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Facilitating Coordination through the Use of *can do* Statements and the CEFR

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Abstract：

This paper discusses issues arising from "*Can do* statements in language education in Japan and beyond" publication [Schmidt et al., 2010]. The origins of this publication can be traced to the observation that many language educators are not aware of how to use *can do* statements effectively. It is generally argued that *can do* statements can facilitate language education in a positive and transparent way. One aim of the publication is to give specific ideas and resources for educators to bring into classrooms. The paper begins by introducing *can do* statements and the related pedagogic tools in question, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the European Language Portfolio (ELP). Rather than adopting a dogmatic stance on the use of these tools, this paper is aimed at those who are interested in implementing *can do* statements etc. in their specific situation. The main body of the paper outlines specific examples of how pedagogical efficiency and transparency in language learning programmes can be created and implemented with the help of these tools. Examples include modifying university-wide English programme based on outcome statements, language activities and tasks based on the CEFR. In such a programme, modifying *can do* statements to reflect the specific context and engaging the cooperation of stakeholders is imperative. Another example is reaching out to the part-time teachers by providing special funding for meetings to develop a coordinated programme. It is likely that resistance will always be present and it must be realized that a top-down implementation approach can be difficult; there must be gradual innovative steps at the classroom level through the actions of individual teachers. A basis for such bottom-up innovation is presented through the learning cycle of self-assessment, goal-setting, task performance, and reflection with *can do* statements and learner involvement at the centre. The paper moves onto dealing with possible implementation of such practices in language programmes for language majors at the university level. The paper concludes by argning for the need for enthusiastic practitioners and institutions to create publicly available resources and examples of good practice.

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Keywords : *can do* statements, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), curriculum coordination, bottom-up implementation, examples of good practice

1 Introduction

The co-editors, this writer included, of the "*Can do* statements in language education in Japan and beyond" publication [Schmidt et al., 2010, see http://tinyurl.com/ CDSLEJB for more information] are all members of the Framework & Language Portfolio Special Interest Group (FLP SIG). The FLP SIG was established within the Japan Association of Language Teaching (JALT) association to bring forward issues and practices regarding the use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages [CEFR; Council of Europe [COE], 2001], the European Language Portfolio (ELP) and other related pedagogic tools. A recurring theme of discussion at the FLP SIG events has been that people are not always aware of how to effectively use these resources, particularly *can do* statements in classes and institutions. It is important to realise that these *can do* statements must be adapted and changed to suit the specific context they serve. The publication, with the principal aim to give specific ideas and resources for educators to bring into classrooms, includes 4 papers from contributors based in Europe and 18 papers from Japan-based contributors. This present paper will outline some of the major findings from the volume, with a particular emphasis on elucidating how these tools can bring transparency and coordination to language education programmes. More specifically, the writer presents specific examples of how this has been attempted in various contexts before suggesting future progressions in language education in Japan.

2. *Can do* statements

For purposes of clarification, this section [based on Imig & O'Dwyer, 2010] explains the general use of *can do* statements and related tools. *Can do* statements (e.g. *I can take part in routine formal discussion on familiar subjects in my academic or professional field if it is conducted in clearly articulated speech in standard dialect*) can be defined as descriptions of the competence of an individual language user. Description of language competence has been an ongoing project since the beginning of communicative language teaching. Positive *can do* descriptions of an individual competence is exceedingly simple, but is a breakthrough in the tradition of language teaching. Before the *can do* descriptions were developed, native-like language competence was the goal of language teaching. In other words, it was the era of *can't dos*, the description of what was lacking from a native-like competence.

Can do descriptions can be used in various linguistic contexts. Proponents believe that the underlying principles of the *can do* approach can be applied to any language learning situation and its tools were designed with this aim in mind. In the classroom, they facilitate and link a learning cycle of self-assessment, goal-setting, task performance and reflection. In curriculum planning, *can do* statements could provide an integrative, transparent tool to provide language education in a positive way. In language testing, they could provide a valid means of comparison between results of different tests. I will briefly introduce the CEFR and ELP with the aim of focusing on the principles and practices underlying the use of *can do* statements.

