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**SELF-ASSESSMENT AND THE COMMON EUROPEAN
FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE FOR LANGUAGES: LEARNING
TEACHING ASSESSMENT:
A CASE STUDY OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SELF-
ASSESSMENT
WITH ADULT LEARNERS OF ENGLISH**

by Susan Sheehan

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Education in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law, Graduate School of Education

October 2007

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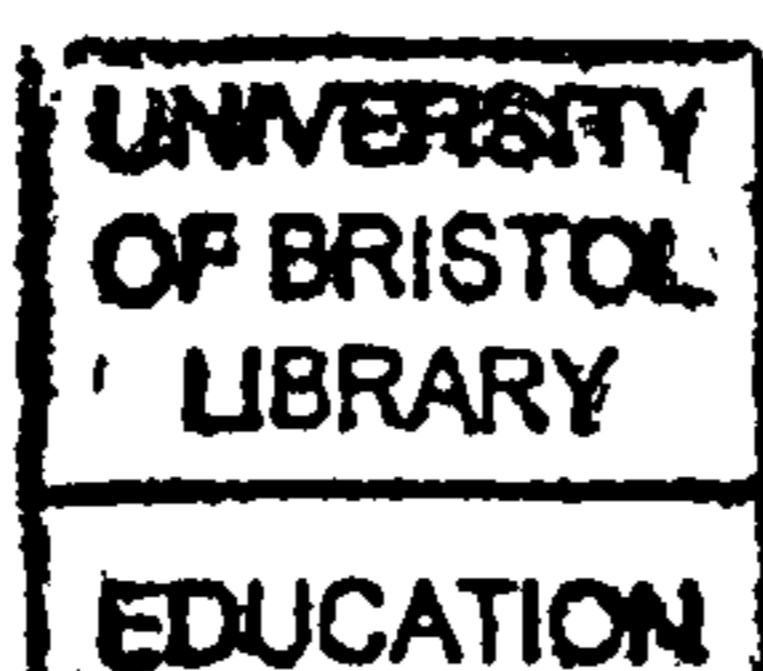
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Abstract

This dissertation is concerned with a conceptual analysis and an empirical investigation of how self-assessment is construed by students, teachers, and institution managers in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting.

The conceptual analysis is made by a review of the relevant literature. The empirical work is based on a case study approach to research and focuses on an institution in Italy offering EFL courses for adult students. A multiple methods approach was adopted to investigate the problem and these included the use of focus groups, questionnaires, student compositions, direct classroom observations and a search of the Institution's documents relating to self-assessment and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR). Data were collected in three stages at intervals over a period of nine months.

The dissertation concludes by identifying the reactions to self-assessment. It was found that the students in the study showed a shift in opinion regarding self-assessment as the study progressed. At first they were sceptical about it; next they were hostile; and in the third stage they were positive towards it, and there was some evidence that self-assessment promotes learner autonomy. The staff in the study were not convinced about the value of self-assessment and two factors may account for this. First, in the Italian educational culture assessment is seen to be the role of the teacher. Second, the document search revealed that scant attention was given to self-assessment in the Institution's documents.

Finally, avenues for further research are suggested, particularly with regard to the attitudes of teachers. If it is educationally desirable for self-assessment to take its place as an integral part of the assessment process, then the issue of teacher hostility must be addressed. Much needs to be done to win the hearts and minds of teachers if the innovation of self-assessment is to become established in educational practice.

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Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Pauline Rea-Dickins. Her unstinting commitment to her students is truly inspirational. She has been incredibly generous with her time and amazingly prompt in giving her feedback. The standards she sets are high and of the many lessons I have learnt from her, perhaps, the most important is that of never settling for anything less than the best.

Secondly, I must thank my family who have supported me throughout the long and difficult process of writing this dissertation. They have all been wonderful in different ways and have each contributed to the completion of this project.

Finally, I would like to thank the students and teachers who volunteered to participate in the project. They have given time and attention to this project in a manner which astounded me. The second rater deserves a special mention for responding so promptly when given very little warning.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original, except where indicated by special reference to the text, and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other academic award. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

Signed: *S. Sheehan*

Date: *Dec 2007*

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a description of the background to this research project (1.2). I then state my personal interest in the topic (1.3). The overall research objectives are outlined in 1.4. This is followed by an overview of the research design (1.5).

Subsequently the structure of the dissertation (1.6) is described with a summary of each chapter.

1.2 Background

The concept investigated in this research project is self-assessment within the context of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR) and its implementation at the Language Institute where I worked. Self-assessment is explored in an English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching environment. Self-assessment is not seen as a replacement for other forms of assessment, rather it is intended in this context to be used in conjunction with other approaches to assessment. Self-assessment is, I would argue, significant for three main reasons. Firstly, it has the potential to promote a greater understanding of the processes of language learning. This allows learners to set language goals and to select appropriate language learning strategies. Secondly, self-assessment carries the potential to promote learner autonomy, as learners take ownership of their learning. Thirdly, self-assessment aids learners in developing an increased understanding of assessment. This gives the learner greater control over assessment and at the same time decreases the assessment burden placed on the teacher.

The assessment of learning on EFL courses has changed in recent years, and self-assessment has been given a much more prominent role than the rather marginal one which had been the case for several decades. One reason for the move of self-assessment from the margins to the mainstream is, I would argue, the introduction of the CEFR and its companion piece the European Language Portfolio (ELP; 2000). This introduction has been one of the most exciting developments in teaching foreign languages in recent times and represents, perhaps, the biggest revolution since the introduction of communicative language teaching. As Alderson observes:

There can be no doubt that the most significant recent event in the language education scene in Europe has been the publication of the Common European Framework of Reference of Languages. (2005:257)

Through the introduction of the CEFR, for example, language educators have been given a common language when discussing levels of language proficiency and it has brought the issues of learner autonomy and self-assessment to centre stage.

Furthermore, the CEFR has shifted the focus on to what language learners can do rather than focussing on their mistakes or what they cannot do.

I have suggested above that one of the reasons for the renewed interest in self-assessment has been the introduction of the CEFR. However, the CEFR itself has proved to be very controversial with its detractors and supporters engaged in an impassioned debate. For example, during September and October 2006, and again in the spring of 2007, there was a flurry of postings about the applicability of the CEFR beyond Europe on the electronic forums such as LTEST (LTEST-L@LISTS.PSU.EDU) and the EALTA (www.ealta.eu.org) discussion list. There have been other periods of intense debate as my study of the archives shows. In Table 1.1 below, I have

summarised the main arguments for and against the CEFR which I have developed from an analysis of postings on these lists.

Table 1.1 Summary of arguments for and against the CEFR

For	Against
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common language for describing proficiency • Assessment types broadened • Standards needed for assessment • Professional dialogue facilitated • Learner achievement formally recorded • Learning objectives negotiated • Reference not policy implementation • Criterion-referenced • Learner autonomy promoted • Understanding of the process of language learning increased • Reflection on language learning encouraged • Recognition of language learning outside of the classroom • Promotion of life-long language learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interference in the classroom by bureaucrats • Differences in opportunities, contexts, personalities not allowed for • Lack of theoretical underpinnings • Danger of “cosmetic application” in a top down manner • Contradiction of local practice • Old fashioned division of language in 4 skills • Imperialistic notion – we know what is best for you • Political mandating of test constructs • View of language learning rooted in the philosophies of 35 years ago • Hard to read and understand • Danger of reification • Bandwagon on which people are jumping

From Table 1.1, it can be seen that the benefits identified by language testing researchers and professionals have much to do with the promotion of learner autonomy and the encouragement of learners to self-assess and reflect on language learning, evidenced by, as examples, “learner autonomy promoted”, “reflection on language learning encouraged” and “recognition of language learning outside the classroom.” Nonetheless, criticisms relating to imperialism and reification continue to be levelled at the CEFR. This debate will be further outlined in chapter 2, along with a full description of the CEFR, the ELP, their creation and the Council of Europe.

1.3 My personal interest

As well as an academic interest in the debate surrounding the CEFR which I have outlined above (1.2), I also have a personal interest in the topic. The Institute, where I was working when I started this research, was one of the first in a network of teaching centres to try to incorporate the CEFR into its courses. I had been involved in piloting the CEFR at the Institute so my interest and participation in the implementation project can be traced back to its very beginnings at the Institute.

My interest in the field also developed over the course of my studies, both at Bristol and those undertaken before coming to Bristol. Learner autonomy and assessment had played an important part in the dissertation for my Master's Degree (Sheehan, 2000). I quickly identified self-assessment as the topic for my dissertation. As the Doctorate of Education (EdD), the context for this current research, is a degree for professionals I was keen to focus on a topic which was of immediate concern in my professional life. The course modules allowed me to pilot different ideas and refine the focus of my interest. Delivering papers at conferences (e.g. IATEFL, 2006) and the feedback from doing so confirmed for me that the topic could be suitable for this dissertation. A list of papers presented is provided in Appendix 1.

In addition to the reasons stated above my interest further increased when I felt that I found a gap in the research literature. As will be explored in more detail in chapter 3, I discovered there was little research into the processes of self-assessment. I felt this was in some ways anomalous as the Council of Europe (2001) specifically states that one of the aims of the CEFR and the ELP is to shift the focus from product-orientated learning to process-orientated learning. I, therefore, wanted to explore how students perceived

self-assessment and how they came to their decisions when asked to self-assess. I did not wish to replicate the studies which dominated the literature review, focussed as they were on the reliability of self-assessment. In these studies (see 3.4, below), the marks the participants gave to themselves were compared to those awarded by an expert. If the two sets of marks were similar self-assessment was declared to be reliable (e.g. Blue, 1988) (see Table 3.2 for a list of surveys of this type).

I became further convinced that the topic was one worthy of investigation when I read Little's (2002) plea for more research into the pedagogical functions of the ELP, such as encouraging goal setting, reflection and self-assessment. He stated:

Each aspect of this pedagogical function can be explored by using empirical techniques and procedures, and the ELP's standing among educational planners and teacher trainers will be greatly enhanced if it begins to provide a focus for research on such topics as learner attitudes and motivation. (2002:188)

As a teacher I have long been interested in promoting learner autonomy. Thus, my interests were located in an area where there appeared to be a need, as well as specific calls, for further research. As shall be seen in chapter 5 the need for convincing research into these topics is relevant to the needs of the profession (i.e. teachers) as well as teacher trainers and education planners.

1.4 Overall research objectives

The overall aim of this study has been to investigate student perceptions of self-assessment. To this end I critically reviewed relevant literature in order to establish the state of the existing knowledge of self-assessment of English as a foreign language by adult learners. I carried out an empirical investigation with the goal of collecting and interpreting data and possibly advancing the knowledge base relating to self-assessment.

This study has taken into account the relevant theories which underpin the concept of self-assessment. A major focus of this research is the development of insights into processes of self-assessment and on the practical implications for teaching and learning processes.

1.5 Overview of research design

The research design takes an exploratory qualitative case study approach. The study was progressively focussed and 'emergent'. Table 1.2 provides an overview of the study's overall design.

Table 1.2 Overview of study design

Stage 1
Research questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are students' perceptions of self-assessment? 2. What are students' perceptions of assessment? 3. What are students' perceptions of examinations?
Data collection methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focus groups/group interviews • questionnaire • composition
Stage 2
Research questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are student perceptions of self-assessment? 2. How do students arrive at their self-assessment decisions? 3. What are the effects of self-assessment in the classroom?
Data collection methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focus groups/group interviews • stimulated recall of classroom observations
Stage 3
Research questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are students' perceptions of self-assessment at the end of the course? 2. What does the documentary evidence show about self-assessment as promoted by the institution?
Data collection methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focus groups/group interviews • document search

As can be seen from Table 1.2, data collection was divided into three stages. At stage 1 I wanted to establish a baseline of students' perceptions of self-assessment. In order to

give these perceptions a context I also investigated the participants' perceptions of examinations and alternative means of assessment. The following data collection instruments were used at Stage 1: group interviews (n.b. these were used at all three stages of data collection), a composition and an attitude survey. At Stage 2 the students had been engaging with self-assessment for 3 months and I therefore wanted to explore if there had been any changes in their perceptions over this time period. Another aim of the research was to investigate whether there were any effects of self-assessment in classroom practice, therefore, I conducted three classroom observations and used stimulated recall when interviewing the teachers. The "unanticipated" results of the classroom observations led me to conduct a document search at Stage 3 of the data collection.

Data were collected at a private language institution. All the participants in this research project were adults who had chosen to study English in their spare time. The type of language learner who participated in this research project differed from those of most other studies into self-assessment as they were not in full-time education at secondary or tertiary level. The students studied for 3 hours per week for a total of 90 academic hours. Their courses ran from October to June.

1.6 Overview of dissertation and summary of chapters

The dissertation comprises six chapters.

Chapter 1 – Introduction outlines the area under research, my personal motivation for conducting the research, the overall objectives and provides an overview of the study and organisation of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 – The Council of Europe and its impact on the classroom describes the Council of Europe and the philosophy that underpins the CEFR and provides a context for the whole study and a basis for the literature review in chapter 3.

Chapter 3 – Literature review critically analyses empirical studies relevant to this research.

Chapter 4 – Methodology presents the methodological approach taken in this study and provides a rationale for the methods and procedures employed throughout the data collection and analysis processes.

Chapter 5 – Findings presents the findings of the data collection and analysis processes.

Chapter 6 – Summary, Conclusions and Implications summarises the study's findings and posits some contributions that may be made to the field. It provides comments upon the strengths and limitations of the study, as well as potential contributions to English language teaching practice, i.e. its professional applications.

The structure of this dissertation is a traditional one. I felt that this best suited the story I was telling. I considered the order of the chapters to be a good representation of the logic and thinking underlying the research project.

1.7 Summary

This chapter outlined the area under investigation in this research project and highlighted my motivation for having chosen it. The area under investigation is the implementation of self-assessment with adult learners of English. My interest in self-assessment was sparked by the publication of the CEFR as I found in it, for the first time, a framework within which to undertake self-assessment. This general interest became more focussed when the CEFR was introduced at the Language Institute where

I was working. This chapter also contains an overview of the research design and of the dissertation. In the next chapter I describe the inception of the CEFR and explore the debate surrounding it.

Chapter 2 The Council of Europe and its impact on the classroom

2.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a description of the origins of the Council of Europe and the CEFR (2.2). There follows an analysis of what the CEFR is and how it works (2.3). The implications for teaching and learning will then be analysed (2.4). A review of the debate surrounding the CEFR (2.5) precedes the chapter summary.

2.2 Origins of the Council of Europe and the CEFR

The Council of Europe was founded in 1949, which makes it the oldest political organisation in Europe. There are three main areas in which it operates: it defends human rights and democracy, it develops agreements to standardise laws within Europe and it promotes awareness of European identity. The Council of Europe seeks to promote better understanding of nations through an understanding of their languages, with the expectation that barriers between different countries may be broken down through speaking each other's languages. The aim of breaking these barriers is to promote European harmony.

The CEFR is the result of over ten years' conceptualisation by a number of applied linguists and pedagogical specialists from all member states of the Council of Europe (John Trim, Jan Van Ek and others). Its origins can be traced back to the 1970s when the Council of Europe published the Threshold (1975) language learning objectives. It defined levels of functional competence and was used in syllabus design by many national language learning programmes. The motivation for this project was not solely

linguistic. It was undertaken at the same time as attempts were being made to forge a European identity. This period is described as being one where:

... notions of a socio-political and economic community in Europe were rapidly taking shape; an early motivation for revising Waystage and Threshold in the late 1980s had been their relevance to educational programmes of language learning for European citizenship. (Taylor and Jones, 2006:3)

The socio-political dimension of the CEFR will be returned to later. The Council of Europe was not the only agency engaged in creating frameworks. The English Speaking Union (1989) and the Association of Language Testers in Europe (1990) also published assessment frameworks that aimed to compare language examinations. As the focus of these two frameworks was comparison of examinations they did not try to define communicative proficiency.

