Assessing level and CEFR

A toolkit for teacher development

Assessing level and CEFR

University of HUDDERSFIELD

- These materials provide an overview of issues relating to assessing level.

- We explore why this issue might be challenging and offer a practical approach to devising assessments at a particular level.

Copyright: Matt Wright

Assessing level and CEFR

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

This module is aimed at:

- teachers of English as a foreign language

- in-service teachers

Overview

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

This module provides an introduction to issues surrounding level and how to create assessment tasks at a particular level. Level is discussed in the context of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Copyright: Matt Wright

Learning outcomes

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

By the end of this module you will have developed:

• an awareness of the CEFR

• an understanding of an approach to creating assessment tasks

• an appreciation of the challenges of establishing level.

Problems of ready-made assessments

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

- When developing these materials, we asked teachers what kind of materials would be of most use to them. They all mentioned the difficulties they had experienced in creating assessment tasks at a particular level.

- The request was made for ready-made assessments which the teachers could take into the classroom that evening. Unfortunately, we cannot provide this as one-size fits all solutions do not really exist.

Problems of ready-made assessments

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

- Happily, we can provide an approach which will help you with the difficult task of creating assessments.

- This approach will be outlined in later slides.

Copyright: Matt Wright

The CEFR

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

- The CEFR describes foreign language proficiency at six levels: A1 and A2, B1 and B2, C1 and C2.

- The scale starts at A1 and finishes at C2.

- More information about the CEFR can be found [here](#).

- A good introductory video to the CEFR can be found [here](#).

Copyright: Matt Wright

The CEFR

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

Copyright: Matt Wright

- Level and the CEFR are not synonymous. The CEFR is not without critics (see Fulcher, 2004, for further discussion of the debate around the CEFR).

- The teachers we spoke to all referred to the CEFR and discussed its impact on their assessment practices.

- For this reason we are discussing the CEFR and level in the same module.

The CEFR

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

Think about the following questions.
If possible discuss them with another
teacher.

- Is the CEFR used in your school?
  If yes, how?

- What are the positive and negative
  aspects of working with the CEFR?

Copyright: Matt Wright

Commentary

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

- We would expect that most teachers have come across the CEFR in some form.

- Perhaps the coursebook you are using is labelled with a CEFR level, such as A2.

- Or maybe your students are working towards a test which has been benchmarked at a particular CEFR level.

- The teachers we spoke to for the project were aware of some aspects of the CEFR.

The CEFR

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

Listen to Claire talk about the CEFR.

- As you listen make notes about the aims of the CEFR and ways in which it has been used and perhaps misused.

- Listen [here](#).

- Do you agree with her?

Copyright: Matt Wright

The CEFR

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

- Here are some [descriptors](#) from the CEFR. Order them by level of language proficiency with A1 at the bottom and C1 at the top.

- As you complete the task think about how you made the decisions when ordering the statements.

The CEFR

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

- Here is the <u>full scale</u> on page 24.

- Were you correct?

- Did you find that a straightforward task?

Copyright: Matt Wright

The CEFR

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

- Now that we have considered the origins of the CEFR, it is time to turn our attention to the CEFR and classroom assessment.

- The CEFR is complex and multi-faceted.

- It can be a challenge to relate the CEFR to classroom practice.

- Over the next few slides we will show you some resources which will help you to do this.

Copyright: Matt Wright

Classroom posters

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

- Look at these classroom posters which were created as part of a project which aimed to support teachers.

- The posters contain 'can do' statements for each of the 4 language skills.

- Furthermore, they contain grammar and vocabulary objectives.

- The posters also contain examples of the type of language needed to achieve the 'can do' statements in the language work sections.

- The posters cover levels A1 to C1 of the CEFR.

Reflective task

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

Copyright: Matt Wright

- Review the posters and consider how they could be used in the classes you teach.

Commentary

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

- The posters can be used for self, peer or teacher assessment.

- They can be used to discuss learning goals.

- They can guide materials selection.

