scale curriculum projects based on the CEFR may involve either the development of curricula for new courses or the restatement of existing curricula. Either way, they should begin by addressing the following questions:

- What is the learners' proficiency level at the beginning of the course in question?
- What level are they expected to achieve by the end of the course?
- Do they need to develop the same level of proficiency in all activities (receptive and productive, spoken and written)?
- To what extent is it necessary or desirable to supplement 'can do' descriptors with information about possible linguistic exponents (vocabulary, grammar, idioms, etc.)?

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- What other competences (e.g. sociolinguistic, discourse, intercultural) will the learners need to develop in order to perform the 'can do' tasks effectively?
- How will the communicative ('can do') component of the document be related to other components? In the case of CLIL programmes, for example, 'subject content' will need to be linked to the learners' developing communicative capacity; while university degree courses typically prescribe literary, linguistic, philosophical and other texts for study.
- How can the document take account of the COMMUNICATIVE PROCESSES OF LEARNING as well as intended learning outcomes?
- How can the document reflect learner needs and accommodate learner initiative and control?

Since the overall purpose is to support pedagogical implementation of the CEFR's underlying ethos, the structure, length and general articulation of the document need to be given careful consideration. In particular, it should be short enough to be used by teachers as a frequent point of reference; and 'democratization' requires that it should also be accessible to (adolescent and adult) learners. The overarching aim is to express communicative goals as communicative process that depends on linguistic but also strategic, discourse, pragmatic and sociolinguistic competences (Council of Europe 2001: 9).

Three examples may be helpful at this point:

- The English Language Proficiency Benchmarks developed in Ireland to support the teaching of L2 English to primary pupils from immigrant backgrounds (IILT 2003) reformulate the descriptors of the self-assessment grid (Council of Europe 2001: 26–27) for the first three reference levels (A1–B1), making them age-appropriate, domain-specific and appropriate to the communicative realities of Irish primary classrooms. The grid is replicated for thirteen recurrent themes in the Irish primary curriculum, and supplemented by a grid (derived from the language quality/competence scales in Chapter 5) that summarizes underlying linguistic competence at each of the three levels.
- The Curriculum Framework for Romani (Council of Europe 2008a) is based on the first four reference levels and was designed following the same general approach as the Irish document: the communicative repertoire to be acquired is summarized in a series of grids that focus on different dimensions of Roma life and culture.
- A Core Inventory for General English (British Council/EAQUALS 2010) summarizes salient characteristics of CEFR levels (spoken language), provides a template for the development of CEFR-based scenarios, maps text types and language content onto levels A1–C1, and lists exponents for language content. It is thus directly relevant to the development of CEFR-based curricula for general English, but its approach might also be adopted for other languages.

4.2 Implementing CEFR-based curricula: developing ELPs and similar instruments

The Council of Europe conceived the ELP as a means of mediating the CEFR's action-oriented approach to learners and enabling them to steer and control their own learning. However, the ELP is more than a pedagogical tool designed to foster the development of learner autonomy. It is also intended to promote plurilingualism and intercultural awareness

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and to embrace ALL the owner's experience of learning and using L2s (see Council of Europe 2006). Thus, a fully developed version of the ELP is not necessarily the most appropriate implementation tool for integrated CEFR projects. The essential elements are checklists of 'I can' descriptors and some kind of learning journal that may incorporate a version of the ELP's dossier. The relation between 'can do' curriculum descriptors and 'I can' self-assessment descriptors is illustrated by the ELP models developed as companion pieces to the English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and the Curriculum Framework for Romani (IILT 2004; Council of Europe 2008b, 2008c). The Council of Europe's ELP website (www.coe.int/portfolio) provides ELP components, including generic checklists.

Research task 7: Develop a goal-setting and self-assessment tool to support the reflective learning processes central to curriculum implementation.

However clearly the relation between this pedagogical tool and the curriculum document is articulated, it may nevertheless be desirable to provide some kind of handbook to guide teachers in its use.

Research task 8: Develop a handbook for teachers.

The handbook should engage with the CEFR's pedagogical implications as discussed in 3.1 above, perhaps with reference to the literature on learner autonomy. It will also need to discuss the mechanics of self-assessment, taking account of the fact that 'I can' descriptors vary in their scope as learners ascend through the CEFR's proficiency levels (Little 2009). Teachers may find it easier to manage the implementation of the curriculum in their classroom if they are provided with a teacher portfolio that incorporates the portfolio instrument developed for learners.

Research task 9: Develop a portfolio for teachers, designed to support record-keeping and encourage reflection on the learners' progress towards the L2 learning goals articulated in the curriculum.

Learner and teacher portfolios are a potentially rich source of research data that may be used to track and evaluate the implementation phase of integrated CEFR projects.

Research task 10: Use action research methods (e.g. Burns 2010) to explore and evaluate the implementation phase of the project.

4.3 Assessment

The last part of an integrated CEFR project entails the design, implementation and evaluation of assessment instruments.

Research task 11: Develop assessment tasks that derive directly from the 'can do' descriptors of the curriculum and rating grids that draw on the language quality/competence scales in Chapter 5 of the CEFR.

The assessment kit that accompanies the English Language Proficiency Benchmarks provides examples of rating procedures that apply criteria elaborated on the basis of the simple scale of underlying linguistic competence in the Benchmarks (IILT 2007). Note that the process of 'democratization' is furthered by making rating scales available to learners, who can use them to inform their self-assessment and also to reflect on formal aspects of their proficiency (cf. the use made of Table 3 in the CEFR by Glover 2009).

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5. Conclusion

What kind of research agenda might accompany the CEFR through the next decade? My answer to the question has been in two parts. First, I have argued that some central aspects of the CEFR invite extension, adaptation and further development; and second, I have proposed that integrated CEFR projects conducted on a small scale are the most effective way of responding to the CEFR's key challenge – that we 'democratize' L2 education by creating the conditions in which learners can 'steer and control' their own learning. The second part of my research agenda needs to take account of the issues raised in the first part, while some aspects of the first part may usefully be informed by results from the second part. Overall, the agenda assumes that using the CEFR inevitably entails adaptation and leads to development, but without continuing adaptation and development the CEFR is unlikely to have the kind of long-term impact on L2 classrooms that the Council of Europe intended.

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