

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and Pearson's *Échos Pro*

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) provides a clear and coherent way of describing and assessing language proficiency. The framework was developed by the Council of Europe after over 30 years of examining language teaching, learning and assessment and is used in many countries to provide a universally understood lexicon. Language proficiency is defined in six broad levels, from basic to proficient, against which a learner's progress can be measured by learners themselves and by teachers. This framework has been recommended as a common basis for describing and measuring language proficiency across Canada (Vandergrift, 2006; Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2010) and is informing the current development of curricula, teaching resources and assessment tools.

Language proficiency is represented by positive *Can Do* statements that relate to understanding (listening, reading, viewing), speaking (production and interaction) and writing. These skills are developed in an integrated way but may be observed and measured separately. As learners advance in their learning, they reuse, reinvest and develop language and skills into gradually increasing yet recursive levels of achievement. The framework and associated language portfolio provide a means of identifying goals and monitoring progress.

A number of the CEFR's guiding principles are particularly pertinent to current practices in Canadian French second language (FSL) teaching and learning:

- an action-oriented approach where learners work together on purposeful tasks and language activities,
- the use of texts as a focus for language learning—print, audio, graphic and multi-media texts that learners use and produce,
- the activation of communication strategies to successfully complete tasks,
- the integration of cultural and intercultural understandings into all aspects of language learning,
- a balance of knowledge (*savoir*), skills and know-how (*savoir-faire*), awareness and attitudes (*savoir-être*) and the ability to learn (*savoir apprendre*),
- the use of *Can Do* descriptors to assess a learner's performance in each language skill.

The pedagogical approach in *Échos Pro* (including the *Échos* literacy series) aligns with the principles of the CEFR in a number of important ways:

Échos Pro is based on a pedagogical approach that emphasizes action-oriented communication tasks based on purposeful learning. Learners are engaged and motivated by meaningful, age-appropriate and cognitively challenging tasks and projects conducted collaboratively and individually. Topics and tasks that interest learners in their everyday lives form the basis of learning in the FSL classroom, and authentic inquiry into those topics affirms learners' interests and identities.

Échos Pro is a text-based resource built on the guiding principles established in Pearson's *Making Connections* which outlines a literacy approach to FSL teaching and learning. The linking of first and second language literacy learning and careful scaffolding for learners (and teachers) make *Échos Pro* unlike any other set of teaching resources, especially with its multi-media text formats, interactive features and web-based access. Exploring and producing print, audio, graphic, multi-media, electronic and other forms of text prepare learners for multiliterate futures.

Strategic learning supports all learning in *Échos Pro*. Comprehension, production and metacognitive strategies are activated by making explicit links to skills and knowledge that learners bring from their first and/or additional language/s and from their learning in other subject areas. These strategies are introduced and reinforced progressively throughout the modules through think-aloud modeling, shared, guided and independent practice and reflection, thus reinforcing the transfer of literacy skills and strategies – *what* they know and *how* they know – across languages and contexts. *Échos Pro* also teaches and reinforces cooperative learning strategies, based on values and skills, so that learners contribute to a safe and supportive environment where they can take risks when communicating in French.

Échos Pro values the multilingual and multicultural nature of Canadian classrooms by ensuring that learners see themselves and their linguistic and cultural backgrounds represented in the texts and are invited to reflect on and share their experiences. Cultural and intercultural understandings are developed in an integrative fashion both through clearly identified elements such as francophone people, locales and ways of life as well as more nuanced ways that address, among other elements, cultural influences on language. It is the development of knowledge, attitudes and, eventually, actions that enable students to become respectful citizens and effective communicators in a complex global society.

Learners develop much more than language proficiency in *Échos Pro*. They explore varied, engaging, multi-modal texts that provide rich learning opportunities (*savoir*) and learn how to activate strategies to support their use of texts and performance of authentic tasks (*savoir-faire*). Embedded cultural learning is designed to develop awareness and enhance attitudes (*savoir être*), and the setting of learning goals, monitoring of progress and guided reflection (*savoir apprendre*) place learners at the centre of their own learning. The *Échos Pro Guide* provides rich professional learning resources and tools for teachers as they implement the multi-layered pedagogy.

Échos Pro's illustrated *Je peux (I can)* statements related to learners' skills and strategies encourage them to take charge of and monitor their own learning. Learning goals are introduced in the opening page or screen of each module, revisited in assessment-for-learning moments throughout the teaching sequence, including just before and after the performance task, and then as part of the end-of-module reflection and self-assessment. Success criteria linked to the learning goals and instructional foci are introduced and reinforced – with clear information for teachers about how/when to provide differentiation for support and challenge – and revisited in assessment-of-learning opportunities near the end of each module. Evidence of learning is collected in a learner portfolio that tracks progress over time.

For more information about the CEFR:

A brief introduction to the CEFR, including a global self-assessment scale:

www.pearsonlongman.com/ae/cef/cefguide.pdf

The Council of Europe's (2011) *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*: www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf

References:

Council of Ministers of Education Canada (2010). *Working with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in the Canadian context: Guide for policy-makers and curriculum designers*. www.cmec.ca/Programs/assessment/Documents/CEFR-canadian-context.pdf

Vandergrift, L. (2006). *Proposal for a common framework of reference for languages for Canada*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Heritage.