



Stakeholders' Meeting on the Implementation of CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) in Canada

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L'Association canadienne
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Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction..... | 3 |
| Background and rationale for the day | 3 |
| Participants..... | 5 |
| Overview of the event | 5 |
| Findings..... | 6 |
| <i>Commitment to the CEFR among participating stakeholders</i> | 6 |
| <i>Taking stock: What has happened so far?</i> | 6 |
| Factors that enable and challenge CEFR development and progress..... | 13 |
| <i>Enabling factors</i> | 13 |
| <i>Challenges</i> | 14 |
| Solutions and future actions..... | 15 |
| <i>Four overarching recommendations</i> | 16 |
| Recommended priorities for future action | 17 |
| Conclusion | 20 |
| References | 21 |
| Appendix 1: Agenda | 22 |
| Appendix 2: Participants and contact information..... | 23 |
| Appendix 3: DELF-DALF: An international standard for French as a second language in Canada | 27 |

INTRODUCTION

With assistance from Canadian Heritage, the CASLT organized a one-day meeting of key stakeholders from across Canada to:

- Assess commitment to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) for language qualifications among participating stakeholders;
- Take stock of the state of CEFR implementation in national and provincial contexts;
- Identify factors that enable and challenge CEFR development and progress;
- Identify priorities for future implementation;
- Assess the need and feasibility for a pan-Canadian coordination of CEFR-related activities;
- Facilitate sharing, learning, and networking among participants.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR THE DAY

For many years, Canada has followed with interest the significant work conducted by the Council of Europe. When the federal government issued the Action Plan for Official Languages in Canada, entitled *The Next Act: New Momentum for Canada's Linguistic Duality in 2003*, one important strategic objective in the plan aimed at doubling the number of functionally bilingual young people in Canada. The concept of identifying or developing a tool to track bilingual proficiency (alongside the national census tool) has been central to all initiatives related to this action plan and the subsequent strategic plan entitled *La Feuille de route pour la dualité linguistique canadienne 2008–2013*.

In 2005, when Sally Rehorick and her team published *Plan 2013: Strategies for a National Approach in Second Language Education*, the following overarching recommendation was made:

Implement a tracking system linked to scholastic achievement to evaluate the effects of improvements made to FSL programs. This parallel tracking system will provide more reliable and valid data than the census and will entail evaluating second language proficiency attained by graduates of existing FSL programs using a standardized national test as soon as possible and every 4–5 years thereafter. (p. 21)

Although the report did not explicitly recommend the adoption of the CEFR as a basis for this tracking system, the report makes many allusions to the work done by the Council of Europe as a valid starting point for Canada.

In 2006, as part of a Virtual Scholar in Residence project (funded by Canadian Heritage and SSHRC) Larry Vandergrift recommended that the provinces and territories explore the feasibility of adopting the CEFR as a framework for official language education in Canada.

Rehorick and Vandergrift, among others like the CASLT, were instrumental in moving the CEFR forward as a useful tool for official language education in Canada. For example, Rehorick participated as a Canadian observer in a project of the Council of Europe concerning the implementation of the European Language Portfolio for four years prior to co-hosting, with the Edmonton Public School Board, a national workshop on CEFR-based language portfolios in Edmonton, Alberta, from October 12–14, 2005. In March of 2006, the CASLT agreed to adopt and coordinate a project on a national level. The first phase of this was a series of regional Awareness Increasing workshops, followed by a multi-year implementation proposal. The third phase was the establishment of a major section on the CASLT website to house CEFR-related resources.

In September 2006, the Advisory Committee of Deputy Ministers of Education (ACDME) established a working group (Ontario, BC, Alberta, Nova Scotia, PEI, and NB) to define the steps in developing a common framework of reference for language learning. In October 2008, the steering committee recommended “the use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) in the Canadian context as the framework of reference for the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), and jurisdictional projects, programs, and initiatives related to second and additional languages, as appropriate.”

Since 2008, the CMEC has published a guide for policy makers and curriculum designers (CMEC, 2010). National organizations such as the CASLT have dedicated considerable time and resources to the promotion and development of CEFR-related activities across Canada. There has been an increase in visibility of the CEFR and an increased interest in it. Anecdotally, and in some cases through formal reports and conference presentations, language educators have heard about pilot projects in many corners of the country. Obviously, significant taxpayer funds have been expended on CEFR-related activities. However, there was an absence of coordination and sharing of these initiatives in a pan-Canadian setting. The stakeholders' meeting of March 11, 2011, was therefore timely and strategic as the 2013 deadline approached and as Canada continued its efforts to improve official language education.

PARTICIPANTS

In January 2011, upon receiving funding from Canadian Heritage, the CASLT issued invitations to key stakeholder groups across Canada, including but not limited to: federal government departments and agencies, national organizations, Ministries of Education, school boards and schools, teachers, parents, universities and researchers, and the business community. March 11, 2011, was selected as the date for the event to coincide with a meeting among provincial and territorial Ministry representatives with Canadian heritage officials and thus facilitating attendance by this key stakeholder group and to reduce travel costs. Forty-six individuals accepted the invitation and participated in the event. Each key stakeholder group was represented by at least one person. Nevertheless, it was not possible or feasible to ensure that an exhaustive list of concerned individuals attended. As a result, the findings from the day are limited in scope to what these 46 people were able to bring to the table. A list of participants and their contact information is included in Appendix 2.

