

<i>Insights from the Common European Framework</i>		
Author:	Keith Morrow (Ed.) (2005)	
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The *Insights from the Common European Framework (Insights)* as the name suggests, is designed as an introduction to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEF)*, which dates back to a project in the 1990s by the Council of Europe to standardize the discourse on language learning, raise awareness and provide a reference for speaking about the skills, to ease the cooperation between the various levels of the education sector in Europe [1]. *Insights* seeks to bridge the gap between the theory and practice. Indeed, the CEF is laden with jargon and terms from a host of disciplines and scores of tables. Thus, those looking for clarification on how the CEF relates to subjects, such as: helping the learner to learn, course design, testing, and syllabus design are certain to find worthwhile information in *Insights*.

As an extension of the *ELT Journal*, *Insights* makes use of subheadings in the margins on the left-hand side of each page, making it easy for the reader to locate relevant information quickly. The appendix contains excerpts of related charts, so that one does not necessarily have to own a copy of the CEF to be able to make sense of *Insights*.

The book is divided up into five main sections. The first serves as a brief introduction to those who are unfamiliar with the CEF. Both articles "Background to the CEF" by Keith Morrow and "Why the CEF is important" by Frank Heyworth manage to pack with a wealth of information in less than 10 pages each. It is exactly the introduction I would have liked to have had, when I first started trying to make sense of the CEF a few semesters ago. I can highly recommend this part to all students studying to become language teachers. As more and more publishers, particularly in the Europe begin to incorporate the CEF into their textbooks and schoolbooks, language instructors at all levels will need to be able to decipher the descriptor scales. In addition, Morrow and Heyworth do not shy away from pointing out potential weaknesses and flaws with the CEF. Again educators should be aware of these too.

One of the strengths of the CEF is its emphasis not on what the learners cannot do or do wrong, but on what they are able to do. Luciano Mariani picks up on this topic, in his article entitled, "Learning to learn with the CEF." Apart from summarizing the main strategies for language learning in the CEF, he highlights the implications for both instructors and learners. Mariani's piece fits together nicely with Julia Starr Keddle's contribution entitled, "The CEF and the secondary school syllabus." She encourages instructors to incorporate the situational/functional approach of the CEF in language instruction at the secondary level without ignoring grammar, as she charges the CEF seems to do. Like Morrow, she too is both an enthusiast and a critic.

Sections three and four deal with course design, teacher education and evaluation with the CEF. Julia Starr Keddle reports on her work incorporating the CEF during the last 5 years into classroom in a secondary school in Italy. She highlights the few passages in the CEF which deal with grammar, underlining that the burden for improving the grammatical competence of the learners is placed on the materials developer. Thus, Keddle provides secondary school teachers with her grammar syllabus module at the A1 level, which helps instructors to evaluate textbooks and lesson plans. Hanna Komorowska discusses her experience and various approaches to incorporating the CEF into teacher training in Poland, while Aari Huhta and Neus Figueras discuss DIALANG, a diagnostic language assessment program available in 14 languages, which not only is user-friendly but incorporates the CEF especially with regard to the 6-level descriptor scales, self-assessment and feedback. The DIALANG also makes use of other sources to make up for the limitations of the CEF in certain areas. Brian North provides useful information on what the CEF has to offer in the areas of assessment and evaluation, and answers the looming question: "Does a CEF result reported by this assessment relate to the common interpretation of CEF levels with an acceptable degree of consistency?." I was particularly pleased to learn about the reference video as a tool in teacher training.

The final section is devoted to case studies on the CEF in the curriculum for newcomer pupils in Irish primary schools, for teenagers learning English at the British Council Milan, and for adult learners of English at the University of Gloucestershire which provides preparatory classes for IELTS and Cambridge ESOL examinations. Although these contexts for language learning and the levels of the courses are quite different, I would hope that a future edition would be expanded. With the readers of the *ELT Journal* in mind, *Insights* concentrated the case studies on learners of English, but since one goal of the CEF is to promote the cooperation in the field of modern languages, it would have been nice to include a greater variety not only in terms of the setting in which language learning takes place, but also in terms of the languages being learned. Nevertheless, the editor has done a wonderful job in selecting a wide range of topics accessible to both scholars, instructors, and university students studying to become teachers. This book is guaranteed to be around for a long time.

[1] For a copy to download, see <http://www.culture2.coe.int/portfolio/documentsintro/commonframework.html>

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