Generally, the development of the CEFR is closely linked to the development of the communicative approach in language teaching dating from the 1960s. For the approaches underlying the development of the CEFR see Green [2010] and Little [2010]. In the early 1990s a group of European language course providers began working together to find solutions to the well-known problem: how can we communicate and how can we understand what kind and what degree of language knowledge can be certified through a particular examination result, diploma, or certificate? They resolved that an extensive, coherent, and transparent reference system to describe communicative language competences was to be developed. To that end the Swiss project carried out between 1993 and 1996, aimed to develop transparent statements of language proficiency. Over 300 teachers and 2,800 learners from approximately 500 classes were involved in this project, for a summary of the procedures adopted see the CEFR document [COE, 2001: 217–225] and Imig and O'Dwyer [2010]. As a result, the CEFR can fairly claim to be the most comprehensive toolkit of its kind that has yet been devised, and the first to present proficiency scales that are based in part on empirical research.

The CEFR document is certainly more than a collection of *can do* statements, but it is strongly identified with its scales of language proficiency. The CEFR describes six levels of language-proficiency. Levels A1 and A2 refer to the basic user; B1 and B2 levels, the independent user; and C1 and C2, the proficient user [see COE, 2001: 23]. Examples of certifications of language proficiency that have been linked to the CEFR include STEP BULATS and the Cambridge suite of examinations for the English language, the Diplomas de Español como Lengua Extranjera (DELE) for the Spanish language, and the Goethe-Institut's German language examinations (Goethe-Zertifikat A1-C2). The CEFR is much more than a tool for certification systems or just one scale, there are 64 different scales (e.g. a scale for Sustained Monologue: Describing Experience) covering several domains (spheres of action or areas of concern), situations or tasks. There are 400 *can do* statements in the CEFR document which have been

validated through repeated studies. The validation process is ongoing, especially for language examinations. In general the CEFR document is a complex document mainly to be used as a reference tool for language educators.

The ELP, conceived in conjunction with CEFR in 1991, was developed for the language learner. It is designed to be a reflective learning tool to implement the CEFR and action-oriented curriculums. Pilot projects were carried out from 1998 to 2000. By 2010, 107 ELPs had been validated from 26 COE members and four international non-governmental organizations. The ELP designed for use in university language education by the European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education (CercleS) is used by 250 language centres in 21 countries. The guiding principles of the ELP are the following: it is the property of the learner; it values competence in a positive way; it promotes learning inside and outside the classroom; it takes a lifelong perspective on the learning of languages; and it is based on the CEFR. The principal aim of the ELP is to motivate students to take responsibility for their own learning by facilitating self-evaluation and the setting of clear goals for language learning. The FLP SIG have developed the bilingual (English/Japanese) *Language Portfolio for Japanese University* (LP), based on the CercleS ELP mentioned above, and a teacher's manual. This LP is available for public download (see http://sites.google.com/site/flpsig for more information).

The LP allows teachers and learners to plan for, reflect on, and record progress in learning activities. See Little [2010] for a general introduction to the pedagogical implementation of the ELP. The LP consists of 3 parts:

1. The Language Passport: The main goal of the Language Passport is to help students assess their competencies in the language(s) being learned as well as the growth in these competencies. Learners may also record learning and intercultural experiences here.

2. The Language Biography: The Language Biography is used to set learning targets and regularly assess progress in order to develop the learner's sense of responsibility for the learning process.

3. The Dossier: This is used to store samples of work to provide evidence of language learning competencies and progress to the learner, teachers or others. In the language passport, learners periodically summarise their proficiency using the self-assessment grid (CEFR).

Each skill is further broken into checklists of *can do* statements or tasks for each level and skill. These Goal-setting and Self-assessment Checklists of *can do* statements (see Figure 1, taken from the *Language Portfolio for Japanese University*, for an

example) can be used when the first-time user is unsure of his or her level during self-assessment and later to identify learning targets, select learning activities and materials, monitor learning progress, and evaluate learning outcomes (formative self-assessment).

Figure 1. A Goal-setting and Self-assessment Checklist

Goal-setting and Self-assessment Checklist
Language:_____ Skill: ▷◁ Spoken interaction やりとり

This is a checklist of SPOKEN INTERACTION skills drawn from the illustrative scales in the Common European Framework. Use this checklist (a) to set personal learning goals and (b) to record your progress in achieving these goals. Decide what evaluative criteria you want to use in the three right hand columns, and enter dates to record your progress.