OVERVIEW OF THE EVENT

Drawing on principles of Open Spaces meetings (<http://www.openspaceworld.org/>), the event adopted a series of semi-structured group activities over a one-day period. Participants worked in groups, debated and dialogued, and helped set priorities for future CEFR-related implementation. Participants were encouraged to direct their own learning and work as they saw best. Participants were also free to network informally with colleagues as the day progressed.

After a short plenary session designed to stimulate thought and trigger reactions, participants focused on taking stock of the uses and implementation of the CEFR in each jurisdiction. Participants were asked to focus on the following four areas: learner portfolio, testing and calibration, CEFR infusion into curriculum, teacher knowledge of CEFR, and uses of portfolios. Participants were also asked to identify research related to each sub-theme and invited to identify other relevant thematic areas as they emerged.

Phase two of the event involved identifying factors that enable and challenge CEFR development and progress. Participants were asked to propose solutions to identified challenges.

During the third phase of the event, participants were asked to identify the most facilitating enablers for CEFR implementation, the most significant

challenges, and the most effective solutions to these challenges. Participants were also asked to circulate through the room to indicate priorities for future implementation of the CEFR. They were asked to return to large flip chart notes written during the stocktaking phase of the event and then to identify activities already underway across the country that should be continued and prioritized.

The event concluded in a plenary format where additional themes were discussed (post-secondary and teacher education, sectors beyond education) and actions identified relating to these new themes. The group also discussed the need and feasibility for a pan-Canadian coordination of CEFR-related activities to facilitate sharing, learning, and networking across the country.

CASLT Board members and staff took detailed notes in each segment of the event. All flip chart notes were retained and transcribed. The facilitator synthesized and did a thematic analysis of these data to prepare this report. The facilitator also presented an overview of the findings from the event at the CASLT's national conference in Montreal (Languages Without Borders) in April 2011. Some additional information about CEFR implementation was gathered at that event and integrated into this report.

A copy of the agenda for the event is included in Appendix 1.

FINDINGS

Commitment to the CEFR among participating stakeholders

Although the participants were not asked directly about their commitment to continuing work related to the CEFR, it was clear from the participation rate, from the engagement of participants in the discussions, from the overall tone of the day, and from the notes collected that there was general commitment among participants to continue the dialogue and implementation of CEFR-related activities in the provinces and territories.

Taking stock: What has happened so far?

Teachers and administrators in the Kindergarden-12 system: The data indicates quite clearly that teacher knowledge and use of the CEFR is in an emergent stage across most of the country. Some participants indicated that new teachers seem more knowledgeable about and open to the CEFR, probably because there has been some use of the *Portfolio canadien des langues pour enseignants* (PCLE) in pre-service teacher education programs (see additional themes later on in

the report for more focus on pre-service teacher education). There has been some in-service work related to the CEFR alignment with and infusion into the curriculum, relating to tests such as DELF and to the learner portfolio. The CEFR is being taken up by educators for official languages but also for international and Aboriginal languages in some jurisdictions (e.g., British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario). One jurisdiction (Prince Edward Island) reported having completed a basic information session for school administrators. Participants from New Brunswick reported that an orientation guide to the CEFR for teachers was under development. There was no mention (in the data) of research related to teacher knowledge and use of the CEFR and related notions. The following issues or questions were recurrent in the data as participants reported on the state of affairs in their jurisdictions:

- Teachers need more training but there are not enough trainers because coordinators are scarce, their jobs are too comprehensive, and time is lacking;
- Teachers need to learn about the CEFR by using it, not because it is dictated in the curriculum. Anxiety is high when a ministry imposes something new and complex like the CEFR in a top-down approach;
- There was concern that the CEFR is seen principally as a tool for testing and less as a way to promote lifelong and autonomous learning. However, it seems clear that knowledge of the CEFR seems stronger in areas where there are also pilots of DELF testing;
- Alignment with and infusion into the curriculum is underway, but not yet complete, in many jurisdictions. There is a sense that more teacher in-service will be done when the alignment has all been done. There is excitement among language consultants and coordinators, but they are also learning about the CEFR and may not be ready to serve as CEFR experts in their jurisdictions;
- Materials and tools created for CEFR implementation should be parent-friendly.

Integration of the CEFR into the K–12 curriculum: K–12 jurisdictions across Canada appear to be at very different stages of acceptance and integration of the CEFR with language curricula. The Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training appears to be the only multi-provincial organization working together to align curriculum with the CEFR, to develop orientation materials for teachers and administrators, to develop pilot units for teachers, and to learn from each other in terms of CEFR-based test implementation. At the Languages Without Borders conference, it became clear that the new Atlantic Curriculum Framework for FSL

will be unified for all FSL programs to harmonize current FSL literacy approaches with the CEFR. The document will emphasize the language competency of all FSL learners and focus on communication tasks and what they can do in the target language. The framework document will also include New Brunswick francophone ESL students. Competency targets by programs and grades will also be included in the document. Significant work is underway and is slated to be unveiled for teachers later in 2011.