Having explained how the CEFR came into being, it is important to provide a description of it. The CEFR is divided into three broad bands, A, B and C. As can be seen from Appendix 2.1, A describes the lowest level of language proficiency and C describes the highest level. The broad bands are subdivided into two levels which are labelled 1 and 2. Thus, the values on the scale range from A1 to C2. A learner at A1 can understand and use familiar everyday expressions while a learner at C2 can understand virtually everything heard or read. The ELP (2001) is the companion piece of the CEFR. The framework, created to make examinations comparable throughout Europe, was not originally developed with a view to aid teachers or learners with day-to-day classroom activity. The ELP, on the other hand, was created to bring the CEFR into the classroom. It has three components: a Language Passport, a Language Biography and a Dossier. The language passport records language proficiency. These can be seen in Appendix 2.2. It includes self-assessment, teacher assessment, and examination certificates. The language biography is a space for language learners to

plan their learning objectives through reflection on past learning experiences. The dossier includes documents and materials which support the achievements recorded in the passport and biography. The ELP has the same action-orientated philosophy as the CEFR and uses the same six level scale of language competences (A1 to C2). The self-assessment grid from the CEFR is also included in the ELP. This has been included in Appendix 2.3. I have used the term ELP in a way which might suggest that there is one which is in use throughout Europe. This, however, is not the case. While all portfolios include the three elements described above they are created locally and then approved by the Council of Europe Validation Committee. Basic information about the validation process has been included in Appendix 2.4. Further information on the validation process can be obtained from the Council of Europe website (www.coe.int). The Language Institute's portfolio had not been submitted to the Council of Europe for validation. The reasons for this are discussed in Chapter 4 (4.6).

The ELP has two functions: reporting and pedagogic. The reporting function allows the learner to demonstrate and evidence their CEFR level of proficiency in languages. The ELP can be used whenever it is necessary to offer such proof, such as when applying for jobs or when entering university. The pedagogic function is to support learner reflection on the language learning process that, as Panthier suggests:

...coincides with the Council of Europe's interest in fostering the development of learner autonomy and promoting life-long learning. (2004:479)

It does this by encouraging learners to self-assess and to set learning goals with the intention to assist learners in taking more responsibility for their own learning. I will return to a discussion of learner autonomy in the following chapter (3.3) and when I come to discuss the results of the data collection phase in Chapters 5 and 6.

As stated above, the aim of the Council of Europe, when sponsoring the creation of the CEFR was to promote shared understanding of the language learning process with the aim of making European citizens better language learners. This was consistent with the previously stated aim of improving understanding between nations through an understanding of each other's languages. The term plurilingualism, which was coined by the Council of Europe and used in its publications, is used to describe a person's linguistic ability in more than one foreign language. Panthier (2005) defines plurilingualism as: "The capacity of a person to communicate in several languages, with skills developed at different levels." I interpret the term plurilingualism to mean inclusivity. Language learning should be available to all and recognised at whatever level of proficiency, no matter where or how the language was learnt. Thus, language learning is no longer restricted to the elite who attend university and study languages at a very high level. Language learning, which takes place outside formal education, was also, and continues to be, recognised. The CEFR and its companion piece the ELP were created with the aim of supporting and promoting plurilingualism.

The CEFR is not the sole instrument which the Council of Europe uses to promote its policy of supporting linguistic diversity. Legal instruments are also deployed. Panthier (2004) describes the measures taken by the Council of Europe to maintain European cultural heritage through linguistic diversity. The European Framework Convention on the protection of minorities (1995) and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992) and the European Cultural Convention (1954) are legal and conceptual instruments used to pursue the goal of promoting linguistic diversity which, in turn, supports the goals of improved international mobility, improved communication

and economic development. These documents can be downloaded from the Council of Europe website (www.coe.int).

2.3 The CEFR and how it works

The CEFR is defined as having two purposes:

1 To encourage practitioners of all kinds in the language field, including learners themselves, to reflect on such questions as:

1.1 what do we do when we speak (or write) to each other?

1.2 what enables us to act in this way?

1.3 how much of this do we need to learn when we try to use a new language?

1.4 how do we set our objectives and mark our progress along the path from total ignorance to effective mastery?

1.5 how does language learning take place?

1.6 what can we do to help ourselves and other people to learn a language better?

2 To make it easier for practitioners to tell each other and their clientele what they wish to help learners achieve, and how they attempt to do so. (The Council of Europe, 2001:7)

All of the above, taken together, reveal a great deal of the underlying philosophy of the CEFR and the emphasis which is placed on learner autonomy and self-assessment. I will now try to break down these reasons into their constituent parts and discuss their implications. First of all, language learners are included within the class of language practitioners (1). In other words, the group of practitioners is not reduced only to language experts or teachers. This also increases learner autonomy as the repositioning of a learner as a practitioner gives greater value to their potentially active role in the language learning process. Everyone can be a language practitioner so the philosophy behind the CEFR is inclusive rather than exclusive. People are not excluded from this group because of their level of language proficiency. Thus, language learners are defined as being language practitioners; it is not only successful or proficient learners

that are included, which was the case when language learning was restricted to a university educated elite.

Secondly, as observed in bullets 1.1 and 1.2 above, the emphasis is on language use rather than knowledge of, or about, a language. The CEFR is focussed on communication rather than academic knowledge of a language. Thirdly, as observed in bullet 1.4, the two ends of the learning spectrum range from “total ignorance” to “effective mastery”. I interpret the use of the term effective mastery (as opposed to say ‘complete mastery’) to mean that the native speaker is not held up as a model to which language learners should aspire as there are no mentions of native speakers being a model for language learners in the CEFR. Rather, the emphasis is on effective communication. Panthier outlines the Council of Europe’s policy thus:

... the aim is not simply to achieve “mastery” of one or two, or even three languages, each taken in isolation, with the “ideal native speaker” as the ultimate model. (2004:480)

Thus, the aim is to achieve differing levels of proficiency in a wide range of languages. This topic will be referred to throughout the thesis. However, as observed in 5.3.4 below, the participants in this research project frequently compared their performance with native-speakers.

Again, the focus on language use can be seen through the use of the term mastery in bullet 1.4. This implies having control over the language in communication situations rather than knowledge about the language or its rules. Furthermore, the use of the term path (in 1.4) gives a value to learners who have yet to achieve effective mastery.

In addition, there is a clear interest in the theoretical underpinnings of language study, which is evidenced by the Council of Europe's commitment to researching language acquisition in the question: "how does language learning take place?" (see bullet 1.5 above). Finally, a focus on process rather than product and an interdependent view of language learning is shown by the final question: "What can we do to help ourselves and other people learn a language better?" (1.6). The idea of helping ourselves can also be interpreted as supporting learner autonomy as language learners are challenged to take more responsibility for their learning and the notion of learner agency.

The second aim (2) of the CEFR shows the importance of transparency and openness. Teaching methodology should not be a trademarked secret as it was with some chains of language schools e.g. Inlingua or Berlitz. The implication is that both teachers and learners should be quite clear why they are doing a particular activity and how it will help them to learn a language better. They become partners in the learning process. Although it can be said that the philosophy of the Council of Europe is clear, this is not the same as saying that the CEFR has sound theoretical underpinnings. As will be argued later in the chapter (2.5) the theoretical underpinnings are questionable and indeed, are the topic of considerable contested debate.

2.4 Methodological implications of the CEFR

Having described why the CEFR and ELP were created and the philosophy behind them the implications for the classroom are discussed below. The CEFR describes its approach to language learning as "action-based". It focuses on how languages are used and what learners can do with the language. Thus, I would argue, there is an implicit rejection of a knowledge-based approach to language learning. I consider a knowledge-

based approach to be one which places greater emphasis on learning about language than learning how to use it. This move to an action-based approach brings with it many implications both for the teacher and the learner. Firstly, it is a rejection of established teaching practice that places a great deal of emphasis on learning grammar and knowledge about a language. Teachers may feel uncomfortable with or indeed disapproving of this break with tradition. Learners too, may dislike this action-based approach that may require them to self-assess and take more responsibility for decision making as it may conflict with the model of teaching used in their past learning experiences.

Heyworth (2004) identified four further implications of this shift towards an action-based approach. I will explore two of them here. Firstly, it requires a needs-analysis based on the learners' objectives. This could cause problems if there were differing objectives within one group. For example, one student needs to develop reading skills whilst another needs to develop speaking skills. Secondly, learner motivation and learner involvement are fundamental for this approach. But it would appear that learners might be forced to be autonomous rather than the desire to be autonomous coming from the learners. This would be an absurd contradiction. Learner autonomy will be further discussed in chapter 3.

The CEFR claims not to be prescriptive and not to seek to promote one kind of teaching methodology. The following, rather vague and vacuous statement, encapsulates the CEFR position on teaching methodologies.

...it has been a fundamental methodological principle of the Council of Europe that the methods employed in language learning, teaching and research are those considered to be most effective in reaching the objectives agreed in the light of the needs of individual learners in their social context. (Council of Europe, 2001:142)

I would argue that this is a rather disingenuous position to take. In light of the action-orientated approach espoused within the CEFR some teaching methodologies could be seen as incompatible with the underlying philosophy of the CEFR. For example, the grammar-translation approach, which is still widely used in the Italian education system, is not easily reconcilable with an action-orientated approach in that it is not operationalised as a teaching methodology which considers language learners to be social agents who need language in order to perform specific tasks such as giving a presentation to clients. In addition, a purely academic approach to language learning such as grammar-translation would not seem to take into account the cognitive and volitional resources of most learners. Thus, the CEFR does have a bias towards certain teaching methodologies and its representation of the language learner is far from neutral.

Panthier (2004) is at pains to point out that the CEFR is not a normative document and the purpose of the CEFR is not to tell teachers how to teach or to tell learners what to learn. This would seem to conflict with the stated aim of the CEFR - which is to improve communication - as skills and vocabulary have to be taught for learners to become effective communicators. This clearly implies that teacher and learner activity should be focussed on achieving certain goals and not others. Thus, the grammar-translation teaching style would seem to be rejected, as it does not place emphasis on communication. Dictation, which is one of the activities which the participants in this study requested most often, would not have a place, as it is not a classroom activity which, in its traditional form, promotes communication. Panthier describes the Framework's approach as positive:

It allows learners and teachers to fix their objectives clearly (for short, medium and long term) and to check achievements, which is a very good way of facilitating learner autonomy and motivation. (2004:477)

Whilst these may be laudable aims it cannot be denied that there is conflict between stating the Framework is not prescriptive but at the same time stating that the Framework will promote certain aspects of the language learning process. The promotion of some aspects must inevitably lead to the demotion of others.

2.5 The CEFR debate

I have previously described the CEFR as one of the most important innovations in language learning of recent times (1.2). As would be expected with such an important development controversy has surrounded the CEFR; conferences and electronic forums have hosted impassioned debates on the topic. For example, in the autumn of 2006 and the spring of 2007 there were vigorous on-line debates on the topic. In the table below I have summarised the main points of this debate. The arguments have been taken from the LTEST and EALTA discussion lists from the past five years. This table is an expanded version of that which appears in chapter 1.

Table 2.1 Summary of strengths and weaknesses of the CEFR

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common language for describing proficiency • Assessment types broadened • Standards needed for assessment • Professional dialogue facilitated • Learning objectives negotiated • Reference - not policy implementation • Criterion-referenced • Learner autonomy promoted • Understanding of the process of language learning increased • Reflection on language learning encouraged • Recognition of learning outside of the classroom • Promotion of life-long language learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interference in the classroom by bureaucrats • Differences in opportunities, contexts and personalities not allowed for • Lack of theoretical underpinnings • Danger of “cosmetic application” in a top down manner • Contradiction of local practice • Old fashioned division of language in 4 skills • Imperialistic notion – we know what is best for you • Extra-European applications • Political mandating of test constructs • View of language learning rooted in the philosophies of 35 years ago • Hard to read and understand • Danger of reification • Bandwagon on which people are jumping • Greater harmonisation leads to less freedom • Believed to describe acquisition • Used in immigration control • Political agenda • Language acquisition processes omitted • Threat to democracy • Formative assessment stifled • Financial implications • Limited number of descriptors • Lack of descriptors for lexis • Incompatibility with some teaching styles • Taken to be a description of linguistic and communicative reality • Predominance of English and French sources

I shall now expand on some of the items outlined in Table 2.1. The CEFR has what can be described as a political agenda. As Lenz and Schneider write:

Self-assessment is promoted not only for pedagogic reasons but also for political reasons based on the assumption that citizens of democratic societies need to be autonomous personalities. (2002:69)

This, I would argue, is an unusual goal for a language learning project. If the reasoning behind it is based on the idea that autonomous personalities make for stronger and more effective democracy then it could be welcomed. If, on the other hand, it is part of a rejection of society and the bonds that bind us to our fellow citizens it is rather more worrying. Whichever interpretation is made, it would seem beyond the scope of the CEFR to change the type of democracy practised in Europe.

Heyworth (2004) has criticised the implicit political agenda of the CEFR. His arguments can be summarised into three main points. Firstly, he is worried that it is amateur social engineering. I interpret this to mean that people who are not elected or qualified are trying to change the quality of democracy in Europe. Secondly, he argues that it supposes that language teachers are capable of promoting this type of democracy. As a teacher I am not sure whether the promotion of democracy falls within my field of competence. Furthermore, language teachers are affected by the same “intercultural prejudice” as any other members of society. So they may not be qualified to promote a particular type of democracy. Thirdly, the assumption that knowledge of another language automatically promotes respect for it may not be valid. My own experience as a highly competent speaker of Italian shows that it is possible to be fluent in the language but at the same time disparaging of some cultural practices. This could be considered an example of the difference between culture fair and culture free.

As can be seen in Table 2.1, many of the concerns about the CEFR centre on its political nature. The Council of Europe has been explicit about the political agenda which it hoped to promote through the ELP and the CEFR. Panthier argues that by supporting people to take more control over their language learning people are developing transferable skills which help them in:

...developing the more general competences necessary for socially responsible participation in processes relating to active democratic citizenship. (2004:479)

The question which needs to be asked here is what type of democratic citizenship is being proposed. It would seem to be European citizenship. This would seem to reduce the importance of citizenship of one’s country. Fulcher (2004b) warns that this process of harmonisation could result in less diversity and less choice. This would be ironic

given that the declared aim of the Council of Europe's language policies is to promote diversity.

Fulcher (2004b) has criticised the CEFR for its lack of theoretical underpinnings. His criticism resonates with that of Bausch, Christ and Königs (2002) who argue that it is weak on theoretical grounds. Fulcher writes that:

In other words, the CEFR is nothing more than a set of scaled descriptors that reflects what groups of teachers drawn from around Europe could agree represented "more" and "less" proficient. (2004:7)

His criticism seems to undervalue the work of teachers. Perhaps teachers are best placed to decide and define language proficiency. A counter-argument to the criticism that the CEFR does not have sound theoretical underpinnings could be Jones' (2005) declaration that: "Proficiency is not just "out-there" – to some extent it is what we declare it to be." It could be argued that such a statement would make Fulcher's criticism rather naïve. Language proficiency is socially constructed rather than an absolute.

As can be seen listed in Table 2.1, one of the purported weaknesses of the CEFR is the lack of theoretical underpinnings and the risk of reification. Jones (2005) states that the original bases used for the levels of the CEFR were the levels of Cambridge ESOL examinations (www.cambridgeesol.org). However, this claim does not match with the history of the CEFR as I have outlined it above (2.2). Jones' statement would, however, seem to give further support to Fulcher's claim that the CEFR lacks theoretical underpinnings. The levels of the CEFR might, therefore, seem to be a case of reification (see Table 2.1). Cambridge ESOL pitch their examinations at this level, therefore these levels have a meaning. This does not seem to take into account any model of how

languages are acquired. This comment should not be taken as a criticism of the work of Cambridge ESOL. Rather, it is not the purpose of examination providers to create the standards for language learning. It is their job to produce examinations, which are fit for the purpose for which they have been created. Whilst the aims of the Council of Europe are laudable I would have to support the notion that the CEFR is not as strong theoretically as it might be. However, this does not mean that it has no value for the teacher or the language learner.

As stated in section 2.2, the CEFR grew out of work which had been conducted by the Council of Europe to create the Threshold documents. Fulcher (2004b) notes that the CEFR is based on the levels described by pre-existing documents; this is another area of weakness in the CEFR. He argues that those three documents:

...are purely descriptive, and the distance between Waystage and Threshold is not based upon any empirical evidence, but the intuition of the authors. (2004b:256)

Thus, the CEFR, it could be argued is based more on intuition than theory. There is the intuition of the authors of these documents combined with that of the groups of teachers who performed the task of assigning descriptors to levels. Thus, the empirical underpinnings of the CEFR can be questioned, as indicated in Table 2.1. This would seem to suggest that both the theoretical and empirical evidence base can be questioned. These types of concerns have been frequently raised in the electronic discussion. For example, McNamara (2007) asks: “what other evidence – for and against – do we have?” I would argue that his question is a manifestation of doubts about the CEFR.

