

Some concluding reflections

David Little, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

Neus Figueras, University of Barcelona, Spain

Lynda Taylor, University of Bedfordshire, Great Britain

<https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTSIG.CEFR8-12>

This article is open access and licensed under an Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) licence.

From the beginning, the editorial group that prepared *Aligning language education with the CEFR: A handbook* (British Council et al. 2022) anticipated that the experience of use would quickly reveal a need for revision and further elaboration. That was one of the chief motivations for organizing the 2024 Barcelona conference. As we explained in our introduction, the articles in this special issue began life as presentations at that conference, and some of them report on alignment projects that made use of the Handbook. On the basis of the feedback, both explicit and implied, provided by our authors, it seems to us that the following issues need to be addressed when planning CEFR alignment projects and preparing a revised edition of the Handbook.

Online vs. in-person alignment procedures. All the alignment projects reported in this special issue were conducted at least partially online, whereas the Handbook is mostly focused on in-person procedures. In most cases, reasons of cost and convenience are likely to tip the balance in favour of working online, for which a revised edition of the Handbook should offer more detailed guidance, taking account of key differences between the two modalities (Kanistra 2025; Kollias 2023).

Four modes of language use vs. four skills. Even when they have been newly designed using the CEFR/CV's mediation scales, the tests reported in these articles are described in terms of the four skills of traditional second language pedagogy rather than the CEFR's four modes of language use (to which only Carolyn Westbrook and Aidan Holland refer). Given that the CEFR was first published a quarter of a century ago, this is both strange and shocking. Clearly, alignment with the CEFR can never be entirely valid if this mismatch is maintained—something to which a revised edition of the Handbook should give prominence.

The CEFR's action-oriented approach. The 2001 CEFR describes its approach to the description of language use as “action-oriented”. The term coheres with the concept of language user/learners as “social agents ... who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish” (Council of Europe [CoE] 2001: 9), and its pedagogical implications are confirmed by the text box at the beginning of Chapter 2: “Language use, embracing language learning ...” (CoE 2001: 9). The 2001 CEFR nevertheless declines to make pedagogical recommendations: “it is not the function of the Framework to promote one particular language teaching methodology, but instead to present options” (Council of Europe 2001: 142). By contrast, the 2020 CEFR/CV advocates an action-oriented approach to language teaching and learning (see also Piccardo and North 2019), though without explaining this significant change of stance

or the relation the new stance assumes between language teaching/learning and language use. Based on the concept of a Comprehensive Learning System (O'Sullivan 2020), the Alignment Handbook is concerned with all dimensions of language learning—curriculum, materials and teaching/learning as well as assessment. Clearly, a revised edition will need to explore what an action-oriented approach to teaching and learning entails, and how precisely it is related to an action-oriented description of language use.

Making greater use of the CEFR's discursive content. To date, regardless of its specific focus, alignment with the CEFR has tended to focus on levels, scales and descriptors; rather little attention has been paid to the discursive content of either the CEFR or the CEFR/CV. The article by Diego Cortés Velásquez and Elena Nuzzo provides a welcome exception to this general rule: the project on which they report started from the discussion of tasks in Chapter 7 of the 2001 CEFR. When revising the Alignment Handbook, the new editors could usefully refer to key conceptual discussions in the CEFR and CEFR/CV, including the discursive characterizations of the proficiency levels in Chapter 3 of the 2001 CEFR (CoE 2001: 33-37) and Appendix 1 of the 2020 CEFR/CV (Council of Europe 2020: 173-175).

The role of AI technologies. In the five years since work began on the Alignment Handbook, the potential of AI systems to support and perhaps abbreviate alignment processes has expanded significantly. Clearly, this must be addressed in a revised edition.

At the end of 2025, and following the publication of a brief supplement to the Handbook in which some of these issues are addressed, the editorial group responsible for the Alignment Handbook—Neus Figueras, David Little, Barry O'Sullivan, Nick Saville and Lynda Taylor—passed the baton to a new group—Dave Allan, Armin Berger, Nathaniel Owen, Graeme Seed and Carolyn Westbrook. These colleagues and the institutions they represent—the British Council, EALTA, UKALTA and ALTE—have agreed to continue the work that started in 2018. We conclude, however, by pointing out that the ultimate responsibility for honest and successful use of the CEFR and the Handbook, and for any consequent improvements in language education, lies with everyone involved in language education.

References

- Kanistra, Paraskevi. 2025. *Evaluating the Item Descriptor (ID) Matching method in a face-to-face and a synchronous virtual environment*. Peter Lang.
- Kollias, Charalambos. 2023. *Virtual standard setting: Setting cut scores*. Peter Lang.
- Piccardo, Enrica & Brian North. 2019. *The action-oriented approach: A dynamic vision of language education*. Multilingual Matters.