British Columbia has also made significant strides to integrate or align the CEFR with a new language curriculum and has done some piloting of new curriculum documents. While reactions have been generally positive, the province has decided to delay implementation to ensure that issues such as teacher readiness, proper alignment with the outcome levels, and DELF are all better understood. In Ontario, a new FSL curriculum is set to be released. The CEFR appeared in a draft version of the curriculum circulated in the field for feedback.

Saskatchewan and Nunavut reported that that they had begun to examine the CEFR and its alignment with their curriculum but progress was slow. Representatives from Alberta, Manitoba, Yukon, and the Northwest Territories expressed the greatest reserve about full-scale implementation of the CEFR. In Alberta, there are no curricular revisions in second languages planned for another 4–5 years and where curricula are revised, more attention may be made to alignment with themes such as literacy, numeracy, and citizenship than with the CEFR. The ministry official from Alberta indicated that school divisions would have choice about whether to align their language education with the CEFR.

This ministry official also reported that the French-first language curriculum is currently under revision and there are plans to align this curriculum with a modified version of the CEFR. No data was presented by Quebec during the consultation event. However, during the Languages Without Borders conference, Wally Lazaruk reported that Éducation, Loisir et Sport Québec is resistant to using and implementing CEFR-related tools.

Beyond taking stock of the stages of integration of the CEFR into provincial and territorial language education curricula, the following themes emerged:

- Work is needed to ensure teacher buy-in. Some participants indicated that teachers will need to see the value added by the CEFR before changing their practice;
- There were questions about integrating the CEFR into additional languages curricula.

The learner portfolio: Three jurisdictions (representing six provinces) reported using a learner portfolio based on the CEFR: Alberta (Edmonton Public School Board and the Institute for Innovation in Second Language Education in Edmonton); The Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training; the Thames Valley School Board in Ontario (in collaboration with the University of Western Ontario).

In Alberta, the Ministry of Education is not involved in implementation of CEFR-based activities since language initiatives such as the CEFR are decentralized to school divisions. The Edmonton Public School Board and the Institute for Innovation in Second Language Education in Edmonton have co-developed a CEFR-based learner portfolio (adapted from online portfolios available through the Council of Europe) that is quite Edmonton specific. The word European is not used in any way in the title or description of the portfolio to avoid any resistance, especially from those involved in Aboriginal languages. Learner portfolios exist for many language programs beyond FSL, including Spanish, Chinese, and American Sign Language.

The Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training (CAMET) has been working on a multi-pronged project related to the CEFR for two years now. In addition to aligning the Atlantic FSL and ESL curricular outcomes to CEFR, the plan is to create an online learner passport. CAMET is currently working with a Canadian company (Career Cruising: <http://www.careercruising.com>) that currently offers an account for every school-aged learner so the language portfolio will simply be added to the existing account. Atlantic representatives indicated that it might be possible for other jurisdictions to buy into this initiative.

Dr. Paula Kristmanson from the Second Language Research Institute of Canada at UNB is working with a group of high school FSL teachers in the Fredericton area to implement a locally created learner portfolio/passport. Exemplars, classroom DVD clips, and resource materials have been created and should be available soon on the Second Language Research Institute of Canada website: <http://www.unbf.ca/L2/>.

Beyond taking stock of the uses of CEFR-based learner portfolios, the following issues and themes emerged in the discussion:

- There was considerable discussion about the language in which the portfolio components should be developed. Is it possible for learners at lower levels to self-assess in the target language?
- Participants emphasized the advantage and importance of the can-do statements that move our paradigm from a deficiency model to a positive proficiency model for assessing student progress in an additional language;

- Participants discussed the complexity and importance of moving the school system, and parents, away from an assessment model focussed on percentage grades to thinking about a proficiency or competency model. Participating parents clearly indicated that they want to know what their children can actually do in their additional languages. A learner portfolio/passport has the potential to help and support parents and their children.

CEFR-based tests: Participants discussed and debated the use of CEFR-based tests with great enthusiasm and passion. It is safe to say that the testing sub-theme attracted the most attention and interest from participants during the taking-stock activities. Three CEFR-based tests were discussed (TCF : test de compétence en français; DELF : Diplôme d'études en langue française; DELE: Diploma de Español como Lengua Extranjera). It is clear from the data that the DELF is the most popular CEFR-based test in use across Canada. In fact, most jurisdictions represented at the stakeholders' event are currently implementing or piloting the DELF. Most other jurisdictions either are planning to pilot it or are examining the advantages and disadvantages of the DELF. Nova Scotia and the Edmonton Public School Board appear to be the leaders in DELF implementation. For instance, in Nova Scotia, at this time, a steadily increasing number of students at the end of the secondary school, and registered in all FSL Programs offered throughout the Province and representing all Anglophones school boards have the opportunity to take the "DELF scolaire" test at the level of their choosing. During the Languages Without Borders conference in Montreal, Wally Lazaruk reported on the state of implementation of the DELF in many areas of Canada. A copy of the handout from his session is included in Appendix 3.