This lack of theoretical underpinnings can, perhaps, also be seen in the omission of description of how language is acquired as indicated in Table 2.1. Weir states that:

...there is very little help for those wishing to understand how language proficiency develops in these respects. (2005:288)

It could be argued that in the way the CEFR describes language use, how language is acquired is not relevant. However, as stated in 2.3 above, one of the purposes of the CEFR is to reflect on questions regarding how language learning takes place. If teachers and researchers are not offered a model of how language proficiency develops then this reflection seems to be taking place without support and guidance. It would be more coherent for the CEFR to offer the language practitioner something to reflect on other than personal experience.

As can be seen in Table 2.1, the number and quality of the language descriptors has been criticised. The CEFR recognises, quite rightly in my opinion that progress is made more quickly at lower levels than at higher ones. Thus, fewer hours of study are recommended to move from A1 to A2 than from C1 to C2. However, the number of descriptors available at the different levels would seem to suggest the opposite.

Appendix 2.5 contains all of the 'Can do' statements from A1 to C2. There is a plethora of descriptors for the A 2 (n = 47) level but a scarcity of them at C 2 (n = 24). This means that higher level learners are forced to refer to the same descriptors when self-assessing for a considerable period of time. This could prove to be uninteresting for the learner and could lead to learners looking at the descriptors once or twice and then putting them away. This would seem to go against the idea of reflective learning, which is supposed to be being promoted. Panthier (2005) stated that there is a need for more descriptors to avoid the problems, which I have just raised. The issue of a lack of descriptors at higher levels is returned to in chapters 5 and 6.

In addition to criticism of the number of descriptors available at higher levels there has also been criticism of their quality, as indicated in Table 2.1. Jones (2002:17) states that C2 statements are not sufficiently different from C1 ones. This can be seen from 'Can do' statements included in Appendix 2.5. Weir offers the following explanation for this deficiency:

The likely root cause is that so few contextual parameters or descriptions of successful performance are attached to such "Can-do" statements. Both the context and the quality of performance may be needed to ground these distinctions. (2005:288)

As shall be explored further in Chapters 5 and 6, some of the participants in this study were quite vociferous in their call for quality of performance to be included in the descriptors and so in self-assessment itself.

In addition to a lack of descriptors at high levels the descriptors themselves have come in for criticism. Huhta et al. comment:

The theoretical dimensions of people's skills and language use, which CEFR discusses, are on a very high level of abstraction. (2002:133)

Little et al. (2002) made a similar point. This level of abstraction makes it hard for learners to quantify their progress in language learning. Weir (2005) criticises the descriptors for lack of attention to lexis. He states that:

The CEFR provides little assistance in identifying the breadth and depth of productive or receptive lexis that might be needed to operate at various levels. (2005:292)

Alderson (2005) also complains of a dearth of descriptors for vocabulary (Table 2.1) and laments a lack of descriptors for grammar. The absence of focus on lexis will be returned to in Chapter 5 where the participants will discuss how their perceived lack of vocabulary made agreeing with the learning aims difficult. The participants also stated that they would have preferred learning aims, which focussed on structures. Virkkunen-Fullenwider and Toepfer (2004:125) also report a shortage of descriptors at the higher

levels and they complain of the “fuzziness” of the descriptors, which require careful interpretation. These arguments were summarised in Table 2.1.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the aim of the Council of Europe is to promote greater mutual understanding. The benefits of this understanding are usually expressed in terms of culture. As Gille points out, these are not the only benefits: “Of course, it is also about money, GNP and economic development.” (2004:494) It would be naïve to think that money is not involved in an initiative as big as the CEFR. That the Council of Europe is aiming to improve the financial status of European countries is, perhaps, an uncontroversial position. It is open to question, however, who is making the money out of the CEFR. Fulcher suggests that test producers will exploit the CEFR. He argues that:

...test producers can fit their tests to that part of the scale that matches their target markets and ambitions can be compared with prestigious large-scale tests. (2004b:260)

Thus, test producers stand to make money from the CEFR. As do, I would argue, publishers. Concerns about the financial implications of the CEFR are included in Table 2.1. The CEFR has taken on the role of a badge of quality. By putting CEFR on textbooks and examinations, in some way the products are regarded as being of a higher quality. There is a risk that this label is now applied in a meaningless way. Concerns about this badge of quality issue have featured in the online debate. Papageorgiou (2007) expressed concerns about how the CEFR was used to market examinations in Greece. Despite not having published any empirical evidence, examination providers in Greece claim that their examinations are linked to the CEFR. These claims indicate the value that such assertions carry in a very competitive examination market, such as that of Greece.

From the above, it appears that the CEFR is being taken as a quality indicator. It is possible to argue that the Council of Europe cannot be held responsible for the misuse of its framework. There have been calls on testing discussion lists for the Council of Europe to set up mechanisms to control how the CEFR is used and the claims of those who state that a test or textbook has been aligned to it. These calls go against the remit of the Council of Europe who rely on cooperation rather than coercion to implement policy measures. There is a risk, however, that CEFR will be seen to be the only framework through which to organise assessment. This could have the effect of reducing choice and diversity. As Gille (2004) argues there is no one “best” way of evaluating student performance. Rather, the choice of instrument depends upon the stakeholders involved and the type of information required.

To continue with the badge of quality theme, I now consider research conducted in Australia as discussed on LTEST. Elder (2007) reported on work which she had conducted for the Australian government. The study investigated the feasibility of implementing the CEFR with state and private providers of English courses. She surveyed the course providers and found an enthusiastic reception for the idea. She states that: “It seemed that they, like government, were seduced by the powerful colonial myth of civilisation and progress implicit in the CEFR.” Thus, the providers wanted to associate their courses with the CEFR as by doing so their schools would be seen as modern and offering a good quality product. It is interesting to note that the promised modernity is described as a myth. Elder describes in her posting to the forum that the providers decided against trying to implement the CEFR as they felt that to do so would reduce their freedom of action.

A concern which has been frequently expressed in testing mailing lists (as shown in Table 2.1) is the applicability of the CEFR outside Europe. Education ministries around the world and cultural relations organisations, such as the British Council, have sought to align curricula to the CEFR. Hamp-Lyons (2007) expressed concerns about the manner in which the CEFR was being exploited in Hong Kong and other countries in South East Asia. She argues that this is problematic on several levels. Firstly, the guides for implementation are not available in the local language. This could lead to the CEFR being used in ways which it was not designed for. Secondly, the CEFR was created for European students and may not necessarily be appropriate for use in countries beyond Europe. Thirdly, the CEFR is one part of a wider problem of European institutions having undue influence in South East Asia. A further example of this is “Bologna Process” whereby South East Asian universities are changing course length to reflect standards agreed to in Europe and commonly referred to as the “Bologna Process”. (ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna_en.html)

Outlined above are some of the concerns expressed about the lack of theoretical and empirical underpinnings for the CEFR. This view, however, may contradict commonly held beliefs that CEFR describes linguistic and communicative reality, which were stated in Table 2.1 above. Fulcher describes what he sees as: “... the popular view among teachers in Europe that these levels describe linguistic and communicative reality.” (2004b:256) I would argue that the CEFR is being taken to be something which it is not. This could have serious implications for classroom practice and syllabus design. There is a risk of reification. The CEFR has come to be viewed as “the truth” rather than a device which may aid language practitioners’ thinking.

Having delineated the debate surrounding the CEFR I now outline my own position. Fulcher (2004b) argues that the CEFR is based on nothing more than the intuition of teachers. I would contend that this criticism devalues the professionalism of teachers. Jones (2005) argues that the CEFR developed the levels of language proficiency which had been established by Cambridge ESOL. As I argued above this point of view does coincide with the history of the CEFR as it is outlined within the CEFR

2.6 Summary

This chapter provided details of the origins and rationale of the CEFR. Following a detailed description of the CEFR and its methodological implications, a summary of the key points of the debate were presented. A central critique has been the lack of empirical basis for the CEFR and claims made for it. The following emerge, in my view, as the main points of the debate: Lack of theoretical and empirical underpinnings; not compatible with all teaching methodologies; inadequate descriptors; financial implications and the risk of being interpreted as a description of linguistic and communicative reality

In the following chapter, I examine claims made in support of self-assessment and discuss the extent to which empirical evidence can be found to support those claims. I argue that self-assessment has come to greater prominence because of the emphasis placed on it in the CEFR.

Chapter 3 Literature review

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I trace the origins of self-assessment and examine the reasons why self-assessment has recently come to greater prominence (3.2). I then discuss the claims made for self-assessment with particular reference to Oscarsson's (1989) four benefits of self-assessment (3.3). I review empirical studies of self-assessment with the aim of finding evidence which supports Oscarsson's claims (3.4). The focus of this current research project is the implementation of self-assessment in the context of the CEFR, therefore, I then review those studies which investigate the effects of the CEFR and the ELP on the classroom (3.5). I examine the implications of the literature review for the current research project in 3.6 and argue that I consider to have discovered a gap in the literature (3.7).

3.2 Origins of self-assessment

Self-assessment has been present in English language teaching, albeit on the periphery, for at least 30 years. Much of the research, as will be demonstrated in section 3.4 and in Table 3.2 below, has been based on comparing self-assessment with other forms of assessment, usually that of an expert assessor. In this section I outline the history of self-assessment and three reasons will be given for the increasing prominence of self-assessment. These are:

1. development of qualitatively orientated research
2. development of self-directed learning
3. introduction of the CEFR.

Firstly, Oscarsson (1989) traces the history of self-assessment back to the development of qualitatively orientated methods of research. The increased importance of research methods such as interviews and diaries has reduced the hegemony of the positivist paradigm in English language research. This has opened a space in which self-assessment can operate. There has been a reaction against the predominance of standardised measures and a perceived need for alternative procedures, linked to a concern for greater engagement of learners e.g. Le Blanc et al (1985) in placement testing.

Secondly, the increasing importance of self-assessment can also be linked to the increased popularity of self-directed learning and learner autonomy in language learning more generally. Pierce, Swain et al (1993) ascribe the increased interest in self-assessment (e.g. Oscarsson, 1984, , 1989; LeBlanc and Painchaud, 1985; Holec, 1985; Blue, 1988; Bachman and Palmer, 1989; Blanche and Merino, 1988; Jassen van Dieten, to the greater attention paid to learner-centred language teaching and self-directed language learning, linked to an understanding of the differences in the types of language learner, (see Tables 3.1- 3.2 for further details of these studies). These differences include preferred learning style and motivation to undertake foreign language studies. Learners have been encouraged to assume responsibility for the assessment of their learning e.g. Little (2002 ; Benson and Voller (1997) and Benson , as well as assuming responsibility for their language learning.

Thirdly, a major impetus to the promotion of self-assessment in language learning, via the introduction of the CEFR, is the Council of Europe as we have seen in section 2.2 above. As Oscarsson asserts, the focus of the work of the Council of Europe was:

... to devise a coherent and communicatively orientated system for adult foreign language learning, taking into account, among other things, possible ways of according the learner a more significant role in the teaching/learning process. (1989:176)

Thus, self-assessment may be considered to be a way of giving the learners more control over their language learning and assessment. Little has acknowledged the role of the CEFR in promoting self-assessment, stating:

The recent publication of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and the increasingly widespread adoption of its companion piece, the European Language Portfolio, renew the challenge to develop a culture of assessment that both facilitates and takes full account of learner self-assessment. (2005:321)

I would argue, therefore, that the Council of Europe sought to promote the role of the language learner in both learning and assessment and self-assessment is the way that this desire has been operationalised.

3.3 Claims made for self-assessment

Oscarsson (1989), who has been at the forefront of research in this area and has worked closely with the Council of Europe, includes four points in his rationale for self-assessment. These are:

1. increased understanding of assessment
2. increased awareness of how languages are learnt which aids learners to evaluate course content and assessment more effectively
3. self-assessment leads to an expansion of the range of assessment
4. self-assessment leads to improved goal orientation.

In addition, self-assessment could help relieve some of the burden of assessment from teachers and reduce the hegemony of traditional assessment. As Oscarsson himself notes, these claims need to be empirically verified (see 3.4 below).

Furthermore, the following benefits of alternative and self-assessment have been identified by Tsagari: “Learners can evaluate the process of learning; it promotes autonomous and self-directed learning and supports students psychologically.” (2004:119) Little (2005:321) identifies three rationales for self-assessment. Firstly, it should be included in a learner-centred curriculum as a “matter of principle”. Secondly, it shares out responsibility for assessment. Thirdly, it allows learners to take full advantage of learning opportunities which occur away from formal education. Both Oscarson and Little, I would argue, can be described as “champions” for the CEFR and self-assessment: they have both published widely on the topic and tend to write positively about the potential benefits of the CEFR. Tsagari, by way of contrast, has written more generally about alternative assessment. For her, self-assessment is one type of alternative assessment. She argues that alternative assessment, as a whole, would benefit from further empirical investigation.

Alderson (2005) claims that self-assessment raises learners’ awareness of the nature of language learning and helps them to recognise their strengths and weaknesses. He describes self-assessment as an “article of faith” for the DIALANG project. The aim of this project was to create an on-line diagnostic test based on the CEFR proficiency levels. The following reasons are given as to why self-assessment was considered to be fundamental to DIALANG:

Self-assessment is thought to contribute to autonomous learning, by giving learners more control over their language learning, by enhancing their self-awareness and their awareness of the language learning process, and by giving them a realistic idea of their own abilities, since this is believed to lead to more successful language learning in the long term (2005:209)

Thus, it is claimed that self-assessment promotes greater self-awareness which leads to learners setting goals, which in turn may make them autonomous. Being an autonomous

learner, therefore, means achieving greater success in language learning. Although these comments were made with reference to the DIALANG project, I believe it is valid to extend them to describe all self-assessment, as the process of self-assessment is fundamentally the same. Empirical research conducted into self-assessment under the aegis of the DIALANG project is discussed below (3.4).

Self-assessment is needed for foreign language learners to judge their current levels of performance and define their learning objectives in order to improve their performance. Dickinson (1992), influential in the field of autonomy for foreign language learners, has identified two problems which could develop if a learner cannot self-assess. The learner who is happy with an unsatisfactory performance may allow her language to develop into a pidgin on the one hand. At the other extreme the learner who focuses on perfection limits her range and quantity.

A further advantage which is claimed for self-assessment is that it enables the learner to focus on process rather than product, and in this way, become autonomous. That is to say, learners evaluate the effectiveness of their language learning strategies and become aware of which strategies work best for them at an individual level. Lazenby Simpson describes it as acting as:

... a pivot, embedded deep in the learning process: it looks both forwards and backwards, facilitating reflection on what has taken place and the articulation of what is to come in future learning. (2003:207)

This focus on process represents a move away from traditional forms of assessment where the focus was very much on the product. Furthermore, traditional forms of assessment do not allow the learner to look forward and plan their learning or define

their learning objectives. Combining assessment and learning may make them, in combination, greater than the two component parts.

In addition, it is claimed that self-assessment is particularly important for adult learners.

As participants in this study are adults, this claim has great relevance. Alderson writes that:

An accurate estimation of one's own language ability is believed to be important for setting an appropriate goal and identifying potential weaknesses in the process of one's language learning, especially for self-directed adult learners. (2005:209)

I would argue that young learners usually follow a curriculum pre-determined by the school and have a goal of passing examinations. Adult learners, by way of contrast, choose to invest their time in language learning and have a variety of goals which they wish to achieve. Therefore, it is important that they are supported in choosing appropriate goals and rewards.

Highlighted above are the claims made in support of self-assessment. Here, I briefly discuss areas of concern about self-assessment. Learner resistance would seem to be one of the greatest obstacles to successful self-assessment. I now describe possible reasons for this resistance. Past learning experiences may well have left learners completely unprepared for the concept that assessment is not exclusively the teacher's responsibility. Riley (1985) states that self-assessment can be both intellectually and affectively difficult for the learner. Intellectually, I would suggest, because it requires self-criticism and affectively because it involves going into unknown territories.

According to the CEFR all learners should be capable of self-assessment with the appropriate training and practice. However, I would argue that self-assessment could be beyond the psychological capacity of some learners, as they do not have the necessary

level of self-awareness. The psychological implications of self-assessment are further explored in section 3.4.

