Early language learning and teaching in England and in France
The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: a pathway to a common approach?

A paper presented by Patricia Monjo
Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres - Université Montpellier 2
Abstract

Since its publication in 2001, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF) developed over more than a decade by the Council of Europe has inspired both English and French governments in the field of language policies, particularly at primary level. In this regard, the year 2002 seems to be a landmark in the history of early language learning in both countries insofar as political discourses and initiatives were taken which gave languages a new dimension and placed them in the limelight: indeed, the same year France decided to make Modern Foreign Languages a compulsory subject for schoolchildren following many years of experimentation and England published its National Languages Strategy (Languages for All: Languages for Life, DfES, 2002) with early language learning as the cornerstone of a decisive plan for a big shift in attitudes.

Against the backdrop of European recommendations paving the way to harmonisation and a better understanding of the implications of language learning and teaching, England and France have developed their own way of interpreting the orientations made by the Council of Europe to the member states, linking with their respective educational environment and traditions. Understandably, the challenges of commonality and transparency in the field of languages met by the French and English governments not only have had an impact at the level of language policy but also on teacher training and on class materials.

This paper seeks to analyse some of the effects engendered by the adoption of the CEF by England and France on school practitioners and classroom materials. Our research focuses on the way that two traditionally different systems of education proceed to bridge the gap between political discourses (utilised to shape a vision of the new landscape for languages) and the reality of school experience. For instance, textbooks published in the post-CEF period both in England and in France collate evidence of different views and ways to achieve common objectives; they help explain deeply rooted approaches to language learning. On the other hand, practitioners’ knowledge about their interpretation of expectations is essential, they being prominent actors of change.

Specifically, two questions the author addresses to assess the impact of the CEF are: how helpful is this European tool in addressing the issue of plurilingualism? To what extent does this new model for language learning and teaching actually develop both linguistic and cultural competences in the face of its recent implementation? The comparison between England and France opens interesting perspectives as it draws on their specificities in the field of language learning and teaching and also helps to gain a better insight into the challenges of incorporating the CEF into their national curriculum.

Adopting a qualitative methodology, the research provides a case study of three English and three French textbooks (respectively from French and English publishers), firstly examining the extent to which the CEF figured in the consideration of the authors. Secondly, it considers how they embedded the principles of the CEF into the content of the book. The six textbooks were selected from classroom materials published in the years following the dissemination of the CEF in view of assessing some of its impact on methodology. This paper considers language learning activities for children as they provide a basis for comprehension. The research also provides a case study of three English teachers and their French counterparts, all taking part as host teachers in a bilateral programme between two higher education institutions in England and France. Semi-structured one to one and group interviews were conducted with these teachers in England and in France, to allow answers with a high degree of personalisation. The data was analysed thematically, drawing areas of similarity and difference in the ways in which they refer to their experiences of both schoolteachers and language teachers.

Drawing on this comparison, this paper sheds light on the discrepancy between the discourse of the language learner as represented within the CEF and the current obstacles of implementation. However, this paper also puts into relief the hope raised by the prospect of better sharing, accepting and understanding through the use of a common tool such as the CEF.

Key terms:
The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages – Modern Foreign Languages – Primary school
Introduction

Since its publication in 2001 during the European year of languages, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF) has gained momentum as a European standard of reference for language education and has gradually impacted the landscape for languages in Europe.

My presentation will focus particularly on early language learning both in England and in France. Indeed, both countries’ commitment to giving children a successful start in Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) and to developing their plurilingual capacities should be pursued along the lines of the orientations suggested in the CEF and recommended by the Council of Europe and the European Union.

I have precisely chosen to examine in which way the implementation of the CEF affects early language learning in the English and the French context. I will highlight 3 different levels:

1. the impact of the CEF on language policies
2. the impact of the CEF on course materials
3. the impact of the CEF on school practitioners

1-Level of language policies: the French and English governments are committed to measures and initiatives taken at a European level.