There appears to have been little research so far on the implementation of DELF; only one study was reported. The Quality Assurance Division of the Ottawa–Carleton District School Board (2010) completed a study of a pilot project in this jurisdiction where 84 core, extended, and immersion French students completed various levels of DELF. The TCF is currently used by some universities (French departments and teacher education programs). Dr. Joe Dicks and colleagues from UNB have conducted one small-scale study (Dicks et al., 2009) to examine the TCF for use in pre-service teacher education. They are also currently conducting research relating to DELF experimentation and other CEFR-based activities (e.g., passport, a professional learning community).

In addition to taking stock on the implementation of CEFR-based tests, the following issues and themes emerged from the testing discussion:

- The following advantages of DELF and other CEFR-based tests were noted: it is an internationally recognized credential; Canada would have a common point of reference for discussing language proficiency, which would be a first for the country;
- Other tests already exist across Canada and there is a desire to calibrate them to the CEFR (e.g., provincial testing in Newfoundland, British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario and the oral proficiency interview in New Brunswick). Calibrating these tests to the CEFR and to DELF is complex and costly and requires careful and systematic research by assessment experts;
- There are concerns that DELF and TCF are not Canadian (i.e., overly European). ACPI and others have contacted the developers of DELF (*le Centre international d'études pédagogiques—CIEP—in France*) to request participation in the development of the test to ensure that the diversity of the francophone world is reflected in CEFR-based tests. Information obtained at the Languages Without Borders conference in Montreal indicates that the CIEP may be open to making these modifications to the DELF;
- There is a concern that the DELF and TCF will be adopted without regard for the framework, the foundational autonomous learning principles from the European Council, and the learner portfolio without proper buy-in from and training for in-service teachers (i.e., testing for testing's sake). Many participants recommended that CEFR-based tests be implemented along with learner and teacher portfolios and that attention be paid to the backwash effects of CEFR-based tests on teaching strategies. Teaching to the test as a potential result of such a large focus on CEFR-based tests is a worry;
- The cost and logistics of test administration were also discussed.

Additional themes: Updates on what else has been done

Post-secondary education: Participants reported that CEFR implementation must occur beyond the K–12 contexts, including post-secondary levels. While only a handful of representatives from post-secondary contexts participated in the event, the following activities were reported:

- Several FSL pre-service teacher education programs piloted CASLT's Portfolio canadien des langues pour enseignants (PCLE). This work with the CEFR-based PCLE is helping new teachers become familiar with the CEFR and with the potential of the learner portfolio. CASLT reported that a revised version of the PCLE will be available in May 2011;

- Some teacher education programs (pre-service and in-service) reported experimenting with le Test de compétence en français or the DELF for admission to a program (e.g., UNB, Université d'Ottawa). Some participants reported that French and Modern Language Departments are becoming familiar with the CEFR and CEFR-based tests in a variety of languages (e.g., Acadia University in Nova Scotia);
- Jean-Gilles Pelletier from CMEC reported that the Explore program is preparing an online CEFR-based self-assessment tool that participants will complete before and after the program.

Recognition and buy-in beyond the education sector: Although there were few participants from outside the education sector, there were notable reports of promising initiatives:

- Given the increasing need for bilingual employees in the Capitale-Nationale and Chaudière-Appalaches regions, the Québec Chamber of Commerce is conducting a study to identify the tools and procedures used as well as the competencies evaluated, with a view to developing a calibrating tool in line with the CEFR. This study will enable these enterprises to better assess language skills (avoiding over- and under-evaluation) and therefore serve businesses in the area who seek qualified employees with the necessary language skills;
- As a follow-up to his study, *Two Languages, a World of Opportunities: Second-Language Learning in Canada's Universities* (2009), which focussed on official language education at the post-secondary level, Graham Fraser, Commissioner of Official Languages, met with the Federal Public Service Commission (PSC) to discuss the possibility of developing a language proficiency framework such as the CEFR to establish equivalencies between the public service exams and those used by universities;
- The provincial public service division responsible for language training with the government of Newfoundland and Labrador recently held a full-day in-service event to learn more about the CEFR and related tools. This group has plans to implement a learner portfolio and possibly a CEFR-based test;
- During the Vancouver Olympics, Sally Rehorick was responsible for language service volunteers. She and her team used a modified version of the overall self-assessment grid of the CEFR to reduce a group of 1200 potential volunteers to a short-list of 200. From these 200, the list was further narrowed using an additional language proficiency test (Canadian Foreign Service Institute—CFSI—of the Department of Foreign Affairs in Canada)

and additional criteria such as experience with sport, knowledge of Olympic protocol, availability, and memory capacity. A research project examined the correlation between the self-assessment results using the CEFR tool and the CFLI test. Correlations were significant and positive but small. Rehorick calls for further research to examine the validity and reliability of CEFR self-assessment tools.

FACTORS THAT ENABLE AND CHALLENGE CEFR DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRESS

During a second phase of the stakeholders' meeting, participants were asked to identify factors that have enabled and challenged progress and development of CEFR-related activities in their jurisdictions. Thereafter, using multi-coloured dots to indicate the importance of these factors, we attempted to identify the most significant factors. It is important to note that this exercise was more or less successful from group to group and therefore the ranking of factors should be considered with some caution. Nevertheless, when analysing the data, the facilitator was also able to examine the frequency of similar factors that could also be considered indicators of importance.