In addition to the reasons outlined above, self-assessment may be problematic for some learners, as it requires them to radically change their behaviour as learners. This behaviour is strongly influenced by past learning experiences. The Italian education system, as described by the participants in this doctoral research, is very teacher dominated and this may make it harder for Italian students to assert their autonomy through self-assessment. Even Little acknowledges that self-assessment may prove difficult, at least in the beginning, for such students. He explains that:

Learners whose experience of formal instruction has been largely traditional and teacher-led cannot be expected to assess themselves accurately without further ado. (2005:322)

I next discuss empirical research studies focussed on self-assessment and aspects of learner autonomy.

3.4 Empirical research studies

In 3.3 above, I summarised Oscarsson's (1989) benefits of self-assessment with reference to four specific points. These are: increased understanding of assessment, increased awareness of how languages are learnt which aids learners to evaluate course content and assessment more efficiently, expansion of the range of assessment and improved goal orientation. In reviewing empirical studies, I looked for specific research evidence that supports these claims. This search has not been entirely successful as I did not find many studies which addressed Oscarsson's benefits of self-assessment. Table 3.1 summarises the studies critiqued in order to address Oscarsson's claims.

Table 3.1 Investigating Oscarsson's claims

Investigating Oscarsson's claims	Research
McDonald and Boud 2003	<p>The effects of self-assessment training on performance in external examinations.</p> <p>256 high school students</p> <p>An experimental group comprising 256 participants received formal training in self-assessment skills for an entire academic year. A control group did not. Performance in external examinations was compared.</p> <p>Training students in self-assessment can contribute to their learning outcomes as formally assessed by tests.</p>
Alderson et al 2003	<p>To create online self-assessment tasks for undergraduates at a UK university</p> <p>40 students in the first year and all students enrolled on the course in the second year</p> <p>Participants were observed using the system, completed questionnaires, were interviewed, made written comments and took part in focus groups</p> <p>Learners need to be trained to derive maximum benefits of self-assessment.</p> <p>Many learners are sceptical or ignorant of self-assessment</p>
AlFallay 2004	<p>To investigate the role of some selected psychological and personality traits of the rater in the accuracy of self-assessment</p> <p>78 university students enrolled on elementary English courses</p> <p>Five questionnaires and participants' scores on midterms and finals were used to determine participants' psychological and personality traits of interest and their achievement level</p> <p>Self-ratings are valid and reliable assessment tools. Students with low self-esteem were the most accurate.</p>
Floropoulou 2002a	<p>To investigate student reactions to self-assessment in the context of the DIALANG project</p> <p>6 students</p> <p>Participants were observed, video-filmed and interviewed as they proceeded through the DIALANG system</p> <p>Participants found self-assessment interesting and useful but had difficulty in deciding if they could always do or not do something</p>
Blue 1988	<p>To analyse self-assessment scores and compare those with tutors' ratings</p> <p>Students on a pre-session course at a British university</p> <p>Participants completed self-assessment forms at different stages of the course. Self-assessment scores were compared with tutors' ratings</p> <p>Results were disappointing in terms of the accuracy of self-assessment and the participants felt self-assessment was less important than teacher assessment</p>
Alderson 2005	<p>To pilot self-assessment statements for the DIALANG project</p> <p>467 for reading, 472 writing, 385 listening, participants were a mixture of ages and nationalities</p> <p>Participants completed the self-assessment tests and results were correlated against CEFR levels</p> <p>Learners seem better able to assess their productive skills than receptive skills.</p>
Malabonga, Kenyon and Carpenter 2005	<p>To investigate how examinees used self-assessment to choose an appropriate starting level on a computerised oral proficiency test (COPI)</p> <p>55 university students</p> <p>Participants completed a self-assessment form. This was compared with scores given by professors and the final COPI</p> <p>92% were able to use the self-assessment instrument to select test tasks at appropriate difficulty levels. Some examinees chose tasks that were too difficult.</p>
LeBlanc and Painchaud 1985	<p>The extent to which self-assessment can be used in placement testing</p> <p>Stage 1: 200 University students for both French and English as second languages in Canada</p> <p>Stage 2: all students registering for courses</p> <p>Stage 1: participants were asked to complete a self-assessment questionnaire before taking a proficiency test</p> <p>Stage 2: participants completed a self-assessment questionnaire for placement</p>

	<p>testing</p> <p>Stage 1 showed that participants could adequately assess level</p> <p>Stage 2 showed that self-assessment placed the participants at least as well as proficiency tests.</p>
Luoma and Tamanen 2003	<p>A report on the development of a self-rating scale instrument of writing in the context of the DIALANG project</p> <p>6 adult learners of Finnish as a second language</p> <p>Participants completed two writing tasks which they self-assessed using benchmark tests. They were videoed as they did this and were interviewed afterwards. Teachers then rated the texts</p> <p>Teacher and self-ratings generally matched but there was a tendency for participants to over-estimate. Participants enjoyed the process but still wanted teacher ratings.</p>

I reviewed research in both EFL and non-EFL contexts. McDonald and Boud (2003) reported that students trained in self-assessment outperformed those not trained when taking external examinations. This would seem to lend weight to the claim that self-assessment supports an increased understanding of assessment as evidenced by higher grades at the end of the course. However, the participants in this study were high school students being tested in a range of subjects and were not students of English as a foreign language. Similarly, the participants in the study reported by Alderson et al (2003) were not foreign language students. They were undergraduate students at a British university. At the end of the survey the participants remained sceptical about self-assessment. Interestingly, training was reported to be crucial to derive the maximum benefits of self-assessment. This ties in with Janssen-van Dieten's (1989) study which is discussed below.

As can be seen in Table 3.1, I consulted a wide variety of research types in order to find evidence to support Oscarsson's claims. Now attention turns to studies conducted with language learners. AlFallay (2004) and Floropoulou (2002a) reported that participants found self-assessment to be beneficial for their language studies. Other studies (Blue, 1988; Alderson et al, 2005) appear to suggest that students were not aware of any increase in their level of awareness. From these data, it seems that there is inconclusive

evidence in support of Oscarsson's second claim. I could not find studies which reported or addressed issues relating to improved goal orientation. Malabonga, Kenyon and Carpenter (2005) and LeBlanc and Painchaud (1985) found self-assessment to be reliable when used as a placement test. This would seem to indicate that self-assessment could ease the burden of assessment placed on teachers. However, several other studies (Luoma and Tarnanen: 2003, Floropoulou: 2002b, Blue: 1988) reported that participants preferred or needed teacher assessment. This suggests that most of the burden of assessment continues to fall on teachers. To date there is insufficient evidence to warrant acceptance of Oscarsson's claims for self-assessment but there is some evidence which suggests self-assessment can replace other forms of assessment and be beneficial for language learners.

A great deal of the research into self-assessment has had the aim of comparing its reliability against that of expert. Below is a table which summarises studies which have investigated the reliability of self-assessment.

Table 3.2 Reliability of self-assessment

reliability of self-assessment	research
LeBlanc and Painchaud 1985	The extent to which self-assessment can be used in placement testing Stage 1: 200 University students for both French and English as second languages in Canada Stage 2: all students registering for courses Stage 1: participants were asked to complete a self-assessment questionnaire before taking a proficiency test Stage 2: participants completed a self-assessment questionnaire for placement testing Stage 1 showed that participants could adequately assess level Stage 2 showed that self-assessment placed the participants at least as well as proficiency tests
Blue 1988	To analyse self-assessment scores and compare those with tutors' ratings Students on a pre-session course at a British university Participants completed self-assessment forms at different stages of the course. Self-assessment scores were compared with tutors' ratings Results were disappointing in terms of the accuracy of self-assessment and the participants felt self-assessment was less important than teacher assessment

Bachman and Palmer 1989	<p>The extent to which self-assessments are reliable and valid measures of communicative language abilities</p> <p>116 non-native English speakers from the Salt Lake City area</p> <p>Participants completed self-rating test</p> <p>Used MTMM design</p> <p>Self-ratings can be reliable and valid measures of communicative language abilities.</p> <p>The most effective question type was participants' perceived difficulties, the least effective can-do statements</p>
Janssen-van Dielen 1989	<p>To compare a test of Dutch as a second language for adult learners with a parallel version of that test in self-assessment format</p> <p>973 adult migrants learning Dutch as a second language</p> <p>Three groups for each skill</p> <p>No consistent significant relationship between language proficiency and self-assessment accuracy could be demonstrated</p> <p>Ability to self-assess reliably did not increase with proficiency levels</p> <p>Learners need training to benefit from self-assessment</p>
Blanche 1990	<p>To identify academic factors or personal characteristics that substantially raised or lowered the accuracy of self-assessment of speaking</p> <p>43 adult learners of French on an American Armed Forces immersion course</p> <p>Language learning experience questionnaire. Completion of self-appraisal forms after taking tests of oral skills</p> <p>None of the independent variables selected for statistical analyses significantly affected the accuracy of self-assessment.</p> <p>High level of accuracy for self-assessment over length of experiment</p>
Pierce, Swain and Hart 1993	<p>The extent to which self-assessment is a valid and reliable indicator of tested proficiency in French</p> <p>500 grade 8 students in French immersion programmes in Canada</p> <p>Detailed questionnaire: participants were given two benchmarks: francophone peers, the difficulty represented by specific everyday tasks in French.</p> <p>French proficiency tests</p> <p>Self-assessments correlate weakly with tests</p> <p>Self-assessment measures on specific tasks are more highly correlated than global self-assessment measures</p>
Ross 1998	<p>An analysis of the validity of a self-assessment instrument</p> <p>236 Japanese adult learners of English as a foreign language</p> <p>Self-assessment survey in Japanese</p> <p>Proficiency test</p> <p>Teacher assessment</p> <p>Accuracy of self-assessment improves when it is based on episodic memory of using skills in the classroom</p> <p>Overall levels of accuracy were good</p>
Malabonga, Kenyon and Carpenter 2005	<p>To investigate how examinees used self-assessment to choose an appropriate starting level on a computerised oral proficiency test (COPI)</p> <p>55 university students</p> <p>Participants completed a self-assessment form. This was compared with scores given by professors and the final COPI</p> <p>92% were able to use the self-assessment instrument to select test tasks at appropriate difficulty levels. Some examinees chose tasks that were too difficult</p>
Ashton 2006	<p>A report on the development and piloting of a can-do self-assessment tool to investigate the comparability of reading ability across learners of German, Japanese and Urdu</p> <p>124 secondary learners of German, Japanese and Urdu</p> <p>Participants rated their reading ability against a survey containing 43 can-do statements</p> <p>Teachers gave ratings for the learners and provided additional information such as National Curriculum levels</p>

	Teacher ratings were consistently more modest but this may be accounted for by low levels of proficiency of learners
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A common characteristic of all of these studies surveyed in Table 3.2 is the reliance on an expert assessor. If the students' assessment matched that of the expert then self-assessment was held to be reliable. I will deal with this type of empirical evidence in the following paragraphs. As Alderson and Banerjee write:

A typical approach to validating self-assessment has been to obtain concurrent validity statistics by correlating the self-assessment measure with one or more external measures of student performance (e.g. Shameem, 1998; Ross, 1988). (2001:227)

They go on to note that multi-trait multi-method (Bachman and Palmer, 1989) and the split ballot technique have also been used. In general, these studies have found self-assessment to be accurate when compared with the judgement of an expert assessor. In addition the risk of cheating is low. Cheating would be a risk if self-assessment were used as, or as part of, end of year evaluations. Much of the empirical research into self-assessment focussed on its reliability compared with the traditional means of assessment i.e. tests, or that of expert assessors such as teachers or examiners. However, using teacher as a "control" can be called into question, as the marks awarded by teachers and examiners are subject to variation. This is shown by the amount of time examination boards dedicate to standardising examiners e.g. via moderation meetings. This line of research can be explained by noting that, as Pierce, Swain et al (1993:26) observe, self-assessment has traditionally been viewed as: "informal and subjective". Research has, therefore, concentrated on investigating whether self-assessment instruments and self-ratings of language proficiency are valid and reliable.

Janssen-van Dieten reports the results of a study designed to investigate the validity of self-assessment carried out by adult migrants of a low educational level. 973 adult migrants were tested in Dutch as a second language. As the participants in Janssen-van Dieten's study lived in Holland they differed considerably from the participants in my research project who study English as a foreign language. The study found that training resulted in more accurate assessments and also higher scores in writing tests overall, although the differences between the groups were not statistically significant. He suggests that the crucial factor is whether the learning environment is conducive to this form of assessment. That is to say the teacher actively fosters self-assessment by learners. Janssen-van Dieten's study would suggest that self-assessment is available to all learners regardless of their educational level. The crucial factor for success in self-assessment, Janssen-van Dieten suggests is training in how to do it.

Blanche and Merino , on the other hand, found that the accuracy of self-assessment often varies according to the linguistic skills and the materials used. They conducted a review of the literature available on self-evaluation and made recommendations on the basis of this review for both teachers and researchers. Both Blanche (1998) and Yamashita (1996), as cited in Brown and Hudson (2002) found that more proficient students tended to underestimate their linguistic abilities. Oscarsson (1989) describing some much earlier work (Oscarsson 1978) found that adult learners were able to make fairly accurate assessments of their language proficiency when using scaled descriptions of performance. This would seem to be particularly pertinent to the present study as this will be the form of self-assessment used and the participants are adult learners of English as a foreign language. Oscarsson (1989) also noted that learners need training to

be able to make reliable assessments of their performance. This would seem to corroborate Janssen-van Dieten's findings.

Bachman and Palmer (1989) found that self-assessment was more reliable than they had expected it to be. They asked one hundred and sixteen non-native speakers to complete a twenty-one item multiple-choice self-rating test. There were three types of question. The participants were asked to rate their: ability to use a trait, difficulty in using a trait and ability to recognise a trait in input. Grammatical competence and pragmatic competence are examples of traits used. At first sight the high level of reliability reported would seem to offer empirical evidence in support of self-assessment. However, in the context of this current research project, another reported finding was more worrying. Bachman and Palmer found that the participants were better at evaluating what they had difficulty doing. In some ways this is not a surprising finding as most people find it easier to articulate their mistakes than to explain how they did something well. The CEFR Can-do statements are all positively worded. This positive wording, on the evidence of this study, may make it harder for the participants to self-assess their level of proficiency in English.

The proficiency level of the participants may also affect the reliability of self-assessment. Heilenman (1990) and Ross (1998) found that overestimation was most common in less experienced learners. Heilenman asked two hundred and thirty two students of French at the University of Iowa to complete a self-assessment questionnaire. The self-assessments were compared with teacher assessment and end of course grades. Ross asked two hundred and thirty six adult Japanese learners of English as a foreign language to complete a self-assessment questionnaire which was written in

Japanese. The participants completed a proficiency test and teachers were asked to assess the levels of the participants. This common finding would seem to indicate that the learners do not know what they are unable to do. Thus, self-assessment is more difficult for beginner students or those with a low level of language proficiency.

There is some evidence that learners are more accurate when assessing some language skills than others. However, the evidence is rather contradictory. Ross (1998) and Blue (1988), for example, found that self-assessment of reading skills were the most accurate. Blue asked fifty-five students of English for academic purpose, who were attending a pre-session course at a British university, to complete self-assessment questionnaires at different points throughout the course. The self-assessment scores were compared with tutor ratings. Alderson (2005), however, states that participants seem better able to self-assess their productive skills rather than their receptive skills. Alderson piloted the self-assessment statements for the DIALANG project with large numbers of participants across Europe. This difference may be accounted for when the type of language learners participating in the studies reported by Ross and Blue is looked at. The participants were university students who would have spent a great deal of time reading. Also, Ross (1998) posits the finding that students search for concrete examples when self-assessing. Thus, the participants would have found it easier to find examples of success when reading as they had more practice in doing it. Alderson (2005) suggests that learners are better able to assess productive skills as they are used to receiving feedback on their performance. Again, this would seem to chime with Ross's finding that students search for concrete examples.

As shown in Table 3.3 the DIALANG project has included several studies of self-assessment. This is further demonstration of the role that the CEFR has played in promoting self-assessment as the CEFR provided the impetus for the DIALANG project.