For example:　　I can do this *reasonably well **well ***very well
I can do this *with a lot of help **with a little help ***on my own

Evaluative Criteria: *_____ **_____ **_____

Level B1	Next goal	*	**	***
I can readily handle conversation on most topics that are familiar or of personal interest, with generally appropriate use of register				
I can sustain an extended conversation or discussion but may sometimes need a little help in communicating my thoughts				
I can take part in routine formal discussion on familiar subjects in my academic or professional field if it is conducted in clearly articulated speech in standard dialect				
I can exchange, check and confirm factual information on familiar routine and non-routine matters within my field with some confidence				
I can agree and disagree politely, exchange personal opinions, negotiate decisions and ideas				
I can express and respond to feelings and attitudes (e.g. surprise, happiness, sadness, interest, uncertainty, indifference)				
I can express my thoughts about abstract or cultural topics such as music or films, and give brief comments on the views of others				
I can explain why something is a problem, discuss what to do next, compare and contrast alternatives				
I can obtain detailed information, messages, instructions and explanations, and can ask for detailed directions				

Note that the checklists do not claim to be exhaustive. For each proficiency level, other tasks or activities can be specified (users can add their own in the blank spaces at the end of each section). One need not be able to perform all the tasks or activities in order to achieve the level in question. If, for example, the speaker can perform approximately 80% of the items on the list for A2 Spoken Interaction, he or she has probably achieved that level in terms of the self-assessment grid. It is important to be aware that such lists of *can do* statements and use of the CEFR must be adapted and changed to suit the specific context they serve.

3 Use of *can do* statements for coordination in language learning programmes
3.1 Influence of the CEFR

Parmenter & Byram [2010] give an overview of some of the ways in which the CEFR has exerted an influence within and beyond Europe so far. Some reasons for the impact of the CEFR include that it can be used in various ways to support and bolster national priorities, and it emphasizes success rather than failure in language learning. On the other hand some criticisms of the CEFR include an over-emphasis on the levels and the 'foreignness' of the CEFR in non-European contexts. Similarly, some in Japan would argue that the CEFR is for the European context and therefore not suited to the Japanese language education. Others would say that we should adopt the CEFR grid to suit Japan. See Naganuma [2010] for a report on the CEFRjapan project which involves the modification of the *can do* descriptors so as to render them more familiar to Japanese learners. 30 years of research has gone into the CEFR and it is primarily a tool for transparency, it is a type of ruler that can be used to measure all language learning. Of course, learning programmes should be adopted to suit the learners and specific situations. This can be achieved by adopting and manipulating the *can do* statements of the *Goal-setting and Self-assessment Checklists* of the ELP (refer to section 2 above). The large range of *can do* statements and related practices being implemented in Japan as described by Naganuma [2010) and Majima [2010] are witness to this. Parmenter and Byram conclude that, it must be made fully aware that the CEFR is much more than a set of lists of levels of language proficiency. This brings us to focus on principles and practices underlying the use of the CEFR, the ELP and *can do* statements. For the writer, many of the papers in the volume show how these tools can bring transparency and coordination to language education programmes. I will focus on specific examples of how this has been attempted in various contexts.

3.2 Examples of good practice from Europe

Smith [2010] asserts that the benefits of using the CEFR is that it is valid (as can

be seen from the report on the Swiss project above), it is practical (as its "action oriented approach" and *can do* statements is all about acquiring real abilities that have been observed to characterize meaningful levels), and it can improve language programme performances. He discusses the Catholic University of Leuven's Institute voor Levende Tallen (Institute for Living Languages) in Belgium as an example. All courses have specific CEFR objectives and times for reaching them that are displayed for all to see, as well as the grammar and vocabulary for each sub-goal. A nearly exhaustive report for each level has been compiled and is updated regularly. This acts as a reference for instuctors seeking ways to teach a given skill at a given level in a given language. Innovative teaching materials can be introduced, of course, as long as they support the program's stated CEFR achievement goals. This system also allows for "coordination" of teachers without them having to meet regularly.

Sormunen et al. [2010] provide ideas of how individuals can work together to bring the strengths of the CEFR to the fore and to foster effective learners through a Quality Development of German Teachers at the Language Centres of Finnish Universities. The QualiDaF project aims to develop quality in the area of oral skills at the language centres of Finnish universities. The language centres of Finnish universities co-operate within FINELC, the Network of Finnish University Language Centres, to strengthen their connectedness, to build upon their common strengths and to use the possibilities given by the wider community to develop and "control quality" in language teaching. The FINELC co-ordination project LAAKEA (2007−2009) provided a framework for the practice of quality control, in concrete terms of quality, development and evaluation in the teaching of language, culture and communication skills to university students. The QualiDaF project was part of the LAAKEA project (this acronym comes from the theme of "*Laa*tu, *ke*hittäminen ja *a*rviointi kaikille yliopisto-opiskelijoille tarkoitetuissa kieli-, kulttuuri- ja viestintäopinnoissa" in Finnish which translates as "Quality, development and assessment in language, culture and communication studies for all university students") and deals with quality control in oral skills teaching and assessing of German for special purposes to Finnish university students. Twenty German teachers from language centres at Finnish universities and comparable institutions were involved in the project. The preparation of the project began in the spring of 2007, the actual work within the LAAKEA project started in January 2008 and in the end of 2009, the project work was accomplished resulting in learning outcome descriptions and the assessment criteria for the three designated tasks, presentations, job interviews and verbal descriptions of diagrams and tables at levels A2, B1 and B2 were edited. This was preceded by workshops on the assessment of oral skills and calibration of standardized assessment criteria with the help of videos recorded at the language

