Lang. Teach. (2011), **44.3**, 400–401 © Cambridge University Press 2011
doi:10.1017/S0261444811000231

Empowering language professionals: Current ECML projects

Assessment of Young Learner Literacy, linked to the CEFR (AYLLIT)

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The AYLLIT project (http://ayllit.ecml.at) was launched by the ECML in 2008, with the overall aim of producing material that teachers can use to establish the reading and writing level of young learners (YLs) between 9 and 13 years; the material will ultimately be linked to the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001). The project was motivated by four principal observations:

1. Teachers of languages in primary schools in Europe are generally not language specialists, and require particular support in assessment (Hasselgreen 2005)
2. The CEFR was originally designed for adults and has six levels, which represent a lifelong span. Only the lower levels (up to B1) appear to cater for the cognitive maturity of younger pupils, and these levels need to be adapted to the actual language-use situations of these learners. To reflect progress, intermediate stages need to be defined.
3. ECML's Bergen Can-do project (Hasselgreen 2003) contributed to adapting the CEFR to lower secondary school pupils, through surveys of what learners and their teachers believed they could do. A follow-up study was considered necessary to identify features of learners as they progress through upper primary school.
4. Literacy is fundamental to lifelong learning, and the pleasure of reading story books, once discovered, plays a major role in literacy development.

In studying YLs longitudinally over a two-year period, the project has the following specific aims:

1. To develop a tool for teachers to use to judge whether a child is able to read a particular story text and to produce guidelines and benchmarks to assist teachers in linking YL story books to CEFR levels.
2. To develop a set of general descriptors of writing, illustrated with benchmark written products, representing a range of levels/sublevels on the CEFR. Guidelines for using the material for assessment and feedback will also be produced.

Teachers and pupils from 5th–7th grade classes in Norway, Lithuania, Spain and Slovenia took part in the project. Material developed in a preliminary phase in Norway was piloted, and regularly reviewed and adapted by the team. The children in the four countries wrote to each other at regular intervals, carrying out writing tasks drawn up by the team. The written language produced by individual children, and assessed using the descriptors, was a rich

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444811000231 Published online by Cambridge University Press

source of data, and enabled us to distinguish features which seemed to mark the transition from one sublevel to the next. A number of story book series (notably Penguin Young Readers), across a range of levels, were selected for reading by all the classes. A method adapted by the team from that developed by Clay (2000) was implemented, so that teachers could recognise which reading texts were at an acceptable level of difficulty for a child.

At a workshop held in September 2010, the material and methods were presented and further refined. A serious attempt was made to validate the CEFR-linked descriptors for writing and the guidelines for placing story texts on CEFR levels. Considerations of how the material may work for languages other than English were also addressed. In 2011, the results of the project will be published in the form of a handbook for teachers, in which the methods and materials developed in the project will be presented. The main body of the handbook will explain to teachers how to use the materials and follow the methods worked out in the project, for the benefit of themselves and their pupils.

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Lang. Teach. (2011), **44.3**, 401–402 © Cambridge University Press 2011
doi:10.1017/S0261444811000243

The European Framework for CLIL Teacher Education

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The European Framework for CLIL Teacher Education (EFCT – http://clil-cd.ecml.at) is a conceptual tool for guiding the professional development of CLIL teachers. CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) is a dual-focused approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language. The framework provides a set of principles and ideas for designing CLIL professional curricula.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444811000231 Published online by Cambridge University Press