PACIS XXI: Aligning English language curriculum with the CEFR/CV for 21st century learning

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 This article aims to outline and describe how the PACIS XXI team (Projetar a Área Curricular de Inglês para o Século XXI), nominated by the Azorean Regional Government's Secretary of Education in 2017, designed and promoted the implementation of the CEFR-based English curriculum guidelines. Its acronym, which translated means to launch English as a curriculum component into the 21st century, states the essence of what the team was mandated to do.

 The key mission was to analyse the state of English language teaching, learning and assessment and design a curriculum document to sustain English language education at the primary level in the Azores, Portugal. In July 2022, the guidelines, Orientações Curriculares de Inglês dos 1.º e 2.º ciclos do ensino básico (OCI), were published.

 First, we delved into the CEFR/CV with New Descriptors (Council of Europe [COE] 2018), then later, while the guidelines were up for public discussion as a working document, between 2019 and 2022, we enhanced them using the final version of the CEFR/CV (COE 2020).

 Aligning curriculum guidelines with the CEFR/CV meant not only aligning proficiency levels for different grades, but also looking closely at what it means to take an action-oriented approach to language learning. Hence the need to move forward into designing descriptors for communicative activities, and not for the traditional four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking.

 We presented planning and assessment tools and templates aligned with an action-oriented approach, incorporating the Understanding by Design/Backwards Theory (Wiggins and McTighe 2005). We also looked at pedagogical assessment, where formative assessment is key, as put forward by Dylan Wiliam (2011) as well as the conceptual framework shared by the Projeto MAIA through the Portuguese educational system.

 Over a hundred teachers in thirty schools were involved. Various types of training were developed, based on the curriculum guidelines, as well as needs expressed by teachers. All this work was not only validated by policymakers, but also by APPI (Associação Portuguesa de Professores de Inglês), the Portuguese English teachers' association who thoroughly revised the guidelines.

 In sharing this experience, we hope to lend some insight into how the CEFR/CV can be used and adapted for curriculum design and can enhance teaching, learning and assessment.

1 Introduction

The Azores is an archipelago of nine islands in Portugal with its own regional government which has autonomy in various areas, including education. This means that curriculum policy can be designed and implemented regionally, and one of the main differences pertains to English language learning. On mainland Portugal, English is a curricular subject as of grade 3, while in the Azores, students begin learning English on the onset of schooling in grade 1. Therefore, there was a need to create a curriculum document to sustain English language education, while also looking at what was happening in the classrooms, to better understand exactly what needed to be done to support teachers and enhance the teaching, learning and assessment process.

In the first phase, four schools were involved, 2 schools in a more urban area and 2 schools in a more rural area on two different islands, Terceira and São Miguel. The initial focus was on meeting with teachers, visiting classrooms from grades 1 to 6, as well as sharing information and research on recent developments in education, specifically the science of learning with contributions from innovations in neuroscience and advances in cognitive psychology that help explain how the brain learns. This included looking closely at English language education and learning that in turn entailed understanding the developments pertaining to the CEFR, which at this time, September 2017, was just prior to the publication of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment Companion Volume with New Descriptors* (COE 2018). On the whole, what was seen was the need to move away from teaching and learning about the language to teaching and learning on how to use the language while integrating an assessment process that would best suit this purpose.

At the end of the first year, June 2018, a group of teachers, who felt the need to contribute to this shift in English language education, spontaneously came together as the PACIS XXI team, coordinated scientifically by Lucy Bravo, managing director of Knightsbridge Examination and Training Centre in Oporto, and supported by the regional education directorate. Training, peer-observation, team-teaching, experimentation with approaches as well as planning and assessment tools to support teaching and learning were developed with her guidance, which led to the design and implementation by the PACIS XXI team of the *Orientações Curriculares de Inglês dos 1.º e 2.º ciclos do ensino básico* [Curriculum guidelines for English for 1st and 2nd cycle for basic education], henceforth referred to as OCI (Direção Regional da Educação e Administratção Educativa 2022).

Until 2019, the team used an action-research approach working collaboratively to align theory with classroom practice. Alongside the CEFR, an array of international, national and regional documents and publications were researched (all references are in the Guidelines, an open-access document at Orientações Curriculares de Inglês dos 1.º e 2.º ciclos do ensino básico | Portal da Educação (azores. gov.pt). These aimed to support decision-making related to curriculum development for language education in the first six years of schooling. In September of that same year, the curriculum guidelines were launched as a working document in the thirty schools in the Azores with these grade levels.

An interlocutor was appointed by each of the thirty schools to assist in the implementation of the guidelines and to collect feedback for further enhancement, which started with a questionnaire that accompanied their launch. The adjustments made to the guidelines, based on the feedback, helped to cater, as best as possible, to the diversity of each school context and to develop support for teachers in organising the learning, teaching, and assessment. They received training and shared their knowledge with their peers while working closely with the PACIS XXI team. The team not only delivered the training, but also provided guidance to serve their needs upon request and adjusted intervention as necessary, while constantly updating the OCI.

2 Background to the OCI

To better grasp the need for the OCI, it is important to understand that the previous curriculum document being used was neither CEFR-based nor aligned with the proficiency levels. It was still structured in terms

of the four skills: reading; writing; listening and speaking; with a strong focus on lexis and grammar. Therefore, teaching and learning were based on rote learning where the four skills were either used to promote memorisation of language structures or to demonstrate memorisation. Written tests were the primary tool of assessment and very little focus was given to oral production or oral interaction, hence teaching to test with emphasis on summative assessment.