Beyond the posters

University of HUDDERSFIELD

- Having reviewed the posters you may be thinking that you need something which contains more detail.

- This book contains more detail about the language points which are relevant at levels A1 to C1 of the CEFR. We will be using this book for activities in later slides so we recommend you keep it accessible.

Copyright: Matt Wright

Core Inventory of general English

University of HUDDERSFIELD

Copyright: Matt Wright

- Watch the authors of the Core Inventory talk about its creation and how it can support teacher assessment of classroom learning

- Make notes to answer the following questions:

  o What are the main aims of the project?
  o How can the Core Inventory be used?
  o What are the *'Core Language points'*?
  o What is a scenario?

Commentary

- The Core Inventory was developed to make the CEFR tangible and to provide support and guidance for teachers, syllabus designers and language learners.

- It can be used as reference of a minimum core content to which other materials can be added.

- The '*Core Language Points'* is a list of language points placed at the CEFR level which is considered of most relevance to the classroom.

- A scenario is a framework for developing teaching and assessment acttivities base on real life language use.

Core Inventory of general English

University of HUDDERSFIELD

- The Core Inventory contains an approach to creating classroom-based assessments. On page 13 you will find a definition of a scenario and how it can be used to create an assessment task.

- On the following two pages there is an example scenario. In the appendices there are example scenarios for the 5 CEFR levels covered in the Core Inventory.

Copyright: Matt Wright

Core Inventory of general English

University of HUDDERSFIELD

- A scenario starts with a language use situation. In the case of the example, a business meeting. The relevant 'Can Do' statements are added to the scenario with the required competences.

- Guidance on how scenarios can be used to create assessment activities continues on pages 16 and 17 of the Core Inventory.

- Using the example scenarios as a guide, think of a language use situation which is relevant for your learners and develop an assessment task for it.

The Word Family Framework

University of HUDDERSFIELD

- You may want to think about the relationship between lexis and level.

- The Word Family Framework Tool can help you to consider the difficulty of vocabulary and ensure you choose words for vocabulary tests with your class which are appropriate to their level.

- The tool is very easy to use – simply enter a word into the search box and it will tell you its CEFR level.

Copyright: Matt Wright

CEFR and level

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

- A project in Finland created [this](#) training resource for teachers.

- There is information about the CEFR and example tasks for each level.

Copyright: Matt Wright

Other ways to think of level

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

- The CEFR is not the only way to consider level.

- The difficulty of the task and the amount of text we expect our students to process in a particular amount of time all contribute to the level of difficulty of a task.

- Therefore we need to control a number of different factors when creating our classroom assessments.

Reading and difficulty

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

Stephen Bax (2013) created this table to illustrate how different factors interact to create difficulty.

Table 1: Levels of cognitive processing in reading tests (adapted from Khalifa and Weir, 2009)

	Level of activity (ordered from more simple to more complex)	Readers' typical cognitive operations in language tests	Size of typical unit
1	Lexis: word matching	Reader identifies same word in question and text	Word
2	Lexis: synonym and word-class matching	Reader uses knowledge of word meaning or word class to identify synonym, antonym or other related word	Word
3	Grammar/syntax	Reader uses grammatical knowledge to disambiguate and identify answer	Clause/sentence
4	Propositional meaning	Reader uses knowledge of lexis and grammar to establish meaning of a sentence.	Sentence
5	Inference	Reader goes beyond literal meaning to infer a further significance	Sentence/ paragraph/text
6	Building a mental model	Reader uses several features of the text to build a larger mental model	Text
7	Understanding text function	Reader uses genre knowledge to identify text structure and purpose	Text

Reading and difficulty

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

- The table appears on page 5 of this report. Though we are only focussing on page 5 here, the rest of the report is well worth reading.

- The table shows that the type of task we ask our students to complete affects the level of difficulty of our assessment tasks.

Copyright: Matt Wright

Task

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

Copyright: Matt Wright

- Analyse a reading assessment task you have used with students, using the framework outlined by Bax.

- What kind of processes does the task require?

- How difficult is the task?