centres

Some would argue that these examples put the emphasis on teachers, whereas a culture of self-assessment puts the learner at the centre. Little [2010] presents an example from Ireland where, rather than merely align existing materials etc. with the CEFR levels they interpreted the curricula from the perspective of the CEFR. The aim of Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT, a not-for-profit campus company of Trinity College Dublin, Ireland devised to support the teaching of English as a second language to the large numbers of immigrant pupils admitted to Irish primary and post-primary schools since the late 1990s) was to support learner involvement in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of learning against the metric provided by the CEFR's common reference levels.

These English language support classes are intended to facilitate immigrant pupils' involvement in mainstream curriculum learning. The classes give teachers an opportunity to provide additional explanation and reinforcement and to engage newcomer pupils in more sustained interaction than is typically possible in a mainstream class of perhaps 30 pupils. The theme and focus of English language classes are largely determined by what is going on in the mainstream classroom. IILT made a close study of the multi-volume primary curriculum and worked with two teacher focus groups to identify thirteen recurrent curriculum themes (myself; our school; food and clothes; etc.) that gradually evolve into the subjects of the senior primary and post-primary curricula. IILT also decided to adapt the first three levels of the CEFR (A1–B1) *can do* descriptors for the different communicative activities in the CEFR's self-assessment grid and illustrative scales were compared with the results of observations carried out in a number of primary classrooms. Then a summary of the proficiency targets for the three levels was written for the activities of listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, and writing. This yielded the so-called "global benchmarks of communicative proficiency," presented in the form of a grid (five activities at three levels). The CEFR's competence scales for vocabulary, grammar, phonology and orthography provided the basis for a second grid that in very simple terms plots the growth of those four dimensions of underlying linguistic competence. Finally, the global benchmarks were rewritten in terms of the recurrent curriculum themes to produce thirteen thematically oriented grids, known as "units of work." The principal implementation tool for the benchmarks is a version of the ELP at the centre of which are thirteen checklists of *can do* descriptors derived from the benchmarks, one for each recurrent curriculum theme. Altogether the checklists comprise almost two hundred tasks, all of them related to curriculum learning and spread across the three proficiency levels of the benchmarks: a developing communicative repertoire that gives

newcomer pupils steadily increasing access to what is going on in their mainstream classroom. Teachers were quick to accept the benchmarks and the ELP. The former reflected their experience of learner progression in the language support classroom and helped them to plan their classes and monitor their pupils' progress; while the latter provided a ready means not only of mediating the ESL curriculum to pupils but also of making them aware of their progress. In addition, the ELP quickly became an important source of information for mainstream class teachers, school principals, parents and inspectors. In due course, IILT developed simple communicative tests that are based on the benchmarks and comprise communicative tasks that are continuous with everyday classroom activity. In this way the circle is closed: the checklists in the ELP mediate the English L2 curriculum to learners; achieved *can do* descriptors form the learner's communicative self-portrait in English L2; and the tests confirm the self-portrait's accuracy. This example creates the close interdependence between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment that the CEFR implies.

Little however, somewhat pessimistically, feels that implementation and widespread adoption of pedagogical procedures on a large scale remains elusive. Initiatives are most likely to succeed if generally accepted *can do* checklists serve as the key reference point for processes of reflective teaching/learning in which self-assessment plays a central role. In national education systems this situation is unlikely to change until the ELP is supported on the one hand by curricula whose communicative content is expressed in "*can do*" terms, and on the other hand by assessment procedures, whether external or school-based, that are shaped by the same criteria as self-assessment that uses *can do* checklists. However the university sector offers greater hope because of the autonomy that universities traditionally enjoy. In the following section I will concentrate on examples within language education in Japan.