There was a need for training to help teachers enhance their teaching and to get a better grasp of the conceptual design of the OCI. This became obvious through the responses to the questionnaire launched alongside the guidelines as a working document in 2019. Twenty-six of the thirty schools in the region answered the questionnaire, of which 88% indicated the need for training, namely in operationalising the concepts underlying the document with practical ideas for teaching and assessing, in line with the action-oriented approach, in the first years of schooling.

In the school year 2019 / 2020, training and implementation focused mainly on grades 1 and 2. A closer look was taken on how to develop reading and writing skills in these grade levels, since it was not part of teaching practice, due to a lack of initial teacher training in this area, and previous guidelines placed emphasis on oral skills. This was mainly based on the fallacy that children in this age group, between five and six, were not capable of developing reading and writing skills in both their mother-tongue and a second language, simultaneously.

In the following school year, all the teachers from grades 1 to 6 were involved. After conducting a survey, the feedback received was unanimous in considering that the training and collaboration amongst colleagues within and throughout schools in the Azores were success factors for continuous implementation. In response to this feedback, the PACIS XXI team proceeded in organising further training and reinforcing collaboration. The teacher training was designed in accordance with the suggestions made, addressing different concepts in the guidelines and exemplifying how they may be operationalised, taking into account students´ needs. Amidst the pandemic there was a need to readjust and enhance the team's ability to cater to the expectations of the teachers in this specific context, while continuing training and collaboration. Hence the design of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) on Microsoft Teams. Going online, in many ways, did not hinder, but facilitated the work that needed to be done. A team of over a hundred teachers was formed, material was shared, meetings were held, and training continued.

Each school retained their interlocutor and the monthly online meetings with them were fundamental to keep up momentum during the pandemic phase. The feedback form in reference to the team's work during the school year 2020/2021 confirmed that 85% of the teachers considered that the interlocutor was an asset for establishing and maintaining communication between the school and the PACIS XXI team. They were facilitators of communication, sharing information amongst their co-workers, putting forth issues that needed to be addressed as well as a motivational factor to move implementation of the OCI forward.

In that same feedback form, information was collected as to what areas teachers were interested in enhancing through training in the following school year, 2021/2022. Reading and writing in the first years of English language teaching continued to be favoured, followed by assessing learning and developing oral communicative language activities. Therefore, throughout the succeeding school year two training courses were ongoing, one for oral communicative activities and the other focusing on reading and writing, with both including a segment on assessment.

In 2021/2022, interlocutor meetings continued, although only once every trimester, also in accordance with the results from the feedback form. It is important to note that it was not compulsory for any of the teachers to participate in any of the events promoted by the PACIS XXI team. However, there was a fairly high participation rate in the meetings. An average of twenty-eight out of the thirty interlocutors were present in each meeting. Of the 177 English teachers from grades 1 to 6 in the region, over 150 were, and still are, part of the PLC on TEAMS. A total of fifty-three teachers participated in the training courses

and many others, throughout the year, contacted the team to share ideas, clarify queries, and discuss various issues related to enhancing their teaching practice, in open online sessions.

Ninety-six teachers filled out the feedback form at the end of that school year and even though 75% of these respondents considered all the activities in the team's action plan as positive, this was the last school year that PACIS XXI functioned as a team. The activities that ranked higher were the certified teacher training, the online open sessions for discussion on topics of their choice, sharing of various types of information on the PLC on TEAMS, also the demeanour and environment established by the team in the various meetings and sessions were highlighted.

Special reference was made in the feedback form to the suggested syllabuses, designed by the team for each grade level, which almost 95% used adjusting accordingly. Similarly identified as important by 91% of the teachers was the common time slot in all the English teachers' schedules, in all the Azorean schools, to work collaboratively within their school or with colleagues from other schools, including the team.

Overall, 83% of the teachers found the work done by the team useful or very useful, with 81% of the teachers indicating that they would like the training to continue. The most popular focus areas chosen by them, in that same feedback form, were rubrics to help integrate assessment in the learning process and mediation activities. Therefore, it was evident that an ever-growing group of teachers was interested in enhancing their teaching practice in accordance with the OCI.

3. Aligning the OCI with the CEFR
3.1. Calibrating Proficiency Levels with Grade Levels

Since the regional curriculum determines that formal English language learning begins in grade 1, it was necessary to analyse the length and quality of teaching time to calibrate the CEFR proficiency levels with the six grade levels. The focus was on giving students the opportunity to progress in the CEFR levels, promoting their development as global active citizens based on the 21st century skills whilst keeping in mind the diverse contexts in the different schools of the archipelago. This includes schools with mixed grade levels, which in some cases may mean a class can have anywhere between two to four different grade levels in the same group.

The introduction of the PreA1 level in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Companion Volume with New Descriptors* (COE 2018) and its finalised version (COE 2020), from here on in referred to as CEFR/CV (COE 2020), made calibrating for lower levels simpler. There was however the need for a closer look at the time allocated to English language learning and the time needed to progress from one level to another.

In accordance with the Cambridge *Introductory Guide to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for English Language Teachers* (2013) the progression from one CEFR proficiency level to the next takes about a hundred guided learning hours. In the Azores, where there are about 35 weeks in a school year with two 45-minute English lessons a week, by the end of a year, students will have had roughly about 50 guided learning hours. Consequently, based exclusively on the length of time spent learning English, students need approximately two school years to attain each level.