Both in England and in France, the year 2002 seems to be a beacon year in terms of language policies and governmental initiatives in the field of language learning and teaching in the primary school. Whether it be coined “a languages revolution” (as was the case in England, according to State Minister Catherine Ashton) or a logical evolution (as was the case in France), 2002 certainly reflected a vigorous determination to give new impetus to MFL at an early age for the two countries:

Even though early language learning was already part of the school routine in 2002 for a solid number of French schoolchildren (94% of children in Year 5 and 6 in the public sector were taught a foreign language in 2001-2002), Jack Lang (French Ministry of Education) decided to gradually extend language learning to Year 1 children and to make MFL a compulsory subject for the age group 5 to 10 (a six-year route for language learning). This revealed a revitalised determination to recognise the importance of developing language competences at school and to take it a step further.

Jack Lang’s vision of languages, as exposed in the address he gave on 29 January 2001, materialised in a core document published in 2002 by the Ministry of Education, which was designed to offer a reference tool for planning, teaching and monitoring the foreign language learning process. This document underlined that MFL should not be limited to mere sensitisation but should be considered as a fully-fledged subject with proper learning objectives, progression and evaluation to be developed in continuity with secondary school.

For the first time, the primary curriculum for MFL introduced the CEF and mentioned that all children were expected to reach A1 level before they went to secondary school:
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BERA 2008

CEF (level A1) – Adapted to schoolchildren

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understanding</th>
<th>Listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning himself/herself, his/her family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Spoken interaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help him/her formulate what he/she is trying to say. Can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoken production</td>
<td>Can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where he/she lives and people he/she knows Can use the past tense.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can write a short email, a short and simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. Can fill in very simple forms.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is worth noting that the can-do statements from the French grid were very much inspired by the self-assessment grid of the CEF. They were, in fact, a copy word for word except for the self-assessment aspect which was not taken up in the French document. Instead of the first-person formulations of the original grid, the use of third-person phrases highlights the importance given by the institution to formal recognition of children’s achievements. In a context where the issue of under-achievement in languages needs to be firmly addressed, the reference to the levels of competence of the CEF is synonym with new perspectives for teaching and learning and new opportunities to success.
Following the incorporation of the CEF into the primary curriculum, the “Plan for a renewal of MFL teaching” launched by the Ministry of Education in October 2005 (“Le plan de rénovation de l’enseignement des langues vivantes étrangères”, Official Gazette N°23, 8 June 2006) was entirely based on the CEF and set levels of competence to be achieved at different stages of study from primary to secondary school. The following diagram is extracted from the French Ministry of Education website (the English translation is mine):

The levels of competence of the CEF from A1 to B2 have been directly applied to the different stages of the elementary and the secondary school. By the age of approximately 10, 12, 14 and 17, children are expected to reach a recognised level of competence along the lines of the CEF grid. The levels of competence are the axis around which revolves the plan for a renewal of language learning and teaching. As it was introduced as the solution to address the French mediocre results in languages, the CEF has become central and raised great expectations. It is hoped it will have a strong impact on teaching and assessing. By encouraging teachers to adopt new modes of organisation within the language classroom, it is believed that it is bound to enhance learners’ motivation and interest.

In England, 2002 is the hallmark of a big shift in attitudes concerning MFL from an institutional point of view. The National Languages Strategy (Languages for All; Languages for Life) was published in December 2002. It clearly placed early language teaching and
learning as the centrepiece of the strategy and stated that every child from the age of 7 should be entitled to learn a new language by 2010.

One of the three overarching objectives of the Strategy was to introduce a new voluntary recognition system to complement existing national qualifications frameworks and the CEF. This would give people credit for their language skills and form a ladder of recognition from beginner level to a standard which sits alongside other assessment frameworks and qualifications.

« By age 11 children should have the opportunity to reach a recognised level of competence on the CEF and for that achievement to be recognised through a national scheme. »
(The National Languages Strategy, 2002)

Mapping of qualification levels (DCSF)
http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/languages/DSP_languagesladder.cfm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NQF</th>
<th>NC Levels</th>
<th>General Qualifications</th>
<th>Language Ladder stages</th>
<th>CEF (approx)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entry Level</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>Entry 1-3</td>
<td>Breakthrough: 1-3</td>
<td>A1 (A2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>Foundation GCSE</td>
<td>Preliminary: 4-6</td>
<td>A2 (B1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>7-EP</td>
<td>Higher GCSE</td>
<td>Intermediate: 7-9</td>
<td>B1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td></td>
<td>AS/A/AEA</td>
<td>Advanced: 10-12</td>
<td>B2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Proficiency: 13-15</td>
<td>C1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mastery: 16-17</td>
<td>C2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Languages Ladder, which started being developed on a national level in 2005 was designed to give language learners of all ages credit for their language skills at different levels, in different skills and in different contexts, in a wide range of languages. It is based on the principle “stage, not age”. It provides can-do descriptors of 6 stages subdivided into 3 grades per stage. There are “I can do …” statements for each skill (listening, speaking, reading and writing) at each grade allowing learners to estimate where their current language skills stand on the Ladder and to monitor their progress in the new language.