3.3 Examples of good practice from universities in Japan

Some of the papers in the volume suggest from practical experience how to handle curriculum change in order to create more pedagogical efficiency and transparency across curriculums in the same institution. Nagai [2010] illustrates how to adapt CEFR into a specific context for curriculum/course development. The Integrated English Program (IEP) in Ibaraki University is a university-wide general education program. The program was developed to solve problems such as the absence of established goals or outcomes for students' English levels, and the lack of course sequencing for courses so that there was no opportunity to build upon skills learned the semester before. In 2002 they modified the outcome statements of IEP using the self-assessment grid of CEFR. However these course descriptors provided no more than the overview of

expected learning outcomes of the IEP curriculum. They were not concrete enough for teachers to plan and design actual classroom instructions nor for students to monitor their learning. In 2006, the IEP working group developed more concrete learning outcomes for each level. The group created elaborate *can do* lists for each level. As a result, expected learning outcomes, which state what learners *can do* to reach the goals of the course were created and became essential components of the course design. They are the basis on which daily classroom tasks and language activities are decided as well as textbooks and other teaching materials are selected. They are also the basis for both teacher-assessment and self-assessment. Learners monitor their own learning progress and reflect on their own learning process. Outcome statements, thus, must be detailed, concrete, and transparent descriptions. Before drawing up such outcome statements, language activities necessary to perform tasks were specified. This involved defining exactly what is involved in a *can do* statement by modifying and adding to the original *can do* statement from the CEFR checklist. See an example in Figure 2 below for a spoken production course (words in italics indicate the original statement for which modification is needed and words in bold indicate the resultant modification. Additions to the *can do* statements are underlined.)

Figure 2. Example of a modified outcome statement

Spoken production (B1)
Can give prepared straightforward presentations *on a familiar topic within his/her field* → **on the safety of cellphones, environmental issues, and the topics of his/her concern** which are clear enough to be followed without difficulty most of the time, and in which the main points are explained with reasonable precision, <u>using PowerPoint</u>. Can take follow up questions, but may have to ask for repetition if the speech was rapid.

Nagai notes that, for many institutions, it is ideal to develop a university-wide English program like IEP. However, because such curriculum development involves negotiations with different types of people in an institution, such as top administrators, curriculum committee members, and teachers of English, it is not easily carried out. One person alone (whether administrator, teacher, or committee chair) cannot achieve a fully developed curriculum. However, if one teacher designs his/her own class using *can do* lists based on CEFR, that effort will constitute part of a wider curriculum development inside and outside a university. One of the greatest merits of using *can do* lists as tools for class design and for achieving specific outcomes is the model they provide for future collaborative work in developing a coherent English curriculum. Her paper shows how the CEFR and *can do* statements can be used to bring transparency and coherency to learning programmes. However, one problem Nagai has noted is the

difficulty in involving part-time instructors.