Enabling factors

Flexibility, neutrality, common language, and vision: The greatest enthusiasm centred on the flexibility and relative neutrality of the CEFR as a framework and tool that is adaptable in many contexts across many languages. The CEFR provides a common language and common vision for talking about language proficiency in Canada. Although not stated as such in the notes taken during the event, it seems clear that there are obvious champions of the CEFR in certain regions of the country who facilitate a synergy and common vision for action in those regions. The following quotations articulate their enabling sentiments:

“There is a sense of common purpose now.”

“It's important to know ‘what IT means’: we now have a way of placing the student. Place the student in the centre of the discussion. Now we can agree on the basics.”

“It's helpful that other regions have a common vision and are focussing on the same priorities.”

Timing is right to rethink learning, teaching, and assessment: K–12 schooling is changing and there tends to be agreement that positive change is needed and the CEFR is one way to facilitate looking at learner progress in a positive way. Discussions across the country around competencies for the 21st century create an opening to rethink how we learn and how we teach and what learners should be able to do. The CEFR creates a common language for describing what language learners can and should be able to do.

External facilitators: All groups referred to external facilitators that have enabled work on the CEFR. Some referred to the CMEC decision as a supportive rationale for moving forward even though the action since the decision has been limited. Canadian Heritage was identified as an enabling factor, especially because jurisdictions were encouraged to link their action plans to CEFR-related activities and, as a result, funding and time could be allocated to CEFR-specific activities in the provinces and territories.

National organizations: The work of national organizations such as CASLT, ACPI, and CPF is an enabling factor. Participants referred to the important work these organizations do to promote the CEFR and to prepare teachers and parents to understand the potential of CEFR-related activities.

Buy-in from outside education: The participation from outside the education sector was small but mighty. Participants agreed strongly that acknowledgement and buy-in from business, industry, other governmental sectors, and other professions would go a long way towards convincing teachers, administrators, politicians, parents, and learners of the importance of the CEFR and passport. The importance of international recognition of the established and validated CEFR cannot be underestimated when it comes to external buy-in.

Challenges

Lack of pan-Canadian vision, buy-in, and coordination: Many participants focussed on the complexity of creating a pan-Canadian vision since education is a provincial responsibility. Many participants perceive this complexity as the greatest barrier to achieving a common vision and common implementation of CEFR-related activities across Canada. This lack of pan-Canadian vision also results in significant differences in the ways the CEFR-related activities are taken up across Canada, and thus a perceived lack of cohesion. Many jurisdictions are spending considerable time and money trying to “reinvent the wheel” due to the lack of coordination and communication.

Systemic barriers within K–12 education: Considerable discussion focussed on the grade-specific organization of the K–12 education system and its fixation on assessing and grading students according to grade-specific learning outcomes. Moving to the CEFR means a transition to competency-based assessment and reporting as well as principles of autonomous learning; parents, teachers, administrators, and learners are not all ready for this paradigm switch. Some participants also articulated the difficulty of replacing well-established tools (e.g., language tests) that represent huge investments in time and money.

Teacher buy-in: Teachers tend to be overburdened with frequent changes without adequate preparation and time to assimilate those changes. As one participant said, “teachers need to see the value added to make the paradigm shift.” Many participants pointed to the important work of national and provincial/territorial language associations for teachers in supporting teacher development and understanding of CEFR-related tools. Participants clearly indicated that time, resources, and expertise are needed and that immediate change is unrealistic.

Connecting with sectors outside education: Some participants acknowledged the importance but also the complexity of promoting the CEFR-related tools in sectors such as business and other government agencies. How will this be done and by whom? The Public Service Commission (PSC) was a specific example cited; will the CEFR-related tools be aligned with the PSC language test, for example?

Lack of funding and limited time and expertise: Considerable funds, time, and expertise are required to implement CEFR-based activities. Funds are always limited at the school board level where Official Languages Education monies do not always reach the front lines in FSL and ESL. Moreover, the CEFR is not aligned with the vision of some senior leaders at the ministry level and therefore funding in these jurisdictions is not forthcoming, quite limited, or insufficient.

The nature of the framework: A few participants lamented the lack of Canadian versions of CEFR-based tools. Participants reported that some individuals have difficulty seeing how the CEFR, originally developed for adult language learning contexts, can be useful in the K–12 context. Other participants suggested that implementing CEFR-based activities is difficult for teachers whose target language proficiency is limited.

SOLUTIONS AND FUTURE ACTIONS

In this section, the facilitator recommends future action based on an analysis of the data, especially participants' proposed solutions to each of the barriers presented

above. First, four overall, overarching recommendations are presented. Second, priorities for future action are proposed in relation to the sub-themes from the first part of this report (K–12 teachers and administrators, curricular integration, the learner portfolio, CEFR-based testing, post-secondary initiatives, connections beyond education). These recommendations reflect possible solutions to key challenges proposed by participants during the stakeholders' event.