It may be worth noting that the reference to the CEF comes second to the recognition scheme, which is first and foremost national. It is made to correspond to the European system of recognition but the basis upon which it relies is national. In the light of the French use of the CEF, the Languages Ladder brings a number of interesting elements, which are absent from the French context:

-It is a way of incorporating language learning into a network of existing frameworks.
-Languages are not singled out but part of a whole system of frameworks, which gives overall coherence to the introduction of the national scheme of recognition. In the perspective of starting from existing frameworks, the CEF appears much more peripheral than in the French context where it is central and meaningful per se.
-The emphasis is put on the possibility for learners to proceed to self and peer assessment.
The subdivision of the general levels into smaller grades gives flexibility and makes the idea of achievement accessible to a wide range of learners according to their abilities and learning pace.

It is not so much the CEF which appears to be the centre of the strategy as in the case of the French context, as the ladder of recognition, which is expected to motivate learners, help to raise standards of teaching and learning and help to broaden participation in language learning.

In view of the different use and status of the CEF on the institutional level, the question which may arise is that of the interpretation of the CEF by authors of classroom materials.

2-Level of classroom materials: the impact of the CEF

Methodology

- I selected:
  - 3 languages courses from French publishers (Hatier, Magnard et Didier) for French children aged 7 starting English;
  - 3 schemes of work published by La Jolie Ronde, T&L Publications and QCA for English children starting French (Year 3)

- I analysed the authors’ interpretation of the CEF by:
  - Listing precisely the phrases used by the authors when referring to the CEF.
  - Highlighting the associations they made when mentioning the CEF.

Following the publication of the CEF in 2001 and its major importance, particularly in the French context of total reorganisation of language learning and teaching, most language courses for primary school expressed their concern to be as close as possible to the priorities given by the French curriculum. Usually, the cover page now mentions the CEF very clearly, presenting it as a fundamental element of the course: “in line with the CEF … in accordance with the CEF … in the respect of the CEF … alongside the CEF … in coherence with the CEF … relies on the CEF …“.
The CEF in 3 French language courses (teacher’s guide)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>A1 Level of competence of the CEF to be reached by children in their final year in primary school</th>
<th>Teaching &amp; learning in accordance with the CEF</th>
<th>Assessing alongside the CEF</th>
<th>The European Language Portfolio (based on the CEF)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hullabaloo Hatier, 2005</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>-using the language in a variety of situations&lt;br&gt;-practising the different skills&lt;br&gt;-listening &amp; speaking are priorities&lt;br&gt;-interaction&lt;br&gt;-task-based approach&lt;br&gt;-intercultural dimension&lt;br&gt;- etc…</td>
<td>Tests aiming at A1 Level and assessing:&lt;br&gt;-listening (importance of phonology)&lt;br&gt;-vocabulary (in link with culture)&lt;br&gt;- reading/writing&lt;br&gt;mark: /20</td>
<td>Scrapbook inspired from the ELP and the CEF to reflect on learning (what?) and learning strategies (how?) with « can do » statements (4 skills)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hop In Magnard, 2006</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>-setting clear objectives regarding the skills to be developed&lt;br&gt;-speaking (a priority)&lt;br&gt;-writing (familiarising with)&lt;br&gt;-children follow their own progression</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Self-assessment ‘in a fun way’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domino &amp; Co Didier, 2005</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>ALL the skills&lt;br&gt;-listening&lt;br&gt;-speaking&lt;br&gt;-reading&lt;br&gt;-writing&lt;br&gt;-culture</td>
<td>Self-assessment sheets inspired from the ELP; with «can do» statements + Teachers’opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No global mark or general comment but mark/comment in each skill to determine children’s profile. Evaluation is positive: what children know</td>
<td>Objective Develop:&lt;br&gt;-awareness&lt;br&gt;-motivation&lt;br&gt;-responsibility for one’s learning and progress Facilitate learning process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
General comments

Commonalities and differences:

-The three language courses stress the recognition of a common level of competence to be achieved alongside the CEF, which is a major innovation in the MFL curriculum. To be competitive, authors of language courses and publishers need to echo the government’s orientations and initiatives, to reflect the general trend and to make their adhesion to it as visible as possible.