However, children in the public school system are not grouped according to language level, nor do they enter grade 1 all with the same background in terms of language knowledge. Increased mobility and globalisation, in a growing digital world, as well as having children with different learning challenges has made for more diverse school and classroom settings. Therefore, there is a vast variation of time needed to progress from one level to another. As seen in Table 1, there are at least two and half school years to move from one level to the next, to allow teachers to cater to such diversity, making sure that no one is left behind. In order to make this clearer, sub-levels were used in line with what is stated in the CEFR/CV:

> The CEFR stresses that the levels are reference levels and that, in any given context, users may well
> want to subdivide them, illustrating ways in which this might be done in different contexts (CEFR 2001

Section 3.5). In the same section, the CEFR introduced the idea of the plus levels.

> *In the illustrative descriptors a distinction is made between the "criterion levels" (for example A2 or A2.1) and the "plus levels" (for example A2+ or A2.2).* (COE 2020: 38, italics added).

Table 1. *Alignment of School Grades with CEFR Proficiency Levels*

GRADE	1	2	3	4	5	6
CEFR LEVELS	Pre-A1	Pre-A1	Pre-A1 into A1.1	A1.1	A1.2	A2.1

This, in turn, allows for a better flow of learning and progression in the CEFR levels, by giving teachers and students flexibility in time. Although teachers do not certify attainment in language levels, they do construct the learning, teaching and assessment conditions necessary for students to progress in the levels. This alignment also creates more awareness for both teachers and learners of what they have learnt, what they are learning and what they need to learn. How this may be done will be explained in more detail in Section 4 of this article on formative assessment.

3.2. Descriptors for Communicative Language Activities

Descriptors were designed for reception, interaction and production of communicative language activities. Once again, the CEFR/CV with the PreA1 level was invaluable in organising descriptors for children who start learning English between the ages of 5 and 6 in grade 1. Nevertheless, it was essential to further dismantle descriptors, in line with the cognitive development of children between the ages of 5 and 12, to guide the learning process and to equitably place them throughout the first six years of schooling. This was especially challenging when looking at the written communicative language activities, namely reading comprehension, written production and interaction, in grades 1 and 2.

Although English language learning has been compulsory since 2010, initiating in grade 1, there has never been great focus on developing reading and writing skills. This was based on the widespread belief in the myth that learning to read and write in both the mother-tongue and a second language would somehow confuse learners and hinder learning in both languages. Much research has been done on the science of reading and writing as well as on the development of literacy skills in two or more languages simultaneously. *A Pluriliteracies Approach to Teaching for Learning: Putting a pluriliteracies approach into practice* (Meyer 2015) and the more recent work, *Beyond CLIL: pluriliteracies for deeper learning* (Coyle and Meyer 2021), share updated research evidence that clearly refutes this myth. Quite to the contrary, learning multiple languages concurrently, in different subject areas, enhances learning in many ways, even at an early age.

Reading and writing in the first years was then established as a teacher training priority. Firstly, to help understand that these are not skills that the brain develops naturally, they must be taught, and to briefly explore how the brain learns to read and write. Secondly, supporting teachers in enhancing gradual development of literacy skills in the English language was also looked at. This gradual build-up of literacy skills is made clear in the guidelines' organisation. Reading and writing focuses on words and short expressions in grades 1 and 2, on longer expressions and sentences in grades 3 and 4, and on longer text at paragraph level in grades 5 and 6.

Different approaches were shared, namely Phonics Instruction and Whole Language Approach, to develop phonological awareness and literacy skills. Alongside that in Annex III of the OCI, a list of sight words and high frequency words was organised for each grade based, not only on the language level, but also on the pertinence of its use with the language structures suggested for each theme. Having them more readily available and organised facilitates teachers' awareness and use when planning learning.

It has been proven that being able to sight read certain phonetically more challenging words, due to the orthographic depth of the English language, enables automatic decoding. This automaticity allows for cognitive energy to focus more on understanding, without having to put much effort into decoding, which in turn improves reading and writing proficiency. The main aim was to demonstrate and share tools to help teachers develop reading and writing in the first two years of schooling, which up until then had only been part of formal instruction in grade 3 in many schools.

Although these types of instruction and approaches are commonly used in the mother tongue, when integrated into language learning, will help dissipate common errors, frequently caused by mother tongue interference. This will also promote knowledge of sounds and spelling patterns that are present in the additional language but not in the students' language. In relation to Portuguese, the English language has a greater orthographic depth which is sometimes challenging for students to grasp. Incorporating phonics instruction to explicitly teach language segments that are known to generate learning difficulties will in most circumstances help students overcome these challenges. Another challenge was to increase awareness of the language and lexis recommended for each level. It became evident, when visiting classrooms and looking at different resources and listening to teachers, that students were being asked to produce structures and words beyond their language level, the accuracy at the lower levels was also far too demanding. Many teachers, when confronted with sample language, admitted to being overly demanding and became aware of the possible constraints being put on language learning because of that.

During training sessions throughout the implementation process, from 2019 to 2022, teachers confessed to using and demanding language levels that were not in accordance with the CEFR/CV levels and consequently with the grade levels described in the guidelines. They concluded that undesirable difficulties were being created. It was not the students that were incapable of learning, but the language demanded of them was too high in relation to their age group's cognitive level.

The use of language functions and genres that were too complex and not in line with learners' needs and interests were also being required of students. For example, when dealing with the topic of jobs with young learners, it is not of immediate interest and need to design a *curriculum vitae* to apply for a job. The language used is also too complex and abstract for this age group. In the lesson planning materials and resources designed and shared by the teachers through the PLC on MS TEAMS, it became even more evident that attention needed to be directed at adjusting language levels and use to suit children's needs and interests. Once again training also focused on exemplifying language production for each level and the need to scaffold the cognitive load. Annex III in the OCI was an important tool that provided samples of language and lexis for the different topics that are level and age appropriate.