Table 3.3 DIALANG and self-assessment

DIALANG and self-assessment	
Floropoulou 2002a	To investigate student reactions to self-assessment in the context of the DIALANG project 6 students Participants were observed, video-filmed and interviewed as proceeded through the DIALANG system Participants found self-assessment interesting and useful but had difficulty in deciding if they could always do or not do something
Floropoulou 2002b	To investigate if there were cultural differences in reactions to self-assessment in the context of the DIALANG project. 5 Chinese learners and 5 Greek learners of English Participants were interviewed about self-assessment, then observed completing a DIALANG reading test then interviewed again Overall the Chinese students were more positive about self-assessment. Both groups expressed dependence on external tools
Luoma and Tarnanen 2003	A report on the development of a self-rating scale instrument of writing in the context of the DIALANG project. 6 adult learners of Finnish as a second language Participants completed two writing tasks which they self-assessed using benchmark tests. They were videoed as they did this and were interviewed afterwards. Teachers then rated the texts Teacher and self-ratings generally matched but there was a tendency for participants to over-estimate. Participants enjoyed the process but still wanted teacher ratings
Alderson 2005	To pilot self-assessment statements for the DIALANG project 467 for reading, 472 writing, 385 listening, participants were a mixture of ages and nationalities Participants completed the self-assessment tests and results were correlated against CEFR levels Learners seemed better able to assess their productive skills than receptive skills

With the exception of Alderson (2005) the studies included in Table 3.3, above, had very small participant numbers. Whilst the low numbers meant that the participants' reactions to self-assessment could be studied in-depth, it does raise the question of generalisability of the findings. The participants found engaging in self-assessment to be interesting but continued to express a desire for teacher assessment and external assessment. Alderson's (2005) study, by way of contrast, involved significant numbers

of participants. This study produced two findings which are interesting in the context of the current doctoral research project. Firstly, the participants were more able to assess their productive skills rather than their receptive skills. This contrasts with the findings of studies such as Blue (1988) which report that receptive skills were assessed more accurately than the productive ones. Secondly, personality was found to have no effect on self-assessment. This corroborates Oscarsson's (1989) finding that self-assessment is unaffected by personality.

AlFallay (2004) investigated the role of psychological and personality traits in self- and peer assessment. Seventy eight elementary students of English at King Saud University were asked to complete five questionnaires and the participants' scores on mid-term and end of year tests were used to determine participants' psychological and personality traits and their achievement level. The questionnaires focussed on motivation types, levels of motivational intensity, self-esteem and classroom anxiety. As AlFallay's study also investigated peer-assessment, not all of the findings reported were relevant to the current research project. Indeed, a criticism which could be made of AlFallay's research is that he was over-ambitious in the range of factors included in the study. Despite these caveats, I would argue that the study produced relevant findings for the current research project. AlFallay demonstrates that students with low self-esteem were the most accurate. This is a significant finding in that it contrasts with Oscarsson's (1989) views and with the empirical research reported by Alderson (2005), as both Oscarsson and Alderson report that personality factors do not affect self-assessment.

3.5 Empirical studies of the CEFR and ELP

As previously stated (2.5) the introduction of the CEFR and its companion piece the ELP has proved to be very controversial. It, therefore, comes as a surprise to note that to-date the empirical studies are relatively rare. Little (2006) argues that a study of the impact of the CEFR would be impossible as it would require a huge number of researchers working in each Council of Europe member state. The research which has been published so far in the two collections of case studies (Alderson, 2003 and Morrow, 2004) has been limited in scale and scope. I would argue that in these books, particularly in the case of Morrow, very little space is dedicated to reporting empirical studies compared with the space given to describing and analysing the CEFR. Little states that:

Despite persistent rumours of ELP orientated research, published findings that are more than anecdotal remain a rarity; where they do exist however, they tend to confirm the feedback collected from the pilot projects. (2006:184)

Table 3.4, below, summarises research conducted into the effects on the classroom of the ELP.

Table 3.4 The ELP

The ELP	Research
Kohonen 2001	An evaluation of the dossier 20 teachers and 420 school pupils in Finland More preparation work for teachers Change of role for teachers to being a facilitator
Ushioda and Ridley 2002	An evaluation of working with the ELP in Irish post-primary schools 7 teachers who taught a variety of foreign languages and their students Participants completed reports on classroom experience, were interviewed, documents were analysed, learner reflections were analysed and lessons were observed. The ELP had a positive impact on both learning and teaching. Learners became more motivated and teachers felt that negotiated class content increased the students' sense of ownership

Ushioda (2003) reports on an evaluation project of the ELP. The ELP was used to bring the aims of the curriculum clearly into focus for the teachers and learners. Fifteen teachers of foreign languages in Irish secondary schools volunteered to take part in an evaluation of the ELP. The largest data source was teacher reports of their experiences of using the ELP. This was supplemented with feedback from learners and samples of materials produced by learners. The teachers reported that the ELP helped them to plan lessons according to the needs of learners rather than slavishly following the textbook. In addition, the teachers stated that the learners benefited from setting their own learning goals. The experience of using the ELP was reported as beneficial for both learners and teachers. The fact that the teachers were all volunteers may suggest that they were convinced of the benefits of using the ELP before the study began and it is therefore, not surprising that the study reported such positive findings.

While Ushioda and Ridley (2002) and Ushioda (2003) report evaluation studies of negotiating the curriculum through the ELP, Kohonen (2001) reports an evaluation study of one aspect of the ELP: the dossier. Twenty language teachers and four hundred and twenty students participated in the project. Nearly half of the teachers had participated in an earlier study and so could be described as being experts in the use of the ELP and as having a keen interest in it. Kohonen (2001) reports that the students had great difficulty in deciding what they should study, but found it easier to decide on working techniques. Another finding of the study was the importance of the teacher as the facilitator of self-directed learning. This shift in role required teachers to undertake more preparation before lessons and to be prepared to react with flexibility when faced with unanticipated situations.

The current research project uses Can-do statements as the basis for self-assessment by students. Little and Perclova (2001) and Ushioda and Ridley (2002) report that Can-do self-assessment tools give learners a sense of control and ownership over their learning. I interpret ownership to mean that the learners became motivated to study through the development of the feeling of proprietorship over the subject matter. The participants in these studies were under the age of 18 and involved in compulsory education. They differ, therefore, substantially from the participants in this research project who are all adults and studying English in their free time. A sense of ownership may be more important to younger language learners as they have fewer opportunities to exert control over their studies as curriculum choices are usually made for them.

3.6 Implications

Having presented a review of research into self-assessment and the ELP, I next assess the implications of my analysis for the current study. These include:

1. lack of studies focussed on using the ELP with adult learners
2. lack of studies with non-volunteer teachers
3. lack of studies into the processes of self-assessment
4. predominance of studies which focus on the accuracy of self-assessment (i.e. reliability) compared with another more traditional form of assessment
5. lack of empirical basis for claims made in support of self-assessment.

The first implication of this review of the relevant literature relates to the level of research undertaken to date which has focussed on learners in compulsory education, as can be observed from Table 3.1. The participants in the current research project are adults and it is expected that their reactions to the ELP would be different from that of school children or those engaged in full-time education. Thus, the current research

project has the potential to push the boundaries of knowledge in the field with specific reference to adult learners.

Another implication is the status of the teachers in the studies of the ELP. Ushioda (2003) and Kohonen (2001), as shown in Table 3.4, report that teachers volunteered to take part in their studies. This would suggest that the teachers were already interested in the ELP and favourably disposed towards it before the research projects began. As part of the research studies the teachers received training and support into how to integrate the ELP into their classroom practice. This is in stark contrast with the teachers in the current research project for whom the use of the ELP (or aspects of it) had been imposed and, in addition, they were given only one training session into its use. It could, therefore, be expected that the teachers in the current research study would not be as favourably disposed to working with the ELP as those in the studies reported above.

Having considered research into the subject of ELP, I now turn to the implications of research conducted into self-assessment. Firstly, there is a lack of studies into how learners arrive at their decisions when self-assessing, which has led to a lack of research into the processes of self-assessment. Secondly, the focus of much of the work into self-assessment has focussed on its reliability as compared with another form of assessment. I would argue that the research undertaken to date has, in some ways, undervalued the participants, as their perceptions of self-assessment and experiences of it were not considered to be important enough to be included as a factor shaping the design and implementation of the empirical studies available.

Finally, I have analysed the claims made in support of self-assessment. It has proved hard to find a sizeable body of empirical research to fully support these claims. This would suggest that there is a gap in the research base in relation to the link between self-assessment and learner autonomy. I explore this issue in greater depth below.

3.7 A gap in the knowledge base

It has been argued that self-assessment is very important to learner autonomy. Yet, as Benson (2001) notes, reports of research or teaching that integrate self-assessment within a programme of learning are rare. My own review of the literature, as evidenced by Tables 3.1- 3.4, would lead me to agree with Benson's conclusion. In addition to which Oscarson states:

While our knowledge about more traditional forms of assessment in the classroom is quite substantial, there has been little research devoted to close investigation of other approaches that may complement regular evaluation, such as student peer- and self-assessment, and student/teacher co-operative assessment. (2004:114)

Thus, there exists a lack of empirical research studies that investigate self-assessment and, consequently, this research project sought to investigate the effects of self-assessment in a specific programme of language learning and to explore possible relationships between self-assessment and autonomy. Also, the advent of the CEFR means there is now a structure in place in institutional settings through which self-assessment and learner autonomy can be explored. In particular, these facets of teaching and learning can be researched in a cyclical way so that it is possible to investigate the relationship between self-assessment and planning in the development of autonomy. However, this does not mean to say the version of self-assessment as described by the Council of Europe (2001) is the best way forward.

Self-assessment, it has been argued, should improve communication between the learner and the teacher. This doctoral research project will seek to investigate this aspect of the CEFR and thus can be included within Norris and Papageorgiou's call for more research.

3.8 Summary

This chapter, positioned self-assessment in its historical perspective and claimed that, with the development of the CEFR, it has moved from the margins of language teaching practice to centre-stage in teaching and learning. I outlined the claims made in support of self-assessment and reviewed the empirical evidence, seeking where possible to match this evidence to the claims made for self-assessment. This, in some sense, has been a rather disappointing task, as many of the claims made about self-assessment remain largely unsupported. Of Oscarsson's (1989) four part rationale for self-assessment, I was only able to find research for three of the claims and even then the evidence in support of these was not clear cut. I have established a gap in the literature in which to position this research project.

The next chapter highlights the data collection process and offers a rationale for the design decisions taken.

Further support for my claim that supplementary research is essential into the area of alternative assessment in general and self-assessment in particular can be found in

Tsagari who asserts:

We also need to develop appropriate theory and research methods in the study of this dynamic teaching-learning-assessing interface before any definite conclusions are also drawn about its positive effects on teaching and learning. (2004:122)

Dragemark has also called for further research in the field of self-assessment:

The question of how students can develop a more active and responsible role in their own education is important in a democracy, but little research has been devoted to the conditions that govern student participation in assessment. (2004:128)

Little, too, describes self-assessment as being: "... key to the exercise and development of learner autonomy." (2005:39) I understand this to mean that a learner can only be described as autonomous when they are able to monitor their own performance and organise their future learning in order to achieve targets. Little (2005) goes on to argue that self-assessment develops both metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness and skills. It is interesting to note that self-assessment is given a key role in the development of autonomy.

As stated above, I would like to argue that I have identified, through a review of empirical studies, a clear need for further research into self-assessment. In particular, I would also argue that there is a call for more research into the CEFR and self-assessment. Norris and Papageorgiou writing in the 2005 edition of the journal

Language Testing, which was devoted to the CEFR, states that:

At this point, research on a variety of levels is needed in order to determine whether this ambitious project is having the intended effects, whether communication among constituencies has been improved, and what problems are emerging. (2005:405)

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology underlying the empirical basis of this dissertation. The aims of the study are outlined (4.2) and these are followed by the research questions (4.3). A general discussion of the major approaches to educational research follows and then the position taken by this researcher is explained (4.4). The participants of the research project are described (4.5) and following this the institutional context is elaborated (4.6). An examination will be made of case study strategy (4.7) and explanations offered for its deployment in this study and a multiple methods approach will also be explored (4.8). I shall then elaborate on the overall design of this study, describing the different stages of data collection and the rationale behind the decisions taken (4.9 - 4.11). The data analysis process will be outlined (4.12). Finally, the ethical issues arising from the study will be examined (4.13) followed by a summary of this chapter (4.14).

4.2 Aims of the study

The main aim of this study was to investigate the implementation of self-assessment in the context of the introduction of the CEFR at the Language Institute where I was teaching. As can be seen in Tables 4.1 - 4.3 below, this main aim was divided into sub-aims at each of the three stages of data collection. The exploration of student perceptions of self-assessment was an aim at each stage of data collection. Self-assessment was a major innovation in classroom practice at the Institute and, as previously stated (1.2), this was one of my motivations for undertaking this research project. As discussed earlier (3.3), prior educational experiences can affect student

receptiveness to the concept of self-assessment and further, claims had often been made about a link between self-assessment and autonomy (see 3.4). I was curious to see if I could find evidence for this link through investigating student perceptions of self-assessment. I argued in Chapter 3 that I found a lack of empirical evidence to support these claims. A further aim was to investigate the effects of self-assessment on the classroom, for example, to understand how students arrived at their decisions when engaged in self-assessment. I felt that this was an under-researched area and one which merited investigation. The final research aim was to investigate the Institute's policy on self-assessment. This focus emerged during the process of this research, following the unexpected results from stage 2 of data collection.

4.3 Research Questions

Research question 2 provided the main impetus for the study, while the other questions fulfilled important and complementary functions, such as to provide insights into the process of self-assessment from the perspective of the student and the effects of self-assessment on the classroom. The research questions (RQ) are listed below:

RQ 1. What are student perceptions of assessment?

RQ 2. What are student perceptions of self-assessment?

RQ 3. How do students arrive at their self-assessment decisions?

RQ 4. What are the effects of self-assessment on the classroom?

RQ 5. What does the documentary evidence show about self-assessment as promoted by the Institute?

The design of the data collection phase is shown below in Tables 4.1- 4.3. There were three tranches of data collection, with the data and analysis of each one shaping and determining the successive ones. This follows Banerjee's assertion that one of the defining characteristics of qualitative research is that it tends to be "cyclical and emergent." (2004:2) The questions at the first stage focussed on student perceptions of assessment (RQ1) and of self-assessment (RQ2). At stage 2 of data collection the main research question was the same as at stage 1 (RQ 2). As the participants had experience of self-assessing a new research question was formulated at this stage which asked how they made their decisions (RQ3) (see section 4.6 for a description of the approach taken toward self-assessment at the Institute). Another new question used at this stage examined the effects of self-assessment in the classroom (RQ4). At stage 3 RQ2 and RQ3 remained unchanged. The final research question was introduced at this stage and focussed on how self-assessment was promoted by the Institute (RQ5). Details concerning data collection will be given later in the chapter. The research questions and the aims of each stage of data collection are provided in the tables that follow.

Table 4.1 Stage 1 of data collection

Stage 1	
Aims	
To establish a baseline of participants' attitudes to assessment in general and more specifically to self-assessment	
Research Questions	
1. What are students' perceptions of assessment? 2. What are students' perceptions of self-assessment?	
Data Collection Methods	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focus groups/group interviews • attitude survey • composition 	
Sample	
3 groups of 14 students for the focus groups, compositions and attitude survey plus pilot groups	
Time line	
Data collection	October 2004 – November 2004
Data analysis	November 2004 – December 2004

The work at this stage of data collection built on that of other smaller scale research projects conducted as part of the EdD research training units. These projects included interviewing teachers to explore their attitudes to the CEFR at the end of the pilot project (see 1.3) and prior to full-scale implementation of self-assessment and CEFR at the Institute. I conducted group interviews with three groups of students and distributed an attitude survey to investigate student attitudes towards self-assessment. Table 4.2, below, describes the second stage of data collection.

Table 4.2 Stage 2 of data collection

Stage 2	
Aims	
a)	to assess if students' perceptions of self-assessment had altered after 3 months
b)	to assess teacher perceptions of self-assessment
Research Questions	
1.	What are students' perceptions of self-assessment?
2.	How do students arrive at their self-assessment decisions?
3.	What are the effects of self-assessment in the classroom?
Data Collection Methods	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • group interviews • stimulated recall of classroom observations 	
Sample	
I.	3 groups of 14 students for the focus groups
II.	3 teachers and 3 groups of 14 students for the classroom observations
III.	3 teachers for the stimulated recall
Time line	
Data collection	December 2004 – April 2005
Data analysis	April 2005 – June 2005

As can be seen from the above table, the aims at this stage of data collection broadened to include the effects of self-assessment on the classroom whilst maintaining its focus on the students' perceptions of self-assessment. Three months had passed since the first stage of data collection and I wanted to investigate whether increased contact and familiarity with self-assessment had altered in any way students' perceptions of it. The final stage of data collection was conducted at the end of the course and the aims and the questions for this stage are given in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3 Stage 3 of data collection

Stage 3	
Aims	
a) to assess students' perceptions of self-assessment at the end of the academic year b) to assess policy towards self-assessment	
Research Questions	
1. What are students' perceptions of assessment? 2. How do students arrive at their self-assessment decisions? 3. What does the documentary evidence show about self-assessment as promoted by the Institute?	
Data Collection Methods	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • group interviews • document search 	
Sample	
I. 3 groups of 14 students for the focus groups II. documents from internal intranet site	
Time line	
Data collection	May 2005 – July 2005
Data analysis	June 2005 – September 2005

At this stage of data collection I had expected to be only conducting research in the classroom, but the unanticipated results from stage 2 of data collection led me to add an additional research question. In relation to this, I conducted a document search with the aim of investigating the Institute's policy towards self-assessment and thereby seek insights into and explanations for the unexpected results at stage 2 of data collection.