-There is not one single interpretation of the CEF, which may reflect, on the one hand, the uncertainty concerning its use, the novelty of a document which has not been incorporated into teachers’ practice yet, and the lack of understanding regarding its implementation in schools. On the other hand, it may also reflect the will of the authors of the CEF to produce a tool which is neither prescriptive nor normative.

-The ELP: even though the document published by the Council of Europe is not used in its original version by authors of language courses, they value the portfolio approach and recognise self-assessment as being very beneficial to children. The portfolio approach is considered as an aid to self-awareness. It encourages the development of a reflective approach to language learning and supports children in developing language learning strategies. It helps them to become more independent in their learning.

The CEF in 3 schemes of work (teacher’s guide)

Why did I select schemes of work rather than language courses?

-In terms of popularity among English teachers, schemes of work seem to be much more in favour than traditional language courses in the primary school. Regarding the approach to language learning, textbooks seem to correspond better to the secondary model. The primary methodology being based mostly on oral activities, teachers prefer to make it an experience where children have a chance to listen and to speak. There is a move away from textbooks due to the use of technology and updated tools in that respect, teachers tending to move to interactive whiteboards. The Scheme of work also seems to fit better the primary MFL methodology as it is more flexible and open than traditional textbooks. It gives teachers more options to deliver the content of the new MFL primary curriculum, which can then be delivered in a variety of ways depending on the context in which language learning happens;

-Schemes of work aim to implement the KS2 MFL Framework; they are developed by local authorities; they are free.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The European Language Portfolio</th>
<th>The Languages Ladder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>French – A Scheme of Work for KS2, QCA, 2007</strong></td>
<td>Resources and support (appendix 3 scheme of work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides a recognised record of all language-learning achievement in and out of formal education.</td>
<td>Voluntary national recognition scheme for languages, designed to endorse achievement in language skills at all levels of competence and for all ages in a wide range of languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is updated as the owner’s language learning progresses and develops. Can be a valuable aid to transition from class to class and from KS2 to 3.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference to:</td>
<td>Reference to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language Learning Portfolios</strong></td>
<td><em>The Languages Ladder</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involve children in their own learning, progress and assessment</td>
<td>‘Can do statements’ in the 4 skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some schools use their own portfolio or a Local Authority or a cluster model to recognise children’s success in language learning and as a way of passing on record to secondary schools. Other schools may prefer to choose the ELP as it is already aligned to the LL and to the levels of achievement on the CEF, an international recognised standard of achievement in languages. The ELP forms part of language teaching and can be integrated into the course and teaching materials. It is a learning tool, in which children record their language learning and intercultural experiences. It is essentially the property of the child, but used under the guidance of the teacher.</td>
<td>Voluntary external assessment at the end of each stage. Expectations: in KS2, children will be working between Grades 1-6 The overall achievement of most children is likely to be approximately Grade 4. No expectation that learners would be at the same grade in each of the 4 skills at one time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Catherine Cheater Scheme of Work for French, Y3, TLP, 2005</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ELP is incorporated into the course</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take some time to discuss with the children how much progress they have made so far in their language learning. Help them to recall what they can do in the language. Talk about things such as learning new vocabulary, language learning strategies, knowledge about language, memorisation skills, finger rhymes, structuring simple sentences, pronunciation, listening to and joining in with stories, learning and singing traditional songs, and developing listening, speaking, Reading and writing skills.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The LL is not mentioned in the scheme of work Y3 (the LL was published in 2005). Mentioned in The Catherine Cheater Scheme of Work for French , Y5, 2007: “Teachers should consider consulting the voluntary assessment scheme known as Asset Languages.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Consider with the children any ways in which their progress in French has helped them to understand more about English and other languages they have knowledge of. The children look at the ELP and discuss with a partner what they might include. When writing in their portfolios the children include samples of their work, including digital photos and the text and lyrics of finger rhymes and songs. Allow the children to listen to background music while they do this.