The concern in creating awareness of productive and receptive language in each learning situation was also addressed. In this same annex, language that may be needed for learning, but is not at the exact level is clearly marked as receptive. To help guide the learning process the scheme of work designed (Appendix A) also provided a section to clearly identify whether language is used productively or receptively in each learning sequence, to prevent the development of undesirable learning difficulties by choosing and using the language that best suits students´ needs and abilities.

Descriptors were not designed for mediation activities for various reasons, mainly due to the fact that training in this area was scarce and there wasn't enough insight to do so, seeing as it was something completely new for the English language education context in the Azores. The PACIS XXI team as well as the policy makers agreed that it was best to focus on the language communicative activities that would be more readily grasped by the teachers to make the shift towards an action-oriented approach. Notwithstanding this decision, and in line with the fact that the OCI is an open document, it is at any time, in the future, possible to add explicit reference to mediation activities. However, having had the opportunity to participate in training and further study mediation, the link between mediation activities and the ten competence areas in the *Students' Profile by the End of Compulsory Schooling* (Martins et al. 2017) became evident. The latter, henceforth referred to as Students' Profile, is the guiding document

in Portugal, as well as in the Azores, for curriculum design. All programmes of all subjects, including English, should aim to support learners in developing this profile.

3.3. Relating Mediation Activities to the Students' Profile

Although mediation activities are not explicitly stated in the OCI, they are implicitly incorporated into the ten competence areas of the Students' Profile, namely *Languages and texts; Information and communication; Reasoning and problem solving; Critical and creative thinking; Interpersonal relations; Personal development and autonomy; Well-being, health and environment; Aesthetic and artistic sensitivity/ awareness; Scientific, Technical and technological knowledge* and *Body awareness and mastery* (Martins et al. 2017: 16). Training which served the implementation process of the guidelines also highlighted how mediation aligns with the development of these competence areas and how to integrate them into learning, teaching and assessment. The link was made by analysing the competence areas' operational descriptors and the mediation activities' descriptors and the *key concepts operationalised* (COE 2020: 93) in each scale. This is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. *Mediation in the Students' Profile by the End of Compulsory Schooling*

Mediation Activities in *CEFR Companion Volume*		Competence Areas in the *Students' Profile by the End of Compulsory Schooling*
Mediating a text	Relay specific information (in speech / in writing)	Languages and texts
	Explaining data (in speech / in writing)	Scientific, technical and technological knowledge
	Processing text (in speech / in writing)	Information and communication Personal development and autonomy
	Translating a written text (in speech / in writing)	Languages and texts
	Note-taking	Information and communication Personal development and autonomy
	Expressing a personal response to creative texts	Aesthetic and artistic sensitivity/ awareness
	Analysis and criticism of creative texts	Critical and creative thinking
Mediating concepts	**Collaborating in a group** — Facilitating collaborative interaction with peers	Interpersonal relations
	Collaborating in a group — Collaborating to construct meaning	Interpersonal relations Reasoning and problem solving
	Leading group work — Managing interaction	Interpersonal relations Well-being, health and environment
	Leading group work — Encouraging conceptual talk	Interpersonal relations Reasoning and problem solving
Mediating communication	Facilitating pluricultural space	Interpersonal relations Languages and texts
	Acting as an intermediary	Interpersonal relations Information and communication
	Facilitating communication in delicate situations and disagreements	Interpersonal relations

As an example, when mediating concepts to collaborate in a group to facilitate collaborative interaction with peers, which implies *collaborative participation by consciously managing one's own role and contributions to group communication* (COE 2020: 109) can be related to the operational descriptor for Interpersonal relations that states: *develop and maintain diverse and positive relationships between themselves and with others (community, school and family) in contexts of collaboration, cooperation and inter-help.* This is one example among many of the existing correlations.

To promote a better understanding of this correlation and to support teachers in integrating the development of the Students' Profile at the beginning of compulsory schooling, operational descriptors for each competence area were adjusted to fit the cognitive level of students in grades 1 to 6 (Appendix B). This was done because the operational descriptors in the original document reflect the knowledge, skills and attitudes of learners when leaving compulsory education at the age of 18. In order to design learning that fosters the development of these competence areas from the beginning of compulsory schooling, operational descriptors were suggested for learners between the ages of 5 and 12, in grades 1 to 6.

The alignment of mediation activities with the competence areas of the Students' Profile illustrates how to both promote plurilingual and pluricultural competences, which in turn sustains the development of 21st century skills needed to interact in today's global digital world. Both the competence areas in the Students' Profile as well as mediation activities embrace all aspects of learning, namely the development of reception, production and interaction activities in the language learning context. The sections that follow suggest and demonstrate how this comes together when learning, teaching and assessing, based on an AoA, are facilitated by using the *Understanding by Design* (UbD) (Wiggins and McTighe 2005) framework for planning.

4. AoA & Understanding by Design Framework

The AoA supports the clear intention to shift away from learning about language to learning how to use language. Designing descriptors for communicative language activities and viewing the learner as a 'social agent' who interacts to develop and to facilitate communication supported this switch in the teachers' mindset. Looking at the concepts of learner agency and co-agency in the OECD (2019) *Learning Compass 2030*, on which the Students' Profile is based, helped to further emphasis the urgency for this change in mindset.

