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Frank Heyworth
Fribourg

The common European framework as a tool for teacher training and development*

L'autore si riferisce a numerose esperienze nell'uso da parte dei docenti di L2 del quadro europeo di riferimento per le lingue (Cadre européen commun de référence pour les langues) e rileva che questo strumento può essere molto utile, ma la sua applicazione non è facile e i risultati ottenuti non sono univoci. Nell'ambito del lavoro con gli insegnanti è emersa l'eccessiva astrattezza del quadro e, di conseguenza, la difficoltà a stabilire un nesso diretto e spontaneo con la pratica. Di regola a questa difficoltà si è potuto ovviare almeno parzialmente con un lavoro di approfondimento in piccoli gruppi. Produttivo è stato pure un lavoro differenziato sull'errore.

Tre sono le conclusioni principali a cui si giunge nell'articolo:

1. La descrizione coerente e completa degli argomenti e delle opzioni del quadro di riferimento è necessaria per favorirne l'utilità didattica.

2. Il quadro di riferimento non può essere utilizzato "a freddo" nella formazione dei docenti. Discussioni preliminari e riflessioni sulle proprie esperienze sono necessarie. Inoltre i formatori devono avere una conoscenza approfondita del quadro di riferimento. Docenti con alcuni anni di esperienza hanno più facilità nell'utilizzazione del quadro di riferimento che non i principianti. (Red.)

Over the last 18 months I have on several occasions presented the Common European Framework in teacher conferences and workshops. On every occasion only a very small minority had read the Framework, even though the first edition was published in 1995. Frequently many of the others present had only vaguely heard of it and often confused the Framework with the Common Scale of Reference; the Common Scale was, equally often, perceived as a bureaucratic instrument devised to impose European standards.

And yet the Framework should, and could, be a key document for teachers – extending their range of knowledge about learning, teaching and assessment and encouraging them to choose among a broad range of methodological options. It is clear, however, that – in addition to the publicity needed to make the Framework better known – some kind of mediation is needed to make it more readily usable. Although one of its aims is to be "user-friendly", even to language learners, it is in fact difficult of access.

This short article is an account of some attempts – with varying amounts of success – to use Chapter 6, especially section 6.4 – "some methodological options for modern language learning and teaching" with groups of teachers.

The general approach to learning and teaching

The first part of section 6.4 (page 143 in the CUP edition) lists nine options for general approaches to learning / teaching ranging from "direct exposure to authentic use of the language" .. in a variety of contexts, through structured teaching with "a combination of presentation, practice and drills" and finally including task-based learning, more authentic texts and involving learners in negotiating learning activities.

Readers of the Framework – in one of the boxes which ask readers to reflect on their own experience – are invited as follows:

> *Users of the Framework may wish to consider and state which approaches, in general, they follow whether one of the above, or some other*

I thought the list was thought provoking and a good introduction to thinking about the amount of structure, about the use of authentic texts and about learner autonomy, and used the list and the reflective task as the introduction to the activity at the beginning of a 20 hour training seminar for experienced teachers of French.

Comment – the activity was spectacularly unsuccessful; participants found it hard to process so much information at once and found it hard to relate their own experience to the text, which they found very abstract. We then left the text and divided into three groups which looked at specific questions – exposure to language versus structured teaching; the use of L1 and L2; involving learners in the learning / teaching process. After a feedback session we looked at the text again; participants found it more useful – "now I see what they are getting at."

Approaches to errors and mistakes

In the same chapter of the Framework, section 6.5 deals with "Errors and Mistakes" (page 155). It distinguishes the two terms – errors being examples of the learner's interlanguage and demonstrating his present level of competence, whereas mistakes occur when learners, like native speakers sometimes, do not bring their knowledge and competence into their performance – i.e. they know the correct version, but produce something which is wrong. This is followed by a list of possible attitudes to mistakes and errors – e.g. "errors and mistakes are evidence of failure to learn" and "errors are an inevitable, transient product of the learner's developing interlanguage". The next section lists possible attitudes to error – among them "all errors and mistakes should be immediately corrected by the teacher"; "errors should be corrected only where they interfere with communication"; "all errors should be noted and corrected when doing so does not interfere with communication".