Four overarching recommendations

- 1) One overarching recommendation for future action emerged quite clearly from the detailed notes taken during small group discussions throughout the stakeholder event.¹ Further commonality in implementation of CEFR-based activities would be greatly enhanced and facilitated if there were a regular opportunity or venue for pan-Canadian sharing and consultation. This would help avoid duplication of effort as jurisdictions that have made progress with CEFR implementation can help guide those at earlier stages. Several comments in the recorded notes point to a national organization such as the CASLT to coordinate this pan-Canadian sharing and consultation opportunity. A few participants argued strongly for the establishment of a formal mechanism for this sharing and consultation such as a *table de concertation* similar to what exists for minority francophone communities. Other ideas included an FSL network, CMEC website, or some other portal for sharing outside events. At the Languages Without Borders, many participants pointed to the significant benefits of coordination of CEFR-based activities in multiple languages, in keeping with the foundational principles of multilingualism of the Council of Europe. It would be unfortunate and regressive for Canada to focus this coordination on two languages only.
- 2) Research is sorely lacking on the multi-level implementation of CEFR-related activities and should be a priority for university-based researchers, ministries of education, and school divisions. The Council of Europe included rigorous research at most stages of CEFR implementation in Europe. Canada must follow this example. Many decisions for implementation in Canada are being made without a Canadian evidence base. However, targeted funding is needed for this research. Strategic funding opportunities that privilege research related to CEFR-based activities must be created by Canadian

¹ This was not necessarily the case at the end of the day when participants seemed tired and unsure about how to conclude or how to move implementation of the CEFR forward.

Heritage, in collaboration with a research agency such as SSHRC or in partnership with ministries of education and/or national organizations.

- 3) It is clear that the CEFR already has champions within the Canadian educational community: educational leaders in Atlantic Canada, British Columbia, and Edmonton; parents; national organizations such as CASLT, ACPI, CPF, Canadian Heritage, OCOL, and CMEC; and the Quebec City Chamber of Commerce. Pan-Canadian coordination would be able to harness these champions for promotion of CEFR-related activities.
- 4) Increased funding will be required to realize the potential of the CEFR across Canada. It is crucial that provinces, territories, and national organizations join forces to develop a financial strategy and an action plan for CEFR-implementation and bring them to the Official Language consultations beginning now across the country to develop the vision for the next OLE funding agreement for 2013–2018.

RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE ACTION

TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS IN THE K–12 SYSTEM: Continue and ramp up multi-levelled (beyond the basics) and multi-pronged (for more than just the CEFR itself) teacher in-service to deepen knowledge and understanding of the CEFR and its related tools. The need for in-service will increase as curriculum is aligned with the CEFR, as jurisdictions engage teachers in the use of the PCLE and a learner portfolio, and as CEFR-based testing expands. Some of this in-service can be delivered by national organizations such as CASLT; however, such organizations have limited capacity. Might a train-the-trainer program be useful to develop more expertise across the country? Multi-media technologies can be an effective way to deliver some of this in-service, especially to allow for self-directed professional development. Increased funding, time, and patience will be needed as Canada builds capacity among its educators at various levels.

INTEGRATION OF THE CEFR INTO THE K–12 CURRICULUM: Jurisdictions across Canada are encouraged to begin or continue alignment of the CEFR with curricular outcomes. Curriculum redesign and alignment should include how curricular expectations can move to become competency-based using the CEFR as a descriptor for what learners should be able to

do in the target language at certain levels in certain programs. This will mean moving away from framing curricular expectations by grade level. Language educators are encouraged to engage in discussions of 21st century competencies since these discussions also focus on what students can and should be able to do as they enter the workforce in the 21st century.

THE LEARNER PORTFOLIO: Continued development of CEFR-based portfolios should be priority. Ultimately, these portfolios should be available online to make them accessible to the greatest number of learners. Participants expressed notable enthusiasm about the work under development in Atlantic Canada. Pan-Canadian coordination would allow for progress reports on the development of this online portfolio so that other jurisdictions might consider adopting or adapting this version of a CEFR-based learner portfolio. At least one participant suggested that a national organization develop a common learner portfolio for all of Canada.

There was also a call for the creation of exemplars to demonstrate to learners and as supports for teachers what each level—in all skills on the CEFR—look or sound like. It is important that exemplars display variations of French from different regions of the francophone world.

CEFR-BASED TESTS: CEFR-based testing should continue to develop across Canada. However, caution is necessary to ensure that the CEFR-based tests are being adopted with considerable concern for the framework, the foundational autonomous learning principles from the European Council, and the learner portfolio. CEFR-based tests would be most effectively implemented along with curricular alignment, learner and teacher portfolios, and with attention paid to the backwash effects of the CEFR-based tests on teaching strategies.

There are concerns about the nature of European-created tests such as DELF and TCF. A national organization might consider sponsoring the development of a validated Canadian version of these tests. Caution is necessary when creating a new instrument; true testing experts and significant time are required for development, piloting, validation, and field-testing. A new Canadian version of a DELF would be very time consuming and costly and the international credibility of the established and validated CEFR-based tests would be compromised.

POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS: CASLT should clearly promote the revised version of the PCLE to university teacher-education programs

immediately. Besides targeting pre-service teacher education programs, it would also make sense to target additional qualifications courses and second language masters programs in universities that serve many practising teachers in their ongoing professional development. In the mid- to long-term, the PCE should be developed as an online tool.

A promotional campaign would help acquaint university language departments, including language industry schools housed in continuing education departments in universities (which often also host Explore summer programs), with CEFR-related tools, including the PCLE (for future teachers), online Council of Europe learner portfolios for adult learners, and CEFR-based tests such as DELF, DALF, and TCF. National organizations might usefully partner with the Canadian Association of Applied Linguistics and L'Association des professeur(e)s de français des universités et collèges canadiens to promote the CEFR and PCE.

It is encouraging to see that Explore programs are moving to develop a tool for their learners. This work should continue; many Explore participants are still in high school language programs or are recent graduates. As implementation progresses across Canada, more and more participants will be familiar with, and even in possession of their own learner portfolio with accompanying passport. The passport would be an excellent way to validate the Explore experience and learners can document their progress before and after this experience—all part of the big picture of official language development in Canada!

RECOGNITION AND BUY-IN BEYOND THE EDUCATION SECTOR: First, national organizations such as CASLT, ACPI, and CPF must promote the success stories (e.g., the Quebec City Chamber of Commerce, the Olympics, and PSC initiatives) in their own print and electronic bulletins, at their conferences and well beyond these venues into the public media and publications for industry members and government leaders in sectors beyond education. Second, learners in the K–12 system (and beyond) must learn about these exciting initiatives as well. External recognition of this international framework can only help position multilingual Canadians in many spheres of society.

It appears that the Public Service Commission—nationally and at local levels—will be seeking more and more functionally and high-level bilingual employees. Timing seems appropriate for one or more national organizations to coordinate and negotiate with the PSC to promote the CEFR within the PSC. A needs assessment would be one essential first step as well as a strategy for

collaboration. French for the Future seems to be a logical partner in these initiatives, although no one represented this association at this stakeholders' event.

CONCLUSION

This pan-Canadian consultation event was successful in many ways. The creative networking and the interest and passion of participants were palpable. Moreover, it is significant that Canada now has documented the current state of affairs for CEFR-related implementation in the country. Obviously, it is not possible to claim that the documentation is complete or exhaustive since the collective knowledge recorded is limited to the participants who attended. Continued efforts are needed to add to this report as we learn more. The CASLT and others are grateful that Canadian Heritage made this day possible. However, one day is clearly not sufficient to address the mammoth amount of work needed to realize the potential of the CEFR for official and additional language education in Canada.

During the event and during the Languages Without Borders conference, it also became clear that while there is considerable excitement around a common language and vision, there is also some desire to create a completely new Canadian framework and new tests. This would require significant time and money to do well and would lessen the international credibility so attractive to students, their parents, and many educators. Funds for official language education are limited and are likely to continue to be limited. Why spend so much money on redoing what has already been done well?

It was clear to participants during this event that pan-Canadian consultation of this nature provides an opportunity to break down provincial and territorial boundaries and share a common vision and common language even if CEFR implementation differs by jurisdiction. Pan-Canadian coordination means doing things in the same way everywhere; it is responsible and forward thinking and it must continue.

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APPENDIX 1: Agenda

Stakeholders' Meeting on the Implementation of CEFR in Canada

March 11th, 2011

Holiday Inn Plaza La Chaudière, 2, rue Montcalm, Gatineau

Salon Nations (Mezzanine)

Facilitator: Miles Turnbull

| | Agenda | Ordre du jour |
|-------------|--|--|
| 8:00–8:30 | Registration and coffee | Inscription et café |
| 8:30–8:45 | Welcome and introductions | Mots de bienvenue et présentations |
| 8:45–9:10 | Plenary: Reflections and Observations on the State of Affairs regarding the CEFR | Plénière : Quelques commentaires et observations sur l'état du CCER |
| 9:10–10:00 | Update Taking stock of CEFR uses/ implementation in each jurisdiction: learner portfolio, testing and calibration, CEFR infusion into curriculum, teachers and knowledge of CEFR and uses of portfolio | Mise à jour Faire état de la mise en pratique et de l'utilisation du CCER dans chaque juridiction : portfolio des apprenants ; évaluation et étalonnage ; la présence du CCER dans le curriculum ; les enseignants et leurs connaissances du CCER et les utilisations du portfolio |
| 10:00–10:20 | Coffee break / Pause | |
| 10:20–11:10 | Update (continued) | Mise à jour (suite) |
| 11:10–12:15 | Identifying factors that enable and block CEFR development and progress | L'identification des facteurs qui facilitent ou qui bloquent le développement et le progrès du CCER |
| 12:15–13:00 | Lunch | |
| 13:00–14:00 | Identifying priorities for future implementation | L'identification des priorités en vue de d'une mise en pratique plus poussée du CCER |
| 14:00–15:30 | Open space discussion including but not restricted to the need for pan-Canadian coordination of CEFR initiatives and the use of the CEFR beyond the K–12 context | Discussion en forum ouvert sur, entre autres, le besoin d'une coordination pancanadienne par rapport aux initiatives de mise en pratique du CCER dans un contexte scolaire et au-delà |
| 15:30–16:00 | Wrap up, reflections and next steps | Conclusions, observations et suivis |