4.4 Major approaches to educational research

To help establish this research project within the field of educational research, I analysed different approaches to educational research. This review follows the framework by Habermas, as cited in Carr (1995). Research is divided into three main areas: empirical analytic, historical hermeneutic and critical. Although Habermas created these three divisions it should be noted that for him all positions are equally valid and can work together. I shall now outline the key features of these three areas.

The educational philosophies of the empirical analytic sciences are positivistic with the focus of research on discovering absolutes which are generalisable. The research methods employed are natural scientific, positivistic and quantitative. By way of contrast the forms of research knowledge used in historical hermeneutic sciences are subjectivist and involve describing and understanding. Interpretation and self-actualisation is more important than generalisability. The educational philosophies are liberal progressive. The third section in Habermas's framework is critical. The research methods used are critical social science and emancipatory action research. The focus of this science is on individuals effecting change, with the educational philosophies being socially critical. I place this dissertation within the historical hermeneutic perspective; interpretation is more important than generalisability in that it seeks to understand self-assessment from the perspective of the participants. In section 4.4, I return to the topic of generalisability. I would also place this dissertation within the critical category as I am seeking to effect change: change in the participants as learners and change in the understanding of the self-assessment. Individual participant change is included in Habermas's position and it should be noted that the categories are not exclusive.

Having discussed approaches to educational research, I now turn my attention to the belief system which underlines this chosen conceptual framework. Holliday states that:

The qualitative belief that the realities of the research setting and the people in it are mysterious and can only be touched by research, which tries to make sense, is interpretive. (2002:5)

This is, very much, the type of belief system, which underlines the conceptual framework adopted. Even though the research setting was my place of work, it was still mysterious to me, in the sense that, on a day-to-day basis, I was more concerned with

doing my job rather than reflecting in more than a superficial way on my practice as a teacher. It was also mysterious as I was going into other people's classrooms to conduct observations and encountering students who were not my own. In any school, even in a relatively small one like the Institute of this study, every teacher is protective of his or her own classes and little is really known about them as gaining access to the classroom is often difficult. A limited number of annual observations can only give a flavour of each teacher's classroom practice. Thus, my voyage into the classroom as a researcher was a real voyage into the unknown. I would interpret Holliday's use of the word interpretive as being consistent with the historical hermeneutic approach outlined earlier as it involves describing and understanding.

The overall data collection strategy follows that of Miles and Huberman's (1984) model of bounded data collection. This has been chosen as it acknowledges that all researchers bring their own values to a project. I consider it to be more honest to declare these values at the beginning. Also, a small scale project with only one researcher needs to have boundaries to prevent it from becoming too unmanageable. Furthermore, I agree with Robson (2005) who notes that the framework brings rigour to data collection and analysis. Miles and Huberman state that:

Conceptual frameworks are simply the current version of the researcher's map of the territory being investigated. (1984:33)

Thus, I would argue that following a model of bounded data collection helped to ensure that focus was maintained throughout the project.

The choice of data collection strategies appears to be almost endless and I now outline how I selected the strategies used in this research project. I would agree with Holliday who states:

Taking strategies first, Denzin and Lincoln (1994b) make it very clear that there are no tight categories. For example, you do not have to choose between case study, ethnography and grounded theory. (2002:17)

I believe that rigour is not best served by slavishly following one strategy. Rather, choosing data collection methods according to the research questions is the best way to demonstrate trustworthiness of the data. Thus, some of the data collection instruments I have used, such as the stimulated recall of classroom observation, are more usually associated with qualitatively orientated research projects, while others such as the attitude survey are more usually associated with quantitatively orientated research projects. I state why these are appropriate below.

4.5 Participants

Data were collected at a private Language Institute in northern Italy. The Institute has sixty teachers and offers a variety of English language courses to both children and adults. The participants were adult learners of English as a foreign language. They had enrolled on courses of 90 academic hours which ran from October to June and they attended for three hours of lessons per week. Learning English was an activity which participants chose to do in their free time and in addition to their work or study commitments. All of the participants were adults; the youngest was 18 and the eldest 62. Half of the participants were university students and the rest were professionals educated to university level. They were attending C1 level courses and had the option of taking the Cambridge Certificate of Advanced English (CAE) at the end of the course in June. The participants had, therefore, a high level of English language proficiency when they started the course and could be described as successful language learners. When referring to individual participants by name, this is not their real name and I have assigned male and female names randomly without any reference to the actual gender of

the participant. I preferred to use names rather than describe them as S1 or use a letter as this preserved anonymity but gave the participants more dignity than reducing them to a number or a letter. The names used were: Francesca, Claudia, Tiziana, Mario, Stefano, Anna, Sara, Marco, Maria Pia, Eleonora, Diana, Sylvia, Helena, Maurizio, Marita, Orlando, Maria, Ludovica, Cinzia, Paolo, Carlotta, Maria Carla, Marzia, Caterina, Francesco, Andrea.

I approached the teachers that I mentored and asked them to participate in this research project. My role as a mentor was to facilitate teacher development through lesson observations, providing assistance with lesson planning and ensuring teachers availed from training opportunities. Three of the four people whom I mentored were observed for this research project, all of whom were experienced teachers and each had been working at the centre for around five years. One teacher had Post-Graduate Certificate level teaching qualification, whilst the other two had Post-Graduate Diploma level teaching qualifications. One of the teachers had recently begun a Master's level course. All three teachers specialised in teaching adults and had considerable experience of teaching students at higher levels.

4.6 Institutional context

The Institute introduced the portfolio as a response to concern about falling numbers of adults on general English courses and low re-registration rates. Institute management used focus groups and questionnaires to investigate why student numbers were falling. They identified students' concerns about progress made during a course as one of the reasons why students were failing to re-enrol. The management hoped that self-assessment would help students to feel that tangible progress was being made.

The Institute aligned course levels to those of the CEFR and introduced a language learning portfolio the year before data collection commenced. The portfolio had been trialled for one year prior to its introduction. As the portfolio had not been submitted to the Council of Europe for approval it cannot be described as an ELP. It had not been submitted as the Institute management team had decided to omit sections of the ELP. The Validation Committee is the authority which the Council of Europe uses to establish whether a portfolio reaches the required standards. Documents relating to validation of portfolios can be obtained from the Council of Europe's website www.coe.int. The portfolio included many elements which would be found in an ELP (see 2.2). There were, however, some notable omissions which will be discussed in Chapter 5. A copy of the portfolio has been included in Appendix 4.1. As can be seen the language passport and dossier have been omitted. The portfolio contained sections where students could reflect on past learning experiences, learning strategies and a description of the teaching methodology used at the Institute. Teachers were supposed to guide the students through the areas for reflection during the first lesson of the course (Section 1 in the portfolio). All students were also given the can-do language descriptors for their level. As the portfolio used at the Institute had not been recognised by the Council of Europe the Institute took the decision to rename the can-do statements learning aims. Both the students and the teachers used the term learning aims when they discussed the can-do statements. I gave the participants in this research project C1 level learning aims. As can be seen from the example included in Appendix 4.2 beside each descriptor there were three boxes. One was labelled I can do this well, the second was I can do this ok and the third I need to study this more. These boxes appeared on all of the learning aims given to students at the Institute and were not created for the

purpose of the research project. The descriptors included in Appendix 4.2 demonstrate the nebulous nature of the language used in the language descriptors at the higher levels of language proficiency. In addition, it can be noted that total number of descriptors is small. The appendix serves to illustrate arguments made in Chapter 2 about the number and quality of the language descriptors.

The programme for the academic year included three points whereby students should have been invited to self-assess. The self-assessment points were: the start of the course, Christmas, and the end of the academic year in June. For levels below B2 teachers were given lesson plans with activities which would aid learners to assess themselves against a particular learning aim. Appendix 4.3 contains an example of a learning aim lesson.

The lexical and grammatical language features needed to complete the activity described in the learning aim were highlighted. The teacher guided the students through these stages. Materials from the textbook or other sources could be used for these stages. The students would then be given a task to complete. The teacher gave the students a follow-up task approximately four weeks after the learning aim lesson had been completed. The purpose of this task was to provide students with episodic memory of completing a learning aim. The students would then be asked to make and self-assessment and put a tick in one of the three boxes next to the learning aim. Students at higher levels were asked to reflect on their learning and then tick the appropriate box. This approach was adopted for higher levels as the more complex learning aims did not easily lend themselves to classroom activities.

All teachers at the Institute attended training on how to use the portfolio with their classes. This comprised a brief introduction of the portfolio and a list of dates for the

learning aims review. It was recommended that learners below B2 level be given tasks to aid the self-assessment process. Teachers of learners at B2 level and above were instructed to ask their students to reflect on the learning aims as homework and then to discuss the completed learning aim sheets in lesson time. The reception to this innovation was generally hostile as teachers were unconvinced of the benefits of the learning aims and of self-assessment. Some teachers resented the interference with their lesson planning whilst others felt that the textbook was a better base for a course than the learning aims. Teachers worried that the learning aims did not lend themselves to classroom activity. The learning aims lesson bank was created to help teachers incorporate learning aims into their lessons. The bank is a collection of lesson plans for all levels with three lessons per learning aim. I was a member of the team that designed the lesson plans. Take up of the lesson plans was poor which was another indicator of teacher hostility to learning aims.

The Institute is part of a larger network of language schools. To facilitate the distribution of information there is an Intranet. The Intranet site was the source of the documentary evidence used during the final stage of data collection (see 4.11). The site is confidential and access is restricted to employees of the organisation so it is not possible to include the URL here. The site contains guidance on mapping courses to CEFR levels and includes reports on how other institutes went about introducing learning aims to their students.

Having described the participants and the context it is now important to outline the data collection methods used and provide a rationale for their use.

4.7 Case studies

The boundaries for this study were delineated by being a case study. Robson defines case study as:

...a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence. (2005:178)

This definition informed the design of this research. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison also note, educational research which is conducted at the classroom level is often done so through case study. The case strategy is frequently used in qualitative research; indeed, Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe it as being: “the natural mode of reporting.” I have selected this strategy for several reasons which I now outline. The case study, as Lincoln and Guba explain, builds in and on the tacit knowledge of the writer. Denzin and Lincoln stress the importance of the relationship between the researcher and the project. They write:

Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape enquiry. (1998:8)

In addition, Punch (2001) states that an advantage of the case study research strategy is it can provide understanding of a new research area. I considered this research project into self-assessment by adults to be a new research area (as discussed in 3.6).

4.8 Multiple methods

I have employed a variety of data collection methods in this research project. Robson uses the term multiple methods to describe this approach and describes the benefit of using it as thus: “One important benefit of multiple methods is in the reduction of inappropriate certainty.” (2005:230) I would posit that using multiple methods pushed

me to go beyond one “right” answer. A further benefit of using this approach was that it allowed me to address complementary questions at different stages of data collection.

Denzin and Lincoln argue that multiple methods strengthen any investigation. They state:

The combination of multiple methods, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in a single study is best understood, then as a strategy that adds rigour, breadth and depth to any investigation. (1998:4)

Further support for the adoption of multiple methods comes from Banerjee who states:

Whenever the circumstances allow, it is often good to “triangulate” your data by using more than one method. (2004:29)

In addition to which, the use of multiple methods was consistent with the definition of a case study which I used to inform the design of this research project (see 4.7 above).

4.9 Stage 1

I now discuss the rationale for the choices made at each stage of data collection. As can be seen in Table 4.1 the data collection instruments used at this stage were focus groups, attitude survey and student compositions. The aims at this stage of the project were to establish a baseline of opinion by the participants towards, in particular, self-assessment and assessment in general. These data were then used to determine whether perceptions of self-assessment changed during the course. All three instruments, after having gone through a process of piloting and correction, were used to collect data to answer to all three questions. As stated above (4.8) triangulating data is a way of ensuring trustworthiness of the data.

4.9.1 Focus groups

The focus groups were the first data collection activity. I chose to use focus groups as they are a time efficient way of gathering data on opinions (Punch, 2001; Robson, 2005). Furthermore, as it was a topic that the participants may not have been used to discussing the group provided more support than would have been available in one-to-one interviews; participants were able to generate ideas by working collaboratively. I used the focus groups to generate statements for the attitude survey. I adopted this approach as I had found during the literature review that few studies had been conducted into this area so there was not an existing attitude survey on which I could draw. This is a further reason why Holliday's mystery metaphor is appropriate (see 4.4 above).

In Table 4.4 below, I summarise the main advantages and disadvantages of group interviews. These have been adapted from Punch (2001), Robson (2005) and . I will then outline my reasons for choosing this data collection instrument for this study.

Table 4.4 Summary of the advantages and disadvantages of group interviews

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• flexible• inexpensive• data rich• memory aiding• supportive environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• individual opinions may be lost• stronger personalities dominate• unsuitable for sensitive topics• need for a skilled moderator

I labelled the first set of interviews focus groups and the subsequent ones group interviews. I consider the terms to be interchangeable except that in focus groups the participants meet for the first time during the session. This condition was met for the first set of interviews but not for the others as the participants were studying together. Punch notes that group interviews have many positive aspects. These aspects are both

methodological and practical and Punch goes on to assert that: “They are inexpensive, data-rich, flexible, stimulating, re-call aiding, cumulative and elaborative.” (2001:177)

The practical advantages are flexibility and being inexpensive. As this study was conducted on a limited budget of both time and resources such advantages were important. However, my choice of this instrument was not based on purely practical considerations.

I next explain the suitability of group interviews from a methodological standpoint.

Group interaction can help to reveal aspects of a situation which might never have been exposed. I agree with Morgan who states that the:

... explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group. (1997:2)

Furthermore, as Robson (2005) notes, interviews offer the possibility of modifying the line of enquiry and following up interesting responses. Fontana and Frey (1988) sum up the advantages of group interviews thus:

The group interview has the advantages of being inexpensive, data rich, flexible, stimulating to respondents, recall aiding, and cumulative and elaborative, over and above individual responses. (1988:55)

The downside of group interviews is that group dynamics can have a negative effect and some personalities may dominate. It was my responsibility as moderator to make sure that all participants had the opportunity to speak. Fontana and Frey also acknowledge that group dynamics can affect the quality of data collected in group interviews. They state:

The emerging group may interfere with individual expression, the group may be dominated by one person, the group format makes it difficult to research sensitive subjects, “group think” is a possible outcome, and the requirements for interviewer skills are greater because of group dynamics. (1988:56)

I also had to avoid leading the discussion rather than moderating it.

I felt that the positive aspects of group interviews outweighed the negatives for the reason of time efficiency. Also, due to the fact that the topic was one which the participants may not have had experience of talking about I decided that the participants needed the support of others who were going through the same process. The ideas created during the discussion helped to support the participants. Furthermore, the group interviews matched well with the aims of the study as participants talked about past experiences of assessment and their preferences as to how assessment should be conducted. They also had the opportunity to talk about self-assessment immediately after having been introduced to the concept with the language learning portfolio. This data collection method related to all three research questions.