Level and difficulty

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

- We have provided a way of determining difficulty for reading tasks. Other authors have written about similar issues relating to the other skills.

- In essence, it is important to remember the task and the text length combine to create task difficulty.

Assessing level

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

- It is difficult to discuss assessing level in isolation.

- We would recommend you work with colleagues to discuss your ideas of level and to consider ways of coming to agreement about level.

- This type of agreement can be referred to as standardisation.

Copyright: Matt Wright

Standardisation

University of
HUDDERSFIELD
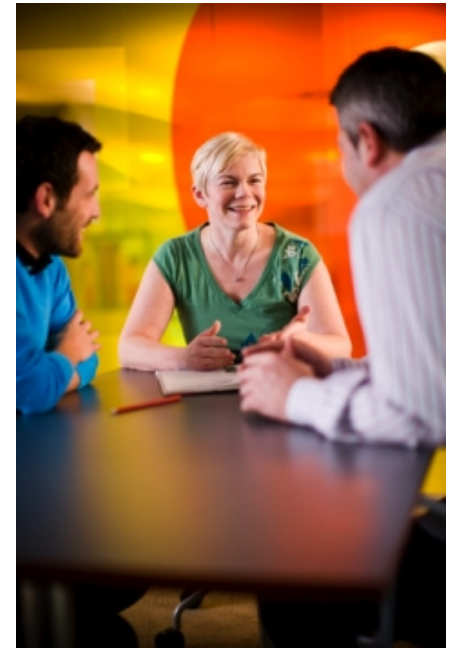
- The term standardisation can be controversial in EFL. Some argue that standards can be reductive (see Hulstijn, 2007).

- If you decide you want to engage in a standardisation process, there follows some steps which you may consider undertaking.

Copyright: Matt Wright

Standardisation

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

Copyright: Matt Wright

- Gather colleagues together in one room for a day.

- Discuss and agree the standard to be used for the session. This could be the CEFR or it could be another framework (such as the Canadian benchmarks)

Standardisation

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

Copyright: Matt Wright

- Look at the level descriptors of the framework you have chosen. Discuss with your colleagues the range of levels and completeness of the descriptors.

- Use the descriptors to self-assess your levels of language proficiency in any languages which you know.

Standardisation

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

- For example, using the CEFR, I would assess my spoken Italian as C1 but written Italian is a B2 level. My reading level in French is A2 but my spoken level is A1.

- Self-assessing is a good way to develop your understanding of levels.

- In groups compare your self-assessments.

Copyright: Matt Wright

Standardisation

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

- Look at a range of assessment tasks used in your school. Discuss together the difficulty level of the task and evaluate if it is appropriate for your teaching context.

- Look at a range of student texts and discuss the level of each. Discuss the factors which helped you to come to your decisions.

- Look at your organisation's curriculum documents. With colleagues work together to create test specifications for level tests. Watch this video if you are not familiar with the term.

- With the specifications you will be able to write tests whilst working to a common standard.

Conclusions

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

- In this module we have discussed level and the CEFR. We have seen that level is not a straightforward issue. We have provided practical suggestions and resources to help guide you through the minefield.

Copyright: Matt Wright

What next?

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

Copyright: Matt Wright

You have now finished these materials on assessing level. We hope you have found them useful and enjoyable. If you are interested in learning more about assessment, please look at our other materials on:

- Assessment for Learning
- Assessing Young Learners
- Language Assessment for Teachers
- Assessment Resources

References

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

- Council for Cultural Co-operation. Education Committee, & Council of Europe. (2001). *Common european framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Bax, S.(2013) Readers' cognitive processes during IELTS reading tasks: evidence from eye tracking. London: British Council

- Fulcher, G. (2004). Deluded by artifices? The Common European Framework and harmonization. *Language Assessment Quarterly* 1.4, 253–266.

- Hulstijn, J. H. (2007). The shaky ground beneath the CEFR: Quantitative and qualitative dimensions of language proficiency. *The Modern Language Journal, 91*(4), 663-667. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4781.2007.00627_5.x