Besides designing the curriculum guidelines around communicative activities and integrating mediation through the development of the competence areas of the Students' Profile, curriculum topics were presented as *Temáticas Situacionais* [situational themes]. This helped to move away from content rote learning, towards learning scenarios which guide students to perform real-life tasks that are meaningful and relevant to them. All these aspects with the intent to promote an action-oriented approach, were supported by the *Understanding by Design* (UbD) or *Backward Design* framework to plan learning sequences. As stated in the CEFR/CV, *Fundamentally, the CEFR is a tool to assist the planning of curricula, courses and examinations by working backwards from what the users/learners need to be able to do in the language.* (COE 2020: 28)

A Scheme of Work (Appendix A) was created to make this design visible and to sustain English language learning, teaching and assessment with an action-oriented approach. The remaining issue was to change mindsets to plan backward, inviting teachers to begin planning from where they normally ended planning. Looking at Figure 1, (A)—the *Why?* of learning, what are students expected to be able to do at the end of the learning sequence is where planning starts. Traditionally, everything that has to do with assessment is done once learning and teaching is planned. However, and according to Wiggins and McTighe (2005) and as expressed in the CEFR/CV, what should be done from the onset is to define *what the users/learners need to be able to do in the language* (COE 2020: 28) to make informed decisions related to how the learning is to happen to reach those outcomes.

Only then can learning aims and activities be intentionally planned to work towards robust outcomes, these include not only using language, but also skills that underwrite the development of competence areas in the Students' Profile, which embed mediation skills.

Learners will in turn be enabled with the tools they need to interact in a digital global world of knowledge for life-long learning. All teachers and educators alike know how important it is to work towards these competences; however, there may not always be intentional planning for outcomes that go beyond content knowledge.

The 21st century skills are part of core curricula in most educational systems at present; nevertheless, this does not mean that they are always intentionally integrated in planning, learning, teaching and assessment. Essentially, planning has been approached from a fallacious perspective. Most importantly, from the onset know what students should understand and be able to do at the end of any learning sequence, afterward clearly identify where they are in relation to the learning that needs to take place, and only then define how learning should happen. If we look at it from a practical point of view of how we function while performing everyday activities, it begins to be made clear. To perform at our best on a task, first we need to know what results we want to achieve, then we set a plan and gather the resources needed to attain the best performance levels.

Figure 1 below illustrates how to approach planning whilst using a Scheme of Work which contemplates all aspects of the process. Planning should start with defining the final global outcome, then the outcomes pertaining to the communicative language activities as well as the Students' Profile to monitor the learning (A), so as to express the *why* of learning. This is followed by planning the teaching, which is to say define the aims (B), the *what* of learning, then sequencing learning activities and selecting resources (C), the *how* of learning. Both (B) and (C) should be completely synchronised with and essential for the outcomes.

The choice of aims, activities and resources should be based on their necessity to achieve the desired outcomes. Simply put, there must be a clear intention or outcome to take action, hence making the UbD framework suitable when planning language learning, teaching and assessment founded on a CEFR-based curriculum.

Figure 1. Scheme of Work for Learning Teaching and Assessment

5. Formative Assessment

To implement a pedagogical assessment which is imminently formative it is crucial to start by stating the desired outcome(s) so that all learning and teaching are completely synchronised with assessment, as seen above. It is important to assure monitoring aids formative assessment and is integrated in classroom activities so that it occurs throughout the learning, without disrupting the flow of learning.

Looking at it as a journey, monitoring the outcomes integrated in the learning activities is a way of tapping into learning to see if students are on the right path. If so, they keep on going, if not teachers give them the support and guidance needed to get them back on track. This will give both learners and teachers a better understanding of how learning is happening, while guaranteeing higher quality global outcomes. In sum, we cannot define what to teach or how to learn, unless we clearly state the why of learning, which is what we are ultimately aiming for and are going to assess. Assessment bands were organised for reception, production and interaction communicative language activities to support the design of learning outcomes aligned with the CEFR/CV and are included in the OCI (Direção Regional da Educação e Administratção Educativa 2022: 40-48). They were created to summarise what students' learning should look like at the end of every two years, giving them time to progress and attain the standards based on the CEFR levels, as mentioned previously when referring to calibration in subsection 2.1. The bands for communicative language activities in the OCI (Direção Regional da Educação e Administratção Educativa 2022: 40-48) and the Students' Profile operational descriptors (Appendix B), are considered fundamental in assisting teachers with setting up assessment that is aligned with teaching and learning as well as developing robust outcomes. These resources were particularly useful during the pandemic to place students in relation to their learning level and assist in delivering quality feedback in both online and face-to-face teaching contexts.

Quality feedback is very important when conducting formative assessment that aims to develop assessment for learning and as learning, which contribute to learners' metacognitive awareness. When analysing feedback, Hattie and Timperley (2007) clearly describe how essential it is to promote quality learning experiences using their *model of feedback to enhance learning* (2007: 87). Feedback should not only look back on learning, but also *Feed Up* to set the stage for learning, *Feedback* to adjust learning and *Feed Forward*, guiding into new learning experiences based on the previous ones. This type of quality feedback ignites learners' metacognitive skills, promoting transfer of knowledge and skills to different situations, improves the use of appropriate strategies and aids the development of learner agency, crucial to all subjects, including English.

All this is especially relevant due to the fact that in Portugal the school system policy is sustained by curriculum flexibility and autonomy to promote inclusive equitable quality education. A demand arose to take a closer look at pedagogical assessment, an endeavour embraced by the MAIA project (Fernandes 2019, 2020a, 2020b and Machado 2019), established to monitor, follow up on and investigate pedagogical assessment in schools across the country, including the Azores. Training and many publications were shared to help reorganise assessment in schools, mainly to promote the use of multiple methods and tools that would highlight its formative function.

Rubrics were amongst these tools which aimed to aid the delivery of quality feedback, fundamental to formative assessment. Focus was given to two types of rubrics, the holistic and the analytical, the first addresses a more summative form of assessment and the later a more formative one, due to the kind of information they each generate (Stevens and Levi 2005). By analysing both, the PACIS XXI team felt the need to incorporate rubrics into the design of the learning, teaching and assessment process to fit the implementation of the OCI.