Lesson 20 – Lesson 29 – Lesson 30
ELP-Self-assessment
Recommended resource

Links with the Languages Ladder and Asset Languages
It is envisaged that some primary schools will wish to accredit the achievements of their learners using QCR’s Asset Languages. For this reason, the schemes of work in all years contain materials to cover the requirements for Breakthrough Level External Assessment.

General comments
Differences and commonalities:
- The CEF is not quoted directly by the authors. It is referred to indirectly through the Languages Portfolio and the Languages Ladder.
- The KS2 Framework is a fundamental reference in the three schemes of work, which were written along its lines according to the authors (meeting the objectives of the KS2 Framework, published in 2005, seems to be a priority). Even though there is no consensus on references to the ELP, the LL and the CEF in the three schemes of work, the KS2 Framework itself makes a number of statements which associates the three tools quite closely, showing coherence in that respect.
- The focus is put on the recognition of learners’ achievements alongside the national recognition scheme, the Languages Ladder, which is mentioned in the 3 schemes of work.
- The ELP is not mentioned in one scheme of work; in another one, it is presented as a helpful resource for recording learners’ achievements and as a valuable aid to transition to KS3; in the third one, the use of the languages portfolio is widely developed as a tool which help engage the motivation of the children, give them a sense of achievement by ongoing regular feedback, allow them to value all the languages they know and help them understand more about them.

Considering the variety of approaches to the CEF as to its integration into the curriculum and in course materials, either in a very direct way as it is the case in France, or in a more subdued manner as is the case in England, we might wonder about practitioners’ perception and knowledge of this European tool.
### 3-Level of practitioners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English teachers</th>
<th>What knowledge of the CEF do you have?</th>
<th>How may the CEF help teachers with their practice?</th>
<th>What obstacles might there be to the use of the CEF?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D. E.</td>
<td>“I read it. I read a summary of it last year, and I read a copy of it. If it could be implemented, it would be very, very good because the objectives are very clear and very well structured… Very important that we do learn each other’s languages, especially here in England… We are very lazy as a nation; we don’t make many efforts to learn foreign languages… It’s a very, very good thing that it’s becoming compulsory in primary schools from 2010.”</td>
<td>“There need to be a big training programme to start with because the problem is that in England we don’t have many adults who are confident in speaking French. -The issue is that of developing language learning in England… -If people have studied basic French, then they are capable of teaching it… -It might help increase cultural awareness, create links and relationships.”</td>
<td>“People’s level of language is not good… It needs to be imposed (or recommended) by the government… We have recommended structures for all the other subjects but if THAT was there, then I think we would adopt it. It needs to be incorporated within that QCA Scheme… You have to believe in this European ideal anyway. Lots of people in this country don’t!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. B.</td>
<td>(Confusion with the Common Objectives Framework) &quot;I have never seen it. I describe it (interviewer speaking) It’s very good thinking; it’s common sense! They brought out the Framework with a ladder … I started developing rungs in between so that my children could assess themselves.”</td>
<td>“You need something to work from otherwise you end up at different cross purposes… You know where you’re going as a teacher…”</td>
<td>“Time constraints; thickness of book…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. S.</td>
<td>(Unknown; confusion with the Common Objectives Framework)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### French teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What knowledge of the CEF do you have?</th>
<th>How may the CEF help teachers with their practice?</th>
<th>What obstacles might there be to the use of the CEF?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I vaguely remember a list of skills; not an easy read; -Might be useful because in France we lag behind in languages; might be useful to know about effective portable classroom practice; -I don’t think it offers methodology perspectives, but I may be wrong; it is more a list of skills; -Yes, I agree, I see it as a list of skills …”</td>
<td>“We could start from the objectives written in the document and then teachers would have to design and plan classroom situations; it would be the teachers’ responsibility -It might be interesting to associate the document to video clips; -It might allow us to share good practices as objectives would be the same in every European country -We might also learn about the differences between countries.”</td>
<td>-The level of language; teachers should be better at languages; teacher training is important… -These document should be available in schools; better dissemination… -Very useful to have English students in classes, they encourage and stimulate teachers to teach the language; they bring classroom materials…”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### What do you know of the CEF?