The topic was part of the same seminar for teachers as the first activity. Participants worked in groups and were given samples of spoken and written French to correct and asked to present how they would mark and correct the different samples. In the feedback session there was discussion of general approaches to errors and mistakes and the distinction between the terms was elicited. As a final part of the session we looked at the relevant section of the Framework and the invitation to reflect:

Users of the Framework may wish to consider, and where appropriate state their attitude to and action in response to learner mistakes and errors and whether the same or different criteria apply to:

- *Phonetic errors and mistakes*
- *Orthographic errors and mistakes*
- *Vocabulary errors and mistakes*
- *Etc with four other categories*

Comment – the activity was much more successful; participants were able to relate to the Framework section without difficulty and found it a useful clarification of their own discussions. The reflection exercise got them to think further about the different categories of error and we returned to the same theme in a further session about grading and assessment.
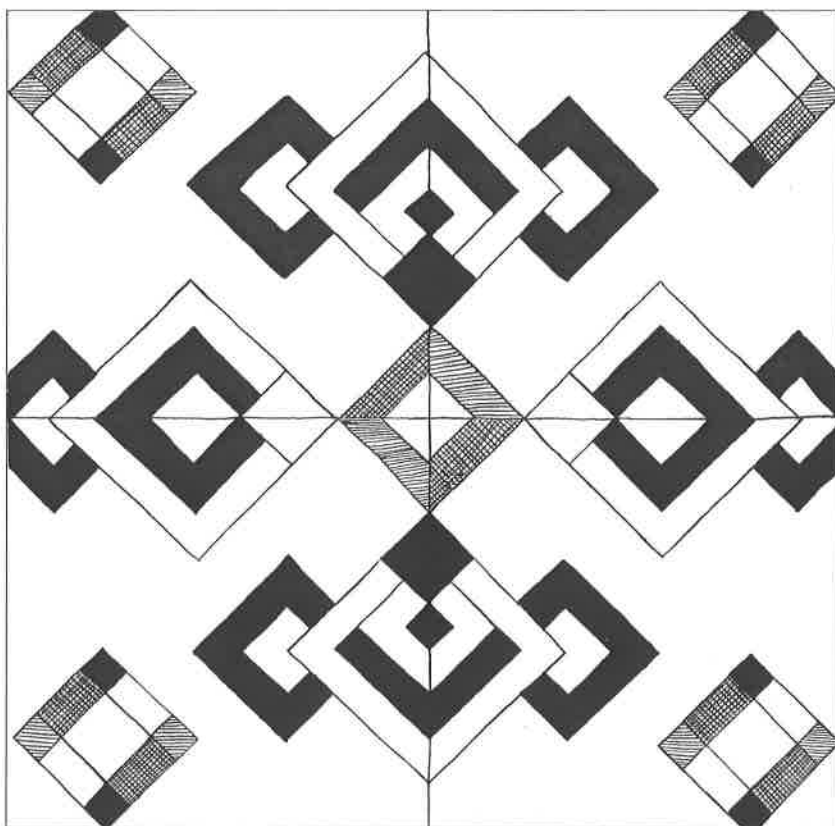
Conclusions

1. The Framework's coherent and comprehensive description of methodological issues and options contains much that is useful for teachers and can extend their knowledge and teaching range.
2. It cannot be used "raw" in teacher development activities, but needs pre-discussion, reflection on the teacher's own experience. Trainers will need to integrate it into other development materials, especially those which provide authentic teaching data. It probably also needs the mediation of trainers with a thorough knowledge of the Framework.
3. It is probably more suitable for experienced teachers, than teachers in initial training.

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Composizione geometrica 2.