However, neither the holistic, nor the analytical rubric totally served the purpose of synthesizing the pedagogical assessment needed to analyse learners' performance to its full extent throughout a learning sequence. Teachers needed a tool to help them observe and follow the whole learning process, which would generate the kind of feedback described by Hattie and Timperley (2007). A Process Rubric

(Appendix C) was designed by the PACISXXI team which displayed both the final global outcome of the learning sequence and the monitoring that needs to take place to assure that learners develop the knowledge and skills necessary to attain the outcome. In Appendix C, not only is there a template provided, but also an example of what a complete process rubric may look like for a full learning sequence. It is important to state that, in some cases it may be useful to create a separate, more analytical, rubric for the final global outcome. This will help look at the learners' performance in more detail, seeing as it is the result of the whole learning sequence.

Having all stages of the process on one document gives both a holistic view as well as a detailed view of what is expected to be learnt, because it contains both the final global outcome and monitoring phases, while also stating the Students' Profile competence area that will be worked on. Performance levels are set for all of these, which assist in generating quality feedback at any stage of the process. This feedback will help learners deepen their understanding and enhance the quality of the final global outcome. A self-assessment tool (Appendix D) was created to make this information accessible to students. Although it appears in English, it is given to learners in their mother-tongue, because their language level does not allow for enough abstract language to support this sort of thinking in English.

Based on the Process Rubric, this self-assessment tool further develops metacognitive awareness as students use it to reflect on their learning and upgrade their work, which will promote higher quality outcomes, based on very precise feedback. Autonomy and the ability to fully recognise strengths and weaknesses inherent to learner agency will lead to informed decisions made by both students and teachers about learning.

Process rubrics also make teachers' work more efficient and effective because all the information pertaining to assessment of any given learning unit is summarised in one place and can be used to give feedback at any time throughout the learning unit. This rubric design complements the Scheme of Work based on the UbD framework used to plan learning for an action-oriented approach. It supports both assessment for learning and assessment as learning, which underline the type of pedagogical assessment that fosters the learner as a social agent, subsequently aiding progression in language proficiency levels, in addition to developing the competence areas of the Students' Profile.
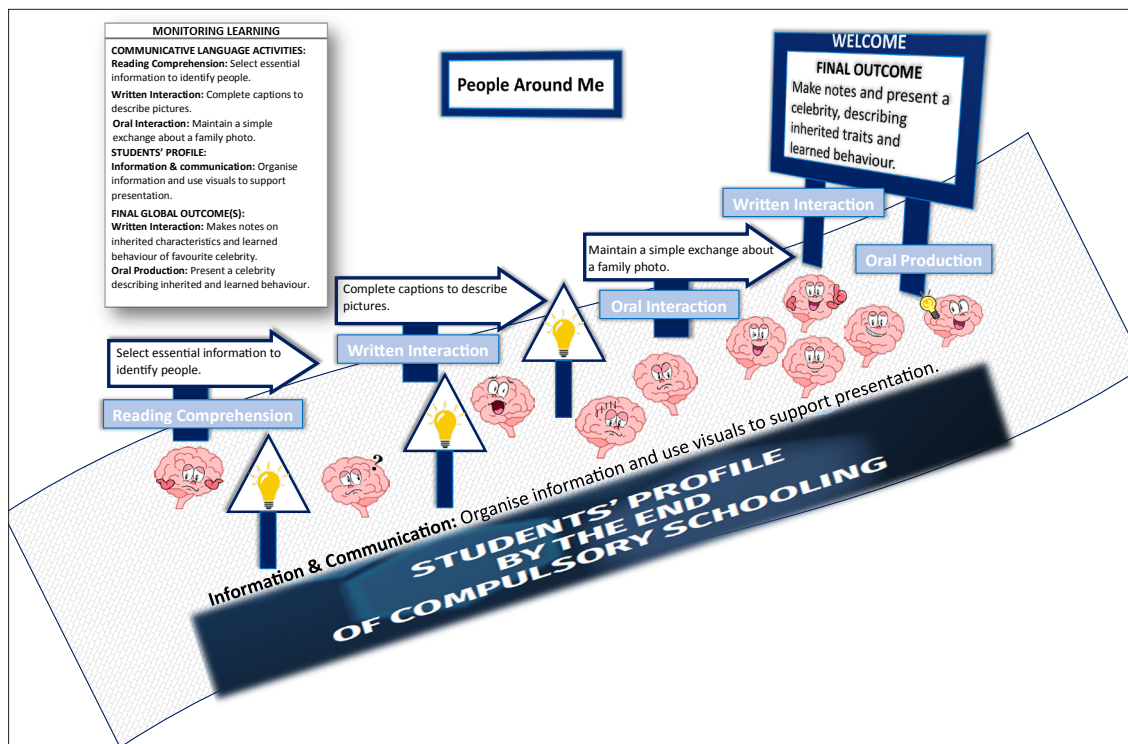
Figure 2. Learning Journey

Figure 2 illustrates what the learning journey may look like using the Monitoring Learning section of the Scheme of Work (Appendix A). Different students may struggle at different stages of the learning sequence. However, if learning is being monitored throughout, with appropriate scaffolding, based on the feedback collected using a Process Rubric (Appendix C), all students will have the opportunity to attain the desired outcomes. Using this type of signposting along the way aids learning by promoting deeper understanding and higher quality learning outcomes.

