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Effective Practices for Improving French as a Second Language Education

The Common European Framework as a Resource for Assessment **Alina MacFarlane**

About the Author

Alina MacFarlane works as a second language consultant and a researcher for the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers. She has been involved in several projects aimed at increasing the number of bilingual high school graduates in Canada including exploring the European Language Portfolio and its potential for Canada.

Content of this Podcast

Alina MacFarlane explains what the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is and why it is of interest to Canadian language educators.

Facts

- ✓ To facilitate language testing, the Common European Framework provides detailed descriptions of the various components of language ability from which we can design a language test which samples a person's abilities.
- ✓ These aspects are presented in two dimensions in a series of scales or grids:
 - 1) The **horizontal** dimension describes in detail what the language learner is required to do and which competences enable him or her to do it; and
 - 2) The **vertical** dimension outlines an ascending series of common reference levels for describing proficiency.

Imagine a number of tables or scales which present all aspects of language use and competence at six proficiency levels: **A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2** (A1 represents the lowest level and C2 the highest). For example, the following table describes overall written production at 6 levels:

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| | OVERALL WRITTEN PRODUCTION (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 61) |
|-----------|---|
| C2 | Can write clear, smoothly flowing, complex texts in an appropriate and effective style and a logical structure which helps the reader to find significant points. |
| C1 | Can write clear, well-structured texts of complex subjects, underlining the relevant salient issues, expanding and supporting points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples, and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion. |
| B2 | Can write clear, detailed texts on a variety of subjects related to his/her field of interest, synthesizing and evaluating information and arguments from a number of sources. |
| B1 | Can write straightforward connected texts on a range of familiar subjects within his field of interest, by linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence. |
| A2 | Can write a series of simple phrases and sentences linked with simple connectors like 'and', 'but' and 'because'. |
| A1 | Can write simple isolated phrases and sentences. |

This framework enables those involved in language learning, teaching or assessment to state in concrete terms and detail what they expect learners to do with the language. It provides a structure that links language activities to rating scales to proficiency levels.

Further Reading

Council of Europe (COE). (2001). *A Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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