Below is a description of the data collection process of the group interviews: The atmosphere in the classrooms was relaxed and the participants performed naturally and after a little initial hesitation were not unduly perturbed by the tape recorders. The interviews, in common with all data collection instruments for student participants, were conducted in English. To conduct the interviews in Italian would have necessitated employing a translator to ensure that my transcriptions and subsequent translations of them were correct. This would have reduced the number of group interviews as the neither monetary or time resources would have permitted the use of a translator for nine group interviews. As the learners were at C1 level I felt that they were not unduly hampered by using English rather than Italian. None of the participants expressed a preference for conducting the interviews in Italian. All group interview tapes were then transcribed by myself and this took place as soon as possible after the recordings had been made. I felt that it was important to make the transcriptions as soon as possible to

make sure that all possible details were included. The transcriptions were made using an ordinary domestic tape recorder and a laptop computer. I circulated the transcripts to the participants. The participants read the transcript and I asked them to write in any corrections or additions. When the participants read the transcripts they focussed more on the quality of the language rather than the content. For example, Elisa corrected her use of much and many but did not correct the content of the interviews. To ensure that no data were lost I positioned three tape recorders in the classroom but when I came to make the transcriptions the conversation had a rather disjointed quality as not all of the participants could be heard on each of the tapes. However, the accuracy of the transcripts was not affected as each participant could be heard on at least one of the tapes. None of the participants requested any changes be made nor did they ask for clarifications. This pattern was repeated at the two following data collection stages (see 4.10 and 4.11).

The purpose of the attitude survey was to explore participants' perceptions of assessment in general. Thus, data relating to research questions about assessment in general and alternative assessment was collected with this instrument. I used the focus groups to create the statements for the attitude survey. I did this by analysing the transcripts and finding common themes and finding statements which exemplified those common themes. I also looked for negative cases (see 4.12 for a fuller description of the data analysis process). I sorted the statements into four areas: (1) attitudes towards examinations, (2) attitudes towards self-assessment, (3) attitudes towards possible ways of assessing foreign language learning and (4) attitudes toward who is responsible for assessing learning.

Using a focus group or group interview to construct a questionnaire is an established practice (e.g. Converse & Presser, 1986). Morgan (1997) describes the fact that focus groups can contribute to the creation of survey items in three ways: to capture domains that need to be covered, to determine the dimensions which make up each of these domains, and to provide item wordings. I employed the third way and used data gathered from the focus groups to provide item wordings. I did this to meet my research aims of studying the participants' perceptions of self-assessment. Morse and Richards (2002) also state that focus groups are a good way of scoping out a project early in its design. The use of the focus groups as the basis for the attitude survey allowed me to develop a better understanding of the research topic and people's attitude to the issue of self-assessment. I agree with Morgan when he writes:

Finding item wordings that are appropriate for the widest possible range of respondents not only improves validity but also reduces unreliability by minimising differences in how the respondents interpret the questions. (1997:26)

Fontana and Frey (1988) also highlight the use of focus groups to develop elements of survey design and questionnaire wording. However, using focus groups to generate survey items is not without risk. There is the danger that a chance remark from one participant could lead the researcher to reject a good idea or it could push the researcher into accepting one that is not broadly applicable. As Morgan (1997:27) cautions, the focus group should guide the work not determine it.

4.9.2 Attitude survey

The attitude scale played an important role in this research project. As Karavas-Doukas notes, many methods have been used to study beliefs and attitudes. These include interviews and questionnaires. She suggests that while these methods may obtain reliable indications of attitudes: "...they cannot, and should not, make any pretence to

measure attitudes in a strict sense.” (1996:189) To measure attitudes an attitude scale is required. Although Karavas-Doukas’ work focussed on teacher attitudes, I believe that the same techniques and observations are applicable to students as well. For this research project it was important to create a trustworthy measure of student attitudes, as this was needed to answer most of the research questions. The use of focus groups to create items also augmented the piloting of the survey instrument. The attitude survey was piloted with 3 groups of 14 students. These students were at C1 or C2 level. Their feedback led to the number of items in the survey being reduced from 30 to 25. The feedback also improved the clarity of the wording of several statements.

The attitude survey did not contain any open questions. As the survey was not the sole data source it was not felt necessary to include them. I wanted to create a survey, which would be easy for the participants to answer and so likely to be returned. As Banerjee (2004) notes, open questions demand more of the participants. Throughout the research project, the participants were free to choose whether to respond or not. I would suggest that this gave the research project a better ethical base. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2005) note, a questionnaire maybe an intrusion into the life of the participant and as such the highest ethical standards must be maintained. A further discussion of ethical issues can be found in section 4.13.

As indicated above, the statements used in the attitude survey were grouped into four areas of interest: attitudes towards examinations, attitudes towards self-assessment, attitudes towards the locus of responsibility for assessment, and attitudes to ways of assessing progress in foreign language learning. These groupings provided data for all three research questions. Below are the statements related to attitudes towards

examinations. The scale ranged from 1 to 5 where 1 was strongly disagree and 5 was strongly agree. As can be seen from the copy of the attitude survey in Appendix 4.3 the scale was repeated for each statement to ensure the participants were very clear about the choice they were making.

I study because I have an exam.	1 2 3 4 5
Only an exam shows what you know.	1 2 3 4 5
There are no alternatives to exams.	1 2 3 4 5
The exam is just an intermediate step you have to make to reach your goal.	1 2 3 4 5
Exams are a challenge.	1 2 3 4 5
Exams are necessary.	1 2 3 4 5
In exams your mark depends on luck.	1 2 3 4 5
Assessment has always been carried out using exams so they are the best method	1 2 3 4 5
Without a mark there is no motivation	1 2 3 4 5
Five minutes after the exam you forget everything you have studied	1 2 3 4 5
A written test show you weak points.	1 2 3 4 5

The next group of statements were designed explore the participants' attitudes towards *self-assessment*. Below is the list of statements which related to self-assessment:

It is not useful to judge yourself.	1 2 3 4 5
You cannot test yourself because you are always too generous with yourself.	1 2 3 4 5
I cannot give myself a mark because I don't know what the best answer is.	1 2 3 4 5
If I write or say something I think it is correct.	1 2 3 4 5

- I cannot see where my own mistakes are. 1 2 3 4 5
- When things become easier you know you have made progress. 1 2 3 4 5
- When you do a task you don't have a feeling of how well or badly you wrote it. 1 2 3 4 5

As previously stated (see 3.7) students' attitudes towards self-assessment is an area which appears to be under researched, as this researcher only found 4 studies that reported how the participants felt towards self-assessment.

Exploring students' attitudes towards ways of assessing a *foreign language* was an important dimension to this research as I wanted to be sure that the participants did not discuss assessment in general. Furthermore, one of the reasons for introducing the language learning portfolio and self-assessment was to give students a more tangible sense of the progress that they were making during their course. Below are the statements used to explore this area:

- A written test shows your weak points. 1 2 3 4 5
- If you want to test your level of English you just have to go to London and see if your level is good or not. 1 2 3 4 5
- You can test your level of English by watching a film and checking whether or not you understand. 1 2 3 4 5
- Speaking with a native-speaker of English is a way to see your weak areas. 1 2 3 4 5
- You can check yourself by listening to others. 1 2 3 4 5

The final group of statements in the self-assessment attitude survey explored participants' attitudes towards *responsibility* for assessment. In particular, whether the teacher was solely responsible for assessment and what, if any, responsibility students had for assessment. In previous chapters (2.4, 3.4) I discussed the possible effects of past learning experiences on attitudes towards assessment and in particular the relationship between a teacher-dominated classroom culture and negative opinions of self-assessment. So the final group of statements focussed on the teacher's role in assessment.

The teacher is supposed to correct and judge you. 1 2 3 4 5

Assessment is someone who tells us the path we should follow to get to our goal 1 2 3 4 5

The attitude survey was analysed using the software programme SPSS. The aim of the data analysis was to explore previously stated issues to see if, in fact, they were important for the participants in this research project. The research aim at this stage of data collection was to establish a baseline of participants' attitudes towards self-assessment. A list of data tables is included in Appendix 4.5

4.9.3 Compositions

The final research activity of the first stage of data collection (Table 4.1) was the writing of a composition. The aim of this data collection procedure was to explore participants' perceptions of assessment, to explore their past experiences of assessment and to evaluate the effect of those experiences on their attitudes to, in particular, self-assessment as well as to assessment more generally. As discussed in the literature

review (3.3) and the critique of the CEFR (2.4) past learning experiences could have a vital role to play in acceptance or rejection of the portfolio and self-assessment. The title of the essay was: “Exams – should they be a thing of the past? Are there any alternatives to exams? Are they the only way to assess progress in language learning? Can students assess themselves?” Sample essays can be found in Appendix 4.6. From these the depth and range of opinions presented by the participants can be observed.

Punch (2001) includes essays in the list of documents that might be used by social science researchers. The participants were informed of the purpose of the composition and were informed that if they did not wish to participate in the study they could choose not to submit the composition. The participants were not asked to write the compositions in class time as I felt this would have been unethical as they had paid to attend English lessons and not to be participants in my research project. The compositions were marked and returned to participants following my usual marking scheme and timescale. Photocopies were made of the compositions, which I kept. The original compositions were returned to the participants. The data collected here revealed important information about participant attitudes towards assessment.

4.10 Stage 2

The second stage of data collection (Table 4.2) had two parts: group interviews and stimulated recall of classroom observation. I had three aims when conducting this stage of data collection. Firstly, I wanted to explore whether participants attitudes towards self-assessment had changed after three months of practising to self-assess and being interviewed about it. Secondly, I wanted to explore the process of self-assessment and

understand how the participants came to make their decisions when making a self-assessment. Thirdly, I wished to explore the effects of self-assessment on the classroom.

Having briefly restated the aims of this stage of data collection I now describe the process by which the participants were asked to engage in self-assessment. The process followed that recommended by the Institute's management and explained to teachers during training sessions. The participants had been asked to reflect on the learning aims at home and they completed the self-assessment process in class. The interviews which followed were unstructured (see 4.9 for a description of the interviews), as I wanted to avoid leading the participants as much as possible. The focus groups were audio recorded and a transcript was made (see 4.9) which was passed to the participants for comment. An example of such a transcript is included in Appendix 4.7. The participants read the transcript and had the opportunity to make any clarifications or alternations, which they felt to be necessary. None of the participants exercised this option. The data collected focussed on the processes used by the participants when making decisions while undertaking self-assessment. When I made the transcription I decided to follow Banerjee (2004) and focus on what the participants said rather than how they said it by including pauses or overlapping speakers. I used a simple transcription scheme. I differed from Banerjee (2004:45) as I transcribed all data rather than concentrating on "... the most illuminating and colourful extracts." If I had to repeat this research project I would certainly follow Banerjee's advice and transcribe selectively (6.7).

4.10.1 Stimulated recall of classroom observations

Stage 2 also involved stimulated recall of classroom observation. I observed a lesson and took field notes. Before the lesson I looked at the lesson plans and discussed them with the teachers. The aim of this data collection approach was to explore the attitudes of teachers towards self-assessment and to assess the effects on the classroom of the language learning portfolio and self-assessment. I decided that stimulated recall of classroom observations would be a better way of exploring teacher attitudes towards self-assessment than conducting group interviews as the classroom observation gave the discussion a firmer basis and a more immediate base on which to reflect on their practice as teachers. Also, I felt conducting classroom observations was consistent with Holliday's mystery metaphor as the classroom is usually the teachers' private domain.

Stimulated recall could be described as a somewhat controversial data collection strategy. Below I summarise the main arguments for and against this technique. The sources for this table were Gass and Mackey (2000), Banerjee (2004) and .

Table 4.5 Stimulated recall: strengths and weaknesses

Arguments for	Arguments against
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• good for small sample size• less arduous for participants than keeping a journal• supports the participant• provides insights which are difficult to obtain by other means	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• self-report data is untrustworthy• the memory cannot always be relied upon• new and unproven technique• researcher can influence the participants' response through the selection of particular episodes

I considered the argument that all self-report data used in research should be declared to be untrustworthy as one which undervalues the participants and seems to imply that only researchers have a privileged position. My opportunities for conducting observations were severely restricted by timetable constraints. So the suitability of this

technique for small samples was one of the reasons for choosing it. A further reason for this choice was the support it offered to the participants while they were being interviewed. I have previously argued that group interviews provide a crutch for participants when discussing unfamiliar subjects. I felt that by offering support to the teacher participants they were being helped through data collection as the student participants were through the use of group interviews. Having outlined the advantages and disadvantages below I list in greater detail the arguments which support the use of stimulated recall as a data collection technique.

The idea which lies at the heart of the stimulated recall data collection technique is that, as Gass and Mackey (2000:1) write: "... it is possible to observe internal processes in much the same way as one can observe external real-world events." In other words cognitive processes can be revealed in a way, which would not be possible through simple observation alone. Again we have the concept of stepping into the unknown. Thus, a further example of the appropriateness of Holliday's (2002) mystery metaphor is found.

Furthermore, Banerjee supports the use of stimulated recall when stating:

This is a variation on more traditional retrospective reports because it provides some support for the informant during the recall. (2004:4)

Nunan offers further arguments for the use of stimulated recall methodology in the second language classroom when he writes:

This technique of inviting the teacher to reflect on the lesson and comment on it in retrospect provides insights into aspects of teaching which would be difficult to obtain in any other way. It also enables the voice of the teacher to be heard. When used in association with other techniques, the results can be both reliable and valid. (1992:94)

As a researcher, who was teaching whilst working on this research project, I would argue that the voice of the teacher is one that deserves to be heard. The data, which had been collected thus far in the project, had been self-report data. As Banerjee (2004:37) notes: "It is often useful to complement such data with direct observations such as classroom observation."

Having stated the arguments in support of this data collection technique I now describe how the data were collected. Before the interview the teachers read a copy of the transcript with the events which I wished to discuss highlighted. An example of this is included in Appendix 4.8. I selected the events by looking for example episodes of autonomous behaviour by students or where the teacher was dominating. As the teachers had been given the transcript before the interview it was possible for the discussion to include events which were significant to them and events significant for me. The interviews with the teachers were audio recorded and then transcribed. The participants received a copy of all the transcripts so that they could make alterations or make any clarifications they felt were needed. Nobody felt it was necessary to make changes. The data produced insights into effects that the Learning Aims and self-assessment have on the classroom.

Fieldnotes were made during the classroom observations. Foster (1996) offers several advantages for using fieldnotes when conducting classroom observations. These include flexibility and unobtrusiveness. Foster goes on to state that fieldnotes offer a: "...much fuller, more rounded record of events than the numbers provided by structured methods." (1996:47) Furthermore, the researcher can become more aware of meanings whilst making notes. Local legislation did not permit use of a video-camera. It seemed

at first that this restriction would compromise the data collection process. I would argue, however, that the use of fieldnotes enriched the study as I was able to note connections between my observations and the literature whilst I was in the classroom. I have included an example in Appendix 4.9.

One of the advantages of including classroom observation into this research project was that, in combination with the other methods used, it helped to ensure rigour. Adler and Adler (1988) argue strongly in support of observation as a data collection technique, stating:

In contrast to experiments conducted in the laboratory that lack a natural setting and context of occurrence, and interviews with subjects that are constructions of subjects' recollection and (sometimes self-serving) perceptions, researchers' observations of their settings and subjects can be considered hard evidence. (1988:79)

I would argue that observation is a technique which allows the researcher to go beyond what people say they do.

The results of the stimulated recall of classroom observations were surprising to me and prompted me to include a document search as part of the data collection process. I felt that the answers to some of my questions were to be found at the level of the Institution rather than at the level of the individual teacher. That is to say, the hostility expressed by the teachers towards self-assessment and the portfolio seemed to be directed at the policy rather than the concept of asking students to self-assess. To investigate if my interpretation was correct, I decided to conduct a document search which related to the portfolio and self-assessment.

4.11 Stage 3

As illustrated in Table 4.3, stage 3 of data collection comprised two elements: the third and final set of group interviews and a document search.

The group interviews followed the same pattern as those of stage 2 of data collection.

The rationale for a final set of focus groups can be summarised as the need to gain access to participant insights into self-assessment at the end of the period in which they had been expected to engage in it. At all stages of data collection, but particularly at this final stage, I was interested in learning about the participants' experiences and perspectives on self-assessment. I, therefore, agree with Morgan who states that the basic argument in favour of group interviews is that they: "... reveal aspects of experiences and perspectives that would not be accessible without group interaction." (1997:20) Further arguments in favour of using group interviews were highlighted in section 4.9.

The final research activity was a document search. Punch (2001) describes documents as a rich source of data for social research. Furthermore, Robson (2005:268) while acknowledging that a document search would not be suitable as the principal data collection method believes it does have: "...considerable general usefulness when conceptualised as a complement to the use of other methods." Documents relating to the Institute's policy on the CEFR and self-assessment were analysed through content analysis. The documents were taken from the Intranet which is a confidential website for the exclusive use of the Institute's employees. There was a great variety of documents from newsletters to policy documents to guides for introducing self-

assessment and promoting autonomy. The idea of incorporating a document search into the project came after the classroom observations (4.10 above).