6. Discussion

From the knowledge gained through the tentative experience of designing and implementing CEFR-based curriculum guidelines, it became clear that there is a necessity to further develop assessment bands for all communicative language activities. Setting up sample bands for all levels and different types of learners including children, better support the construction of tools for formative assessment. These bands should aid both assessment for learning and assessment as learning, promoting metacognitive awareness for a deeper understanding of knowledge to facilitate transfer. The abilities for *languaging* and *translanguaging,* in a growing global digital world where mediation skills are crucial, will also be fostered. These aspects of thinking about language use and learning as it is taking place are an important part of any assessment process.

Assessment is an essential part of this process, for it is the bridge that links teaching and learning. Only through assessment can we collect the evidence that what is taught is actually learnt.

Although great focus has been given to assessment, structuring CEFR-based curricula and issues, putting together the different components that should be included, was also a challenge. Setting up a resource centre for CEFR-based curricula would facilitate access to valid resources and to sample curricula, supporting those involved in this endeavour. It would be interesting to be able to join and collaborate with others around the globe who are facing similar challenges. Notwithstanding the fact that contexts may be different, within this diversity it is possible to find commonalities that would enable the enhancement of all those involved, developing CEFR-based curricula that is sustainable in diverse educational environments.

7. Conclusion

As previously stated, the purpose of this article was to briefly describe and outline how the OCI were designed and is in no way meant to be a study of any kind. Throughout this procedure the PACIS XXI team, based on the CEFR/CV, experimented, and researched into how to clarify and sustain the decision-making process involved in organising language learning, teaching and assessment. National and regional policy was also taken into account as in any case where international frameworks are adapted to specific educational systems. Nevertheless, these guidelines aim to be a useful open document to facilitate English language learning, teaching and assessment, that is adjustable to any school's educational project in line with curriculum autonomy and flexibility, contributing to inclusive equitable quality education.

Once completed and before being officially published, the OCI were appraised by APPI (*Associação Portuguesa de Professores de Inglês*), the Portuguese English teachers' association's Pedagogical Committee. The guidelines were improved based on the committee's appraisal which also emphasised the need for continuous professional development for the different innovative concepts contained in the document. However, policymakers decided that once validated and published in July 2022, there was no need to continue training nor to monitor implementation.

Unfortunately, much of the work done whilst enhancing and promoting implementation of the OCI happened during the pandemic state. This did not allow for a closer look at what has been done in the classroom. Although there was a lot of feedback from teachers, it has not been possible to create a more

viable structure to fully grasp how the OCI are being implemented and their impact on the quality of English language learning. The change in the teachers' mindset to use the UbD framework for planning with an action-oriented approach based on the CEFR/CV has therefore not been fully grasped. What was evident, whether through information received via feedback forms or during events promoted by the team, was that there is a continuous need to collaborate for sustainable higher quality language learning.

Feedback collected between 2019 and 2022 was aimed, not only at monitoring the work being done to help promote implementation of the OCI, but also at understanding the needs of teachers working in the thirty schools in the Azores. A rigorous study needs to be undertaken to fully comprehend to what extent CEFR-based curriculum guidelines improved language learning, teaching and assessment in the Azores.

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9. Biographies

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Joana Silveira is a teacher and teacher trainer and assisted in coordinating the PACIS XXI team set up by the Azorean Regional Education Directorate until August 2022, responsible for the design and implementation of curriculum guidelines to enhance English language teaching, learning and assessment, from grades 1 to 6 in the 30 schools in the Azores, Portugal. Currently teaching English to 2nd and 6th graders in the public school system. She also belongs to the bilingual education team, assists in organising and implementing a CLIL-based programme for primary education.

Appendices
Appendix A
Scheme of Work Template

YEAR:	SITUATIONAL THEME:		NUMBER OF LESSONS:	DATES
PRODUCTIVE LANGUAGE		SIGHT WORDS / HF WORDS:	RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE:	
LESSON 45min	LEARNING AIMS What?	COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES How?	RESOURCES	MONITORING LEARNING Why?
1				Outcomes for Communicative Language Activities:
2				
3				Students' Profile Outcome(s):
4				
5				FINAL GLOBAL OUTCOME(S):
6				
7				
8				
FEEDBACK:				

Appendix B

COMPETENCE AREAS in the *Students' Profile by the End of Compulsory Schooling*
Adapted to 1ˢᵗ & 2ⁿᵈ Cycle – Years 1 to 6

COMPETENCE AREAS	SUGGESTED OPERATIONAL DESCRIPTORS		
	Years 1 & 2	**Years 3 & 4**	**Years 5 & 6**
Languages and texts	Use body language and pictures to aid communication	Select with guidance representative elements that aid communication: body language, gestures, images …	Create with guidance simple products using verbal and non-verbal language to generate new meaning
Information and communication	Organise with guidance very basic information provided to prepare a presentation of a very simple new product	Select with guidance simple information which they are provided with to prepare and present a simple new product	Research topics familiar to them with guidance to create and present a simple new product
Reasoning and problem solving	Follow very simple guidelines to solve very concrete problems to complete a very simple task	Select with guidance strategies to complete a simple task	Recognise with guidance suitable strategies to accomplish tasks related to familiar situations Question a situations or simple problems and offer solutions with guidance
Critical and creative thinking	Use simple criteria to organise very simple information Participate in very simple tasks, expressing their individuality	Select with guidance simple ideas and ways to carry out a simple task Create with guidance situations to apply learning	Adapt, with guidance, ideas and procedures in familiar contexts Participate in a guided discussion supporting their ideas with what they have learnt Create a new situation, based on acquired knowledge, expressing their individuality
Interpersonal relations	Listen to others following turn taking norms, using very simple appropriate social expressions	Contribute with guidance to the accomplishment of a task, valuing the diversity of ideas	Collaborate to complete a task, valuing and incorporating contributions and ideas different from theirs Collaborate with guidance to solve problems, in a classroom/school setting, to help reach consensus.
Personal development and autonomy	Recognise strengths and weaknesses in their learning in a very guided setting	Select, with guidance, ways to enhance learning and/or overcome challenges	Recognise, with guidance, strategies to enhance learning and/or overcome challenges
Well-being, health and environment	Maintain with guidance learning material and space clean and organised	Help maintain the learning environment clean and organised Recognise with guidance healthy eating, hygiene and exercise habits that contribute to one's well-being as well as that of others	Take on behaviour that contributes to one's well-being as well as the well-being of other with guidance