Krause-Ono [2010] also shows how the CEFR and *can do* statements can be used to bring transparency and coherency to learning programmes. In the Muroran Institute of Technology (where 600 first year students have to choose between Chinese, German, and Russian) the instructors of the three languages collaborated to produce similar *can do* lists based on the CEFR for the curriculum of the three languages. Each language has its own idiosyncrasies and different order in which new subjects are introduced, in short, its own steps to progress. Therefore, it is necessary for each language to develop their own *can do* lists based on a Japanese language template. Seven part-time instructors of Chinese and Russian collaborated over the span of one year in developing the teaching materials; at the beginning of the collaboration, none of the instructors had ever heard of *can do* lists. The coordinator reached out to the part-time teachers by providing information and training regarding the use of the CEFR, and special funding for meetings/workshops, transportation, and special payments for developing the new teaching materials. This was found to be the key for the successful and well-implemented programmes. At the end of the process, learning guidelines and also the learning content of each language were coordinated. Since April 2010, all instructors use the same material within the teaching of each language. In each language, they also proceed and progress approximately in the same way and speed. I believe similar practices (classes proceeding in the same way and speed) are being implemented in the Russian Language Department of the School of Foreign Studies in Osaka University. Two of the German language contributions from practitioners based in Japan [Imig, 2010; Vögel & Hopf, 2010] continue this theme with coordinated textbooks and programmes for complete beginners.
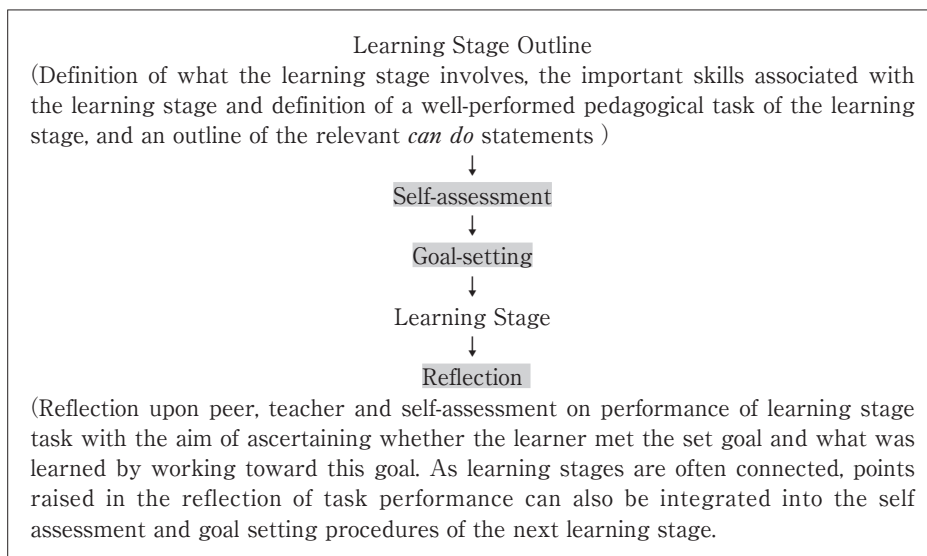
Sargent & Winward-Stuart [2010] outline similar efforts in a large English conversation organization. The project lasted seven years and encompassed the adaptation of a set of *can do* criteria, the levelling and assessment of roughly 17,000 students, the retraining of nearly 1,000 teachers, and the creation of over a thousand new lessons spanning more than twenty textbooks. Overall, it was determined that *can do* based assessment is more effective in accurately determining a student's abilities and that *can do* based assessment systems are easier to teach from. They feel there will always be resistance within an organization and efforts will have to be taken to persuade students to accept *can do* based assessment, but the rewards are well worth it.

Majima [2010] gives an interesting insight into the background and philosophy underlining education in Japan (traditionally students have been trained to be receptive, quiet, diligent, and respectful of teachers) and how the ethos of the ELP do not

necessarily comply. Parmenter & Byram [2010] note some values underlying the CEFR and the ELP indicate that the role of the learner in language education is central, and that the role of the teacher is to organize and motivate learning. Horiguchi et al. [2010] reported survey results outlining the resistance to large-scale implementation of an ELP based learning initiative in Japan. In April 2006, a five-year research project was launched at the Keio Research Center for Foreign Language Education, jointly financed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science, and Technology (MEXT) and Keio itself. The research project, as its name "Action Oriented Plurilingual Learning Project" (AOP project) suggests, places its aims on promoting an "action-oriented," "autonomous" learning environment of multiple foreign languages. It also aims to promote the continuity and transparency of foreign language education at all levels of the Keio educational system- which consists of one elementary school, three junior high schools, five senior high schools, and ten university departments- and to achieve collaboration among its language teachers. In order to achieve these goals, the AOP project proposes to develop a learning and assessment framework based on the CEFR and to adapt it for the Keio context. One of the central, ongoing research initiatives within the AOP project has thus been tentatively developing a Japanese version of the European Language Portfolio (ELP)-Junior version- to be distributed to foreign language teachers in the various Keio schools. Some comments from the survey note that the ELP is for learners in Europe who have contact with foreign languages on a daily basis and it is based on the European, plurilingual ideal. This suggests the ELP should be adapted in class to suit the context of the learner. There has been a continual tension between the communicative and the literary approaches with the latter likely to resist such measures. They note that in the case of Keio, reform in foreign language education is likely to occur not in a top-down manner but through gradual innovative steps that occur at the classroom level through the actions of individual teachers. The ELP should be left ambiguous and flexible, so that teachers can add things as they like. A top-down approach can be difficult, and teachers may become more open to change if models of how the teacher actually uses ELP in the classroom are demonstrated.

A basis for bottom-up implementation of the ELP is presented by the learning cycle used by O'Dwyer [2010], see Figure 3 below.

Figure 3 Procedures of the learning cycle and a learning stage

Learning Stage Outline
(Definition of what the learning stage involves, the important skills associated with the learning stage and definition of a well-performed pedagogical task of the learning stage, and an outline of the relevant *can do* statements)
↓
Self-assessment
↓
Goal-setting
↓
Learning Stage
↓
Reflection
(Reflection upon peer, teacher and self-assessment on performance of learning stage task with the aim of ascertaining whether the learner met the set goal and what was learned by working toward this goal. As learning stages are often connected, points raised in the reflection of task performance can also be integrated into the self assessment and goal setting procedures of the next learning stage.