One of two English teachers read it and found it very clear and very well-structured and thought that it was a very good thing that languages would be compulsory at primary level by 2010. One other teacher confused it with another framework, the Common Objectives Framework, used in a students exchange with France. The third teacher had never heard of it but when I started to explain what it was about, she immediately linked it with the Languages Ladder.

Knowledge of the CEF is very vague for French teachers: they remembered a list of skills. One teacher mentioned that the CEF does not contain any methodology guidance. Another one thinks the CEF might be useful to inform teachers about effective classroom practice.

#### How could it be incorporated into teachers’ practice?

The main issue is that of teacher training. Teachers need to be trained; people are not confident enough in languages. Language learning needs to be developed. One English teacher believes that when people have studied basic French, they are capable of teaching it. Besides, the CEF might help increase cultural awareness, create links and relationships. Her colleague underlines that it is something to start from; it is important to know where you are going as a teacher.
This reflection echoes a French teacher’s observation: “we could start from the objectives written in the document”; sharing good practice would be possible with similar objectives in all the European countries.

The need for teacher training, the development of language learning and cultural awareness are mentioned by one English teacher as being essential elements to start incorporating the CEF. One English teacher and her French counterpart see it as a tool which may give guidance to teachers by helping them identify objectives. Another French teacher mentions harmonisation as the main benefit the CEF brings; sharing good practice may be effective provided objectives are the same everywhere in Europe.

What may be the obstacles to its use?
One English teacher resents the time constraints and the thickness of the book. Her English colleague thinks that people’s level of language is the main obstacle. Besides, the CEF should be a structure imposed by the government and incorporated into the QCA Scheme. The lack of belief in the European ideal is another strong reason for not using the CEF. On the French side, the three colleagues mention people’s poor linguistic skills and agree on the importance of teacher training. The CEF and other documents should be available in schools, there should be better dissemination. Having English students is very stimulating for class teachers. They encourage them to teach the language and bring authentic classroom materials with them.

Conclusion
The CEF was conceived to bring new perspectives to the challenge of plurilingualism. Adhering to the CEF implies an adherence to its underlying basic principle of achieving linguistic and cultural harmony throughout the promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity. In this regard, is the CEF helpful to address the issue of plurilingualism?
In order to bring some light to this question and a possible answer, it is worth bearing in mind two significant recent events:

- In February 2007, a 3-day intergovernmental policy forum organised by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe was held in Strasburg. It was entitled “The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the development of language policies: challenges and responsibilities”.
  In his conclusion to the Forum, Francis Goullier, the French expert for the Language Policies Division of the Council of Europe, emphasised the points on which the participants eventually agreed: one of these was the need for the users of the CEF to embrace its full potential and to be careful not to focus exclusively on the levels of competence described in the CEF. He stressed the urgency to promote and implement the concept of plurilingualism which is actually at the core of the document but which had tended to be neglected so far.

- In the wake of the Forum, and indeed only a few weeks ago (on 2 July 2008), a recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to Member states of the Council of Europe was published. It was entitled « The use of the CEF and the promotion of plurilingualism », which clearly put forward the tight association to be made between the document of the Council of Europe and plurilingualism. The latest recommendation specifically recommended that governments of member states create conditions favourable to the use of the CEF as a tool for effective plurilingual education, which “creates opportunities for learners to relate
what they are learning of the particular language being taught to their experience of other languages in their plurilingual repertoire”.

We may assume that the Recommendation was made necessary because the multiplicity of uses of the CEF since its publication in 2001 reflects different approaches and interpretations. The openness of the CEF itself, claimed by its authors, allows a range of implementations which may prove detrimental to the fundamental issue of plurilingualism and eventually put it in the background. The way forward involves taking children’s linguistic competences into account and building on them, adopting a European Languages Portfolio-like approach which promotes reflection, self-assessment, knowledge about language and intercultural understanding.

Finally, I would like to quote John Trim, one of the main authors of the CEF:

“The CEF invites its readers to reflect and question their own existing practice, to consider options and then to be willing to communicate the results of their reflections to other colleagues and enter into dialogue with them. The outcome may well be that people maintain their differences, but with enhanced self-awareness, mutual respect and openness to new circumstances and influences in a rapidly changing world.” (Intergovernmental Policy Forum, Strasbourg, 2007)

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