COMPETENCE AREAS	SUGGESTED OPERATIONAL DESCRIPTORS		
	Years 1 & 2	**Years 3 & 4**	**Years 5 & 6**
Sensibilidade estética e artística	Express likes and preferences pertaining to music, drawings, pictures …	Value, with guidance, aesthetic aspects related to cultural expression	Identify with guidance the importance of aesthetic aspects in familiar contexts Use, with guidance, aesthetic aspects (colour, visual effects, movement, sound, etc.) with the work produced in different formats
Scientific, technical, and technological knowledge	Use previously selected re-sources with a lot of guidance	Use resources at their disposal following very clear guidelines	Select with guidance resources that best suit the needs of a task
Body awareness and mastery	Complete very guided activities to develop fine motor skills and body posture activities, respecting the shared space	Manage with guidance the learning space relating to one-self and others	Explore with guidance move-ment that enhances learning

Appendix C
Process Rubric

SITUATIONAL THEME:

	MONITOR			FINAL GLOBAL OUTCOME		
PERFORMANCE LEVEL	**COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES**			**STUDENTS' PROFILE COMPETENCE AREA**	**COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE ACTIVITY(IES)**	
VERY GOOD **(I can)**	.	.	.	.	.	.
GOOD **(I can but can improve)**	.	.	.	.	.	.
ADEQUATE **(I can with help)**	.	.	.	.	.	.
INADEQUATE **(I can't yet, I need help)**	.	.	.	.	.	.

Example

PERFOR-MANCE LEVEL	MONITOR			FINAL GLOBAL OUTCOME		
	COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES			STUDENTS' PROFILE COMPETENCE AREA	COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE ACTIVITY(IES)	
	Reading Comprehension	Written Interaction	Oral Interaction	Information and communication	Written Interaction	Oral Production
VERY GOOD (I can)	• Selects essential information to identify all of the people in the text	• Completes all the captions accurately to describe pictures	• Maintains a simple exchange about a family photo: - Is generally intelligible - Responds promptly and accurately	• Organises all the information and uses visuals to support presentation	• Makes notes on inherited traits and learned behaviour about favourite celebrity and 2 of their family members: - All content is relevant - Errors don't impede understanding	• Controls the use of present simple and adjective order • Uses a range of adjectives to describe people • Is generally intelligible
GOOD (I can but can improve)	• Selects essential information to identify most of the people in the text	• Completes all captions, errors do not impede un-derstanding	• Is generally intelligible • Responds promptly and is mostly accurate	• Organises most of the information and uses visuals to support presentation	• Most content is relevant • Errors don't impede understanding	• Controls the use of present simple and adjective order • Uses adjectives to describe people • Is generally intelligible
ADEQUATE (I can with help)	• Selects essential information to identify some of the people in the text	• Completes all captions errors may impede un-derstanding OR • Completes most of the captions, errors do not impede un-derstanding	• Is mostly intelligible • Responds with some hesitation and is not always accurately	• Organises most of the information but visuals may not support presentation	• Some content may not be relevant • Errors may impede understanding	• Has limited control of the present simple and adjective order • Limited range of adjectives • Is mostly intelligible
INADEQUATE (I can't yet, I need help)	• Doesn't select or selects very basic information that doesn't fully identify anyone in the text	• Doesn't complete all captions and errors impede understand-ing	• Is not always intelligible • Is not accurate and hesitations are very frequent	• Information is not organised and there are no visuals or uses visuals that doesn't support presentation	• Most content is irrelevant or missing • Errors impede understanding	• Has little or no control of present simple and adjective order • Very limited range of adjectives • Is not always intelligible

Appendix D
Self-assessment Tool

My progress on: _____

☞ **Look! What is your opinion? Colour the stars.** ✎

★★★★ I can!

★★★☆ I can but can improve.

★★☆☆ I can with help.

★☆☆☆ I can't yet, I need help!

	IN MY ENGLISH LESSONS I CAN …	Student	**Teacher** **How** can I do better? **Where** can I find help?
Oral Comprehension		☆☆☆☆	
Written Comprehension		☆☆☆☆	
Oral Production		☆☆☆☆	
Written Production		☆☆☆☆	
Oral Interaction		☆☆☆☆	
Written Interaction		☆☆☆☆	
Students' Profile		☆☆☆☆	

NOW, I CAN …		Student	Teacher
			How can I do better? **Where** can I find help?
		☆☆☆☆	
		☆☆☆☆	

NEED TO IMPROVE: ☑

☐		☐		
☐		**TEACHER:**		

PARENT / GUARDIAN

What's your opinion? ☑

Sig.: _____

★★★★ Well done, ready to move on! ☐
★★★☆ Well done but can improve! ☐
★★☆☆ Can with help, needs practice. ☐
★☆☆☆ Can't yet, needs help ☐

Your Opinion: _____

_____