APPENDIX 2

Participants and contact information

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Stakeholders Meeting on the Implementation of CEFR in Canada: Facilitator's report

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Stakeholders Meeting on the Implementation of CEFR in Canada: Facilitator's report

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Stakeholders Meeting on the Implementation of CEFR in Canada: Facilitator's report

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APPENDIX 3

DELF-DALF: An international standard for French as a second language in Canada

1. Our children and youth are a core value in our education system. They should therefore receive the best French second language education possible.
2. As part of a first-rate education, our students should receive national and international recognition for their achievements in French as a second language.
3. Being that Canada is an officially bilingual country (first Official Languages Act adopted in 1969), it would be significant to create national standards, guidelines or criteria that our students could aspire to attain.
4. In this context, the *Diplôme d'études en langue française* (DELF) and the *Diplôme approfondi de langue française* (DALF) offer one model for helping our youth to obtain international recognition. With DELF and DALF, candidates are assessed on the same international language standards as candidates in more than 160 countries and receive a lifelong diploma upon successful completion of each level.
5. If DELF and DALF are recognized as international standards for French as a second language in Canada, students could obtain provincial credits for successfully completing DELF and DALF examinations. In addition, universities in Canada could recognize the results of these examinations for entrance purposes. Furthermore, employers in Canada could recognize these results for employment purposes.
6. The obstacles to such recognition include the reluctance of provincial and territorial departments of education to recognize examinations developed in Europe for official purposes such as diplomas. Moreover, effective quality control measures in the administration and correction of DELF-DALF examinations would have to be safeguarded and monitored at provincial or national levels. Similarly, a large number of examiners and correctors would have to be trained. Additionally, sufficient federal and provincial funding would have to be allocated.
7. Five provincial positions related to recognizing DELF and DALF as international standards for French second language competency in Canada range from emphasizing local decision making to exploring the benefits of DELF-DALF as standards to using the Common European Framework of Reference to guide the development of the French as a second language (French Immersion and Basic French) curricula to having already developed provincial assessment tools to reflect provincial realities.
 - In Alberta, the use of DELF and DALF examinations is to be addressed at the local level. Alberta school jurisdictions are free to use these examinations if they deem them appropriate.
 - In Saskatchewan, the Department of Education has made no commitment to recognize the DELF and DALF as standards officially. However, the province is

open to exploring the potential benefit of adapting these standards for students who are learning a second language.

- In Manitoba, the Department of Education is not planning to implement the DELF and DALF examinations formally. As a local initiative, one school division (River East Transcona) is presently conducting a small pilot project involving these examinations. In Manitoba, the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) is presently used as a reference document to guide the development of the FSL (French Immersion and Basic French) curriculum.
 - In Ontario, the Ministry of Education has been exploring the benefits of using the CEFR as a guiding principle to inform teaching and assessment practices in the FSL classroom as part of the province's action plan to enhance student performance in French. The ministry recognizes that learning from the DELF training deepens the understanding of the CEFR, but the administration of the DELF continues to be a board decision.
 - Au Québec, le Ministre de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport indique que le Québec a déjà développé ses propres outils dans le domaine de l'évaluation de la compétence en langue française, outils qui sont adaptés à la réalité québécoise. Le Québec n'utilise donc pas les outils européens développés dans le Cadre européen commun de référence pour les langues. En effet, le ministère considère important que les outils d'évaluation utilisés reflètent les réalités dans lesquelles l'élève ou l'étudiant évolue et présentent la langue française dans son actualité et dans sa diversité.
8. Given the diversity of perspectives and experiences across Canada, it suggests, in my opinion, that a national project could lead and coordinate initiatives related to Common European Framework of Reference, including DELF-DALF. Such a program could be set up to:
- Gather and share available information and documentation on success stories related to the use of guidelines such as the CEFR, including DELF-DALF;
 - Work with national and international agencies, provincial governments and business and industry to identify language needs in business, industry and services in Canada;
 - Develop language proficiency guidelines that could be used across Canada;
 - Identify language proficiency assessment tools that could be used across Canada for both employment and post-secondary purposes; and
 - Work with parent organizations such as CPF, Chambers of Commerce, and other business-related agencies to advocate for national and international standards.
9. CASLT is in a good position to lead such as initiative in view of its successful history with the National Core French Project (1985–1989) and the National Core French Assessment Project (1994).

10. Our continued efforts in this area will:

- Encourage more students to enrol in and to complete French immersion and Core French programs in Canada;
- Recognize students for their French second language proficiency at the national and international levels;
- Lead to a nationally recognized benchmark to define and assess French second language proficiency in Canada;
- Enable the Government of Canada to hire more bilingual employees who have received training in our schools, thus reducing training costs at the federal level; and
- Increase the number of bilingual citizens in Canada.

Presented at the CASLT National Conference in Montreal on April 8, 2011 by Wally Lazaruk, President and Principal Consultant, Evaluation Plus Inc. E-mail: evaluate@shaw.ca