In the first procedure, the learning stage outline procedure, the instructor goes through the textbook learning stage defining what it involves and what are the related *can do* statements from the *Goal-setting and Self-assessment Checklists* of the appropriate skill and level. This of course may be done with the learner group. The instructor could then encourage the learner group to generate and define exactly what is necessary when approaching the learning stage. For example, for a learning stage from one of the writers class with a presentation as the main task (and the relevant *can do* statement for the Spoken Production skill at level B2: *I can give a short presentation in a clear and precise manner, highlighting significant points and providing relevant supporting detail*) the instructor asks the question *What is an effective presentation?* Some of the answers from the groups include: *good body language (pointing, gestures); speak loud and clear (with good speed and rhythm); use positive, attractive, interesting and emotive words; emphasize important points slowly and precisely (repeating keywords is good); use well prepared examples and points with enough details; make the presentation visual and attractive (reading a script is not interesting); the explanations should be easy to understand and logical.* The instructor follows up with the question "*in the presentation, how can I efficiently highlight the significant points and provide relevant supporting details?*" Some of the answers from the groups include: "*use visual (graphics, pictures, facial expressions) and sound effects; try to have a clear voice and pronunciation; use easy to understand words; be logical; ask questions to guide the audience; provide and emphasize significant point; always provide relevant supporting details like examples and figures; thoroughly prepare and explain in a clear way so that all audience members can*

easily understand".

Using this learner-generated information, the instructor could complete the following peer-teacher and self assessment rubric (Figure 4) of the learning stage presentation task. The instructor also tries to integrate the relevant *can do* statements into the assessment rubric.

Figure 4 Peer, self and teacher assessment rubric for a presentation task

> **1** The <u>data</u> was clearly presented with important points emphasized appropriately
>
> No 1 2 3 4 5 Yes
>
> **2** The <u>presentation</u> was clear, visual, attractive and well-prepared
>
> No 1 2 3 4 5 Yes
>
> **3** The <u>body language</u> and <u>voice quality</u> helped me understand
>
> No 1 2 3 4 5 Yes
>
> **4** The <u>explanations</u> were easy to understand and logical with examples when necessary.
>
> No 1 2 3 4 5 Yes
>
> **The presenter can give a short presentation in a clear and precise manner, highlighting significant points and providing relevant supporting detail**
>
> *(reasonably well) **(well) ***(very well)   Total: /20
>
> Comments and advice:_____

One aim of the approach of learners contributing to the assessment criteria is to develop the skill of defining exactly what is necessary when approaching a learning task - this is immensely important when learners face language challenges in their future. With the content and assessment of the learning stage clearly outlined, the class move to the self assessment procedure where the learners are asked to self assess for an appropriate *can do* statement. In the learning stage noted above, the learners are asked *How well can you give a short presentation in a clear and precise manner, highlighting significant points and providing relevant supporting detail * reasonably well, ** well, or ***very well?* For example, if a learner self-assesses their competency in being able to do the relevant *can do* statement as reasonably well (*) the goal then becomes to be able to do it well (**). This self-assessment procedure segues directly into the goal-setting procedure using a learning target sheet of the ELP filled in with relevant information above and individual improvement points. Once they complete learning stage tasks, the learners receive the assessment rubrics, completed by peers and teacher who watched their presentation, to use in the reflection procedure.

This approach, as well as the practices outlined by Nagai [2010], is congruent with Diamond [2008], who emphasizes that the essential relationship among goals, outcomes, and assessment should be kept constant when designing a language learning curriculum, course or learning stage.

Horiguchi et al, [2010] found the in compatibility of self assessment practice in the predominantly teacher-centred classroom in the Japanese educational context to be

problematic. Sato [2010] developed a programme where learners were provided with self-assessment and metacognitive training. The procedure was as follows:

1）Initial completion of the task-specific *Goal-setting and Self-assessment Checklist*

2）Initial performance of the task

3）Instruction and awareness-raising on features of "good" communicative performance and relevant communication strategies

4）Introduction and practice of relevant communication strategies

5）Practice of the task

6）Second completion of the checklist

7）Review, the second performance of the task and the third completion of the checklist

Such learning practices can go toward effective implementation of practices suggested by the CEFR and the ELP and, in turn, possibly facilitate lifelong learning.

4. Programmes for language majors

I will now consider the possible implementation of such practices in language programmes for language majors at the university level. Smith [2010] outlines a programme where students have seven English classes in the first year (three taught by native teachers) and five in the second year (at least two taught by native teachers). Instructors choose how closely they want to adhere to CEFR for the language classes they teach in first and second year, and to some extent, later years. It would be possible for instructors to come together and assign relevant *can do* statements to each of the above courses so progression through the programme, and related learning outcomes and goals are transparent.

Furthermore, students currently complete a bilingual WebCT/Blackboard-based version of the *can do* checklists. This will give learners a rough idea of their levels/profiles. If a class is to focus on speaking and listening, for example, and the vast majority of the class affirm the A2 cells for speaking and listening and none of the B1 cells, then the teacher can examine the level B1 *can do* statements for speaking and listening and decide which ones to try to deliver during the course based on intuition. The instructor could also enquire for more details about disaffirmed *can do* statements of high priority to students.

Smith continues that if learner groups consist of different levels, as is often the case, one way to satisfy all of the students is to use assignments/tasks that can be done in different ways, according to students' levels, as reflected by their affirmed *can do* statements. For example, students of different levels can listen to a news programme in different ways, focusing on the main points or detail, and then write a reaction in a

listening journal, which they then relate to discussion group members in class. By observing class discussions and comparing student journals and discussions with students' *can do* checklists, a teacher can judge if the student is listening and discussing in a suitably challenging way.

If such practices are suitably combined with suggestions by Krause-Ono [2010], Little [2010], Nagai [2010], and O'Dwyer [2010] among others above then this coordination amongst teachers and classroom procedures will be a solid example for language education in Japan. Of course instructors are encouraged to work according to their own teaching style and teaching materials while guiding students toward transparent and empirically validated goals based on the CEFR.

5. Conclusion

O'Dwyer [2010] argues the aims of the learning cycle of self-assessment, goal-setting and reflection implied by the ELP is to make visible the process and content of L2 learning that is shaped by the principles of learner involvement, learner reflection and target language use. It is fair to say that there is a large focus on standardized testing in Japan with long-standing concerns about the distortion of the curriculum to accommodate such high-stakes testing. Research does not support the view that this can be relied on alone to raise standards while contextualized formative assessment has been shown to improve learning. Falsgraf (2009) goes on to promote tools that put assessment information in the hands of the learners themselves as an important first step in placing value on language proficiency and in helping the wider society interpret and understand that value. I would put a focus on transparent systems and practices that could enable learners to be autonomous (for example the practices developed by Sato [2010] in sections 3.3 above). It is hoped that these values can inform and underline practices that will emerge in the future. For this vision to be realised, there needs to be dialogue, coordination and accommodation amongst educators at the grassroots level of institutions and course construction.

In summarizing her paper, Majima [2010] notes that the universality and commonality of the CEFR has been widely accepted in the globe. We need to be aware when we accept CEFR, that a "paradigm shift" is more or less involved in language education settings in Japan and elsewhere. Parmenter & Byram [2010] conclude that once the CEFR is up for discussion in the dominant circles of education policy, it will be the task of researchers/educators to ensure that policy-makers are fully aware that the CEFR is much more than a set of lists of levels of language proficiency. The underlying principles and practices outlined in section 3 need to be taken on board and adjusted to suit the context of the learners. Majima continues more discussions and practices

including action research are called for.

Green [2010] notes that schemes that seek to engage teachers and learners will be more likely to succeed by allowing them scope to set their own targets and by providing opportunities for them to contribute materials and sample performances from their own contexts for collective moderation. Horiguchi et al. [2010] argue that there must be gradual innovative steps that occur at the classroom level through the actions of individual teachers rather than top-down practices.

All this suggests that enthusiastic practitioners and institutions should collaborate to create publicly available resources and examples of good practice. The completely free and downloadable European Centre for Modern Languages projects (such as the ELP implementation support project and the Training teachers to use the European Language Portfolio project, see http://elp.ecml.at/) could act as templates for such initiatives. Projects, based on the Qualidaf project [Sormunen et al., 2010], could develop learning outcome descriptions and calibration of standardized assessment criteria based on CEFR level and skill. To complement this, a database of ideas and lesson plans divided by level and skill could be developed and made available [see Smith, 2010]. This could lead to the development of textbooks closely related to the underlying principles and practices encouraged by the CEFR and the ELP. The *Language Portfolio for Japanese University* (LP) could be improved and suitably contextualized based on research such as the CEFRjapan project. These are some possible bottom-up, action research type activities that could be pursued in the future.

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