Robson (2005) identified three main advantages of content analysis. Firstly, it is an unobtrusive measure. That is to say the observer is not observed and there is no risk of reactivity. Secondly, the data are permanent which means they can be subjected to reanalysis and replication studies. Thirdly, it can provide a longitudinal analysis.

Furthermore, Punch argues that:

In conjunction with other data, documents can be important in triangulation, where an intersecting set of different methods and data types is used in a single project. (,2001:190)

When analysing the data I particularly focussed on: values, goals and methods; values, as I wanted to understand the values of the Institute's adoption of the CEFR goals, as I wanted to understand what the Institute wanted to achieve at the end of the process; Methods, as I wanted to understand how the Institute sought to achieve those intentions.

4.12 Data analysis

Having explained how the data were collected and the rationale for the choices made I now discuss how the data were analysed. This process is outlined in Table 4.6 below and subsequently explained in further detail.

Table 4.6 Data analysis

Conduct of analysis	
Data Sources for analysis	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcripts from group interviews • Compositions • Attitude survey • Classroom observations • Stimulated recall interviews of classroom observations • Documentary analysis 	
Main Analytical practices	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coding • Memoing • Handwritten research diary • Data summary sheet • Use of software packages NVivo and SPSS 	
Tactics for generating findings	Tactics for confirming findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noting themes and patterns • Making contrasts and comparisons • Counting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Triangulation • Analysis by a second rater • Changing research design to find an explanation for unexpected findings • Confirmation from participants

The analysis was conducted following the framework outlined by Miles and Huberman (1984). The basic idea is that all researchers, no matter how inductive they wish to be, come to the research setting with some pre-conceived ideas. Rather than ignoring these ideas, it is better to build an initial framework based on these initial ideas. This framework guides the structuring of the analysis. The analysis was carried out whilst the data was being collected. Robson notes that this system of analysis: "... calls for considerable organisation." (2005:384) However, I decided that the benefits outweighed the disadvantages. Denzin and Lincoln (1988) criticised the framework as being unresponsive and simplistic. I would agree that the framework may not be suited to studies which are in the poststructural or critical theory perspectives but I found the framework to be helpful for this research project.

The process of data analysis and data reduction began with the start of the project. Data analysis did not, therefore, begin when the first focus groups had been held. Rather as Huberman and Miles explain:

Choices of conceptual framework, of research questions, of sample, of the “case” definition itself, and of instrumentation all involve anticipatory data reduction – which, as we have noted, is an essential aspect of data analysis. (1988:184)

Thus, data analysis was conducted from the start of the project and subsequently at all stages of the research process.

Following Miles and Huberman (1984) the analysis was divided into five initial main stages. These stages were:

1. session summary sheet
2. document sheet
3. development of coding categories
4. memoing
5. interim summary

This is a slightly simplified version of their model, which is appropriate for a small-scale research project. If there was more than one researcher working on this project it would be necessary to use a more complete version of the 1984 model to ensure that all researchers involved in the project were using the data analysis framework in the same way. The process of coding began with eyeballing the data. Then, patterns and themes were identified following the framework, which has previously been summarised.

Robson (2005) explains that the coding process has two levels. The first level attaches labels to groups of words. The second level groups these codes into a smaller number of themes or patterns. Furthermore, Robson (2005) explains that memoing is theorising

whilst coding. An example of a session summary sheet is included in the appendices (Appendix 4.10).

For the first stage of data analysis I chose not to use a data analysis software package. I made this decision as I felt, and Banerjee (2004) also notes this, that the tool cannot perform the analysis. I wanted to be sure that, as this was my first major qualitative project, I had as much contact with the data as possible. I did not want my status as a novice researcher to allow me to let the tool take over the analysis. However, I then analysed the data using the NVivo qualitative data analysis software programme when I came to review the data after data collection had finished. I felt that this was a time efficient way of dealing with larger amounts of data.

In Table 4.6, I outlined the processes by which data were analysed. I then explored in greater detail the terms used during data analysis such as coding and memoing. Here I describe the narrative of the data analysis process. Whilst collecting data I made handwritten notes in my research journal of points which I felt to be significant. These notes were on occasion a link to the literature review and on others were questions which I wished to explore further. The notes in the journal formed the basis of the session summary sheet (see Appendix 4.10). In these sheets I began a more formal and considered analysis. Ritchie and Spencer (1994) describe this familiarisation stage as vital as it is the beginning of the process of abstraction and conceptualisation. They describe the process thus:

Once the selected material has been reviewed, the analyst returns to these research notes, and attempts to identify key issues, concepts and themes according to which the data can be examined and referenced. (1994:179)

Once this familiarisation stage was complete I began the process of coding and memoing. I looked for patterns and themes and also made contrasts and comparisons. I counted the times a particular theme occurred and gave more weighting to the most common ones. When seeking confirmation of my findings I looked for negative cases. I also used triangulation to confirm my findings. In addition, I asked the participants if they found my findings credible. Presenting my work to colleagues and at conferences also served to confirm the trustworthiness of my findings.

Below is an extract from one of the early stages of data analysis. Holliday (2002) argues that qualitative researchers need to show their workings. To do this I have included explanations of the workings throughout this study. The extract is taken from a tapescript of a group interview.

Extract

1. P for example in may case I don't read poetry in Italian so I'm not able to say if I can do it or not so whenever I start to read it I will be able to say I can do it poetry is probably another step for us also to classical writers probably
2. T yeah obviously contemporary poetry would be easier than Tennyson
3. V it's the same if you want to read Dante you have to learn Dante so for many others and what about the writing?
4. E I think that it is easier the formal than the informal I use these kinds of words in my job for example and not like some messages to friends for example in informal way the biggest difficulty I find is to make a difference between formal and informal writing I tend to use always the same register. For me it is much more difficult to write informal than formal
5. P for me there is no problem to write down in a way formal or informal I mean I have done all these types of writings during the course so *I think that I can do it good, I mean not excellent but good*: I am not able to write down something specific type but if I have to write down something about scientific topics for example about the brain I don't use I cannot use the appropriate language I mean it's too technical for me but otherwise *I think that I've got a good chance*

Key

For example = comments on descriptors

For example' = assessing the difficulty of language skills

For example = self-assessing

To check the consistency of coding I asked another researcher to analyse a small sample of my data. (Appendix 4.11 includes the details of how the second rater coded the data)

4.13 Ethics

In addition to the books about educational research previously cited in this chapter (Punch, 2001; Robson, 2005 etc.), I consulted The British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL) Recommendations on Good Practice in Applied Linguistics (2006) <http://www.baal.org.uk/goodprac.htm> to ensure that this research project met high ethical standards. The organisation states that these guidelines are not a "recipe", however, the guidelines do highlight issues which researchers need to demonstrate have been considered. I considered responsibility to the informants to be most relevant to this research project. Data collection was organised to: "... avoid any stress, undue intrusion

and real or perceived exploitation” (2006:4). As I argued above, I chose strategies which would not place undue burden on the participants and would offer them support when participating in the project. When I decided to use materials from on-line mailing lists I followed recommendation 2.9 which stated that contributions to such forums were considered public and as such individual consent was not required. When I conducted the document search I decided that I had to respect the confidentiality of Intranet and chose not to place the documents consulted in the appendices.

BAAL (2006) recommended cross-referencing its guidelines against others to demonstrate that high standards have been maintained. To this end I now discuss how I met the standards as described in Punch (2001). Punch identified 5 questions, which are central to establishing the ethical credentials of a research project. Firstly, there is the matter of informed consent. The participants had full information about the research and gave their consent freely. Second, on Punch’s list, is privacy. The research project did not intrude on people’s privacy. Thirdly, there is the question of confidentiality and anonymity. The data has always been kept in a secure environment to which only I had access. Only people involved in the project heard the tape recordings or read the transcripts. I maintained the anonymity of participants by assigning a pseudonym to them; I am the only person who knows which name refers to which participant. The fourth point considers ownership of data and conclusions. After collection and analysis I own the data and it will only be disseminated in a way which the participants have agreed to. Finally, there is the question of the use and misuse of results. In a project on as small a scale as this one, this is not a very important issue as the stakes are very low. All participants completed a consent form, an example of which is included in Appendix 4.12.

4.14 Summary

In this chapter I presented the empirical basis for this research project. Table 4.7, below, summarises the central dimensions of the research design of this doctoral study.

Table 4.7 Highlights of data collection process

Research Question	Strategy	Data
What were students' perceptions of self-assessment?	Group interview transcripts Compositions Attitude survey	9 hours of recordings 18 attitude surveys 18 compositions
How do students make their decisions when self-assessing?	Group interview transcripts	9 hours of recordings
What are the effects of self-assessment on the classroom?	Classroom observations Stimulated recall	3 observations of 1 hour 20 minutes fieldnotes 3 hours of recordings
What was the Institute's policy towards self-assessment?	Documentary analysis	150 pages of documents

At the end of the data collection process, I had nine hours of recordings of group interviews with the participants drawn from the student body. I transcribed these recordings and the transcripts represent the biggest source of data. I collected eighteen attitude surveys and the same number of compositions. I have the notes of the lesson observations (N = 3) and the transcripts of three interviews with teachers. I consulted one hundred and fifty pages of documents for the document search. The project was small scale; however, I feel that there are sufficient data for the limited claims which will be made in chapter 6.

In the preceding sections of this chapter I have demonstrated how the methods I chose were both valid and reliable through triangulation and the description of how data were analysed. Operating within a qualitatively orientated framework, this study has used a

variety of data collection techniques in order to ensure trustworthiness. The most commonly used data collection technique utilised in the study of self-assessment (see 3.4), i.e. comparing student self-assessment with expert assessment, was rejected on several grounds. A teacher may not be suitable to act as an independent adjudicator. Examination boards invest considerable amounts of time and money training teachers to be examiners. Also, this type of research did not reveal any insights into the processes of self-assessment. The research has now finally moved into the classroom. The data collection methods chosen include stimulated recall. This is an exciting development in the field of research into the CEFR and the ELP. Some limitations in the design of the experiment have been acknowledged. I would, however, agree with Morse and Richards (2002:103) who state that: “even imperfect data can be amazingly interesting and produce quite satisfactory results.” In the next chapter the results will be analysed.

I chose to use a case study research strategy, outlining the reasons for my choice in 4.7 above. Here I would like to develop those arguments further. I felt that by deploying the case study strategy I was able to examine a real situation with real people. As Cohen, et al state:

Further, contexts are unique and dynamic, hence case studies investigate and report the complex dynamic and unfolding interaction of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance. (2005:36)

As shall be seen in the following chapter the events were certainly dynamic and complex. Furthermore, the case study strategy allowed me to observe the lifecycle of the Institute, which in the case of this study was an English course which lasted for thirty weeks.

Finally, in this chapter I have written about the importance of using multiple methods. As shall be argued in chapter 6 when I analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the use of multiple methods, this has helped to ensure the trustworthiness of this research project. Fontana and Frey argue in favour of multiple methods when they state: “Thus an increasing number of researchers are using multimethod approaches to achieve broader and often better results.” (1998:73) The use of multiple methods was consistent with the definition of a case study given at the start of this chapter and is also constant with Holliday’s mystery metaphor as it allowed deeper exploration of the unknown territory. In the next chapter, the results of the data collection process will be presented.

Chapter 5 Findings

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the findings from the research study. Reflections on the methodology itself will be presented in the final chapter (see 6.6). I begin by analysing the participants' perceptions of self-assessment (5.2) and how they make their decisions when self-assessing (5.3). I go on to report the participants' perceptions of examinations (5.4). As previously stated (4.9), the purpose of this analysis was to establish a baseline of opinion about assessment against which to match student opinions of self-assessment. The next research question to be addressed concerned the effects of self-assessment and the CEFR on the classroom (5.5). The unexpected results to this question led me to conduct a document search, the findings from which are presented in 5.6. The chapter concludes with a summary (5.7).

Having delineated the structure of this chapter, I present the main findings of the research project which are examined in more depth below. There are three main findings which, I would argue, could be termed significant. Firstly, the participants based their self-assessment decisions on affective factors rather than any specific classroom activity, as previously suggested would be the case (see 3.4). Secondly, the participants stated that engaging in self-assessment facilitated goal setting (e.g. identifying language learning targets and the appropriate strategies to achieve them), with goal setting identified as one of the key features of learner autonomy, as discussed in 3.2. I would argue that the findings presented here offer empirical evidence for the claims that self-assessment promotes learner autonomy (see 2.3 and 3.3 for a discussion of the relationship between self-assessment and learner autonomy). Thirdly, the

participants' perception of self-assessment changed significantly over the duration of the course. Further findings presented in this chapter include: the importance of the native speaker as a role model, and teacher hostility towards the CEFR.

5.2 What are student perceptions of self-assessment?

The findings related to student perceptions of self-assessment were, I would argue, the most significant of this research study. They were also the most numerous. Below I present the two most significant findings and then go on to present three further findings. As described in the previous chapter (4.9 - 4.11), this question featured at each stage of data collection. This partly explains the size of the findings for this research question compared to the others. Forty-two participants responded to this question at each of the three stages of data collection. More importantly, it addresses the central concern of this research project which focussed on the implementation of self-assessment at the Institute (1.3).

5.2.1 Self-assessment and learner autonomy

In Chapters 2 and 3 (2.3 and 3.3) I discussed claims made that self-assessment promotes learner autonomy and I argued that there was a lack of empirical studies to support this claim. Below I set out the findings of my own research, which seem to indicate that self-assessment does help to promote learner autonomy.

Claudia spoke positively about self-assessment in general and in particular about using the grid (see section 4.6 for a description of how the participants self-assessed and Appendix 4.2 for a copy of the learning aims) asserting that she was far from alone in doing so:

1. I think the grid is useful yes because it lets us evaluate ourselves and then we have the possibility to point out which are the next focus, the next objectives that we can reach, achieve it, so it is a good means to realise what is good or not. (FG3.1:69)¹

Her point was echoed and developed by Tiziana:

2. I think it is a good instrument if you want to focus on the weak points because as Diana said before you can always improve I think also a native speaker could also better his language but in our case we can improve everywhere of course but we can point to topics on which we have worked more to bring them to a better level than the average level among the seven points. (FG3.1:71)

The above quotations were two examples of the many student comments which indicated that self-assessment assisted goal setting. In extract 1 Claudia clearly states that self-assessment helps her to identify the next focus for her studies. I would argue that this is an example of goal setting. Tiziana states in extract 2 that self-assessment means that she can focus on weak points and then see the progress made to achieve particular learning goals. The identification of appropriate learning goals is one of the behaviours which can characterise autonomous learning. Thus, I would argue that the participants' identification of their own learning goals would seem to offer support for the claim that self-assessment supports autonomy. The small-scale of this study would, however, suggest that further research needs to be undertaken to explore whether these results could be replicated with a larger number of participants.

5.2.2 Changing student perceptions of self-assessment

As described in chapter 4 this research project was designed with a longitudinal dimension and followed the participants through an academic year to explore whether perceptions of self-assessment altered over this period of time. I describe below that there was a considerable shift in opinion by most of the participants. At the start of data collection the participants, with the exception of one participant, were hostile to self-assessment and this hostility was again shown at stage 2 of the study. The final stage of

¹ FG is focus group, 3 is at the third stage of data collection, 1 is the first focus group to be held at that stage, 69 is the line number.

data collection saw a remarkable shift in opinion: away from hostility and towards an appreciation of self-assessment and the way it supported identification of appropriate learning goals.

At the first stage of data collection, the student perceptions of self-assessment were overwhelmingly negative. Comments such as: “I cannot give myself a mark because I don’t know what is best” (FG1.2:115) or “It’s impossible that a person who is learning English, for example, makes an evaluation about a thing he is learning himself and that he doesn’t know from birth.”(C4.9). This would seem to follow arguments made by Little (2005) that contact with native speakers of English may be a vital pre-condition for successful self-assessment of foreign language learning.

There was one student who stood out from the generally low opinion of self-assessment. Interestingly, she had experience of using self-assessment during her secondary education. Francesca described her experience thus:

We had a professor like that in high school and I do remember he didn’t give a mark it was very useful because you think for yourself, you have to be honest. He saw that you really know what your level is so you can’t cheat, I think it was very smart.”(FG1.2:110)

This comment suggests that when students are asked to practise self-assessment they may come to develop a more positive opinion of it. Support for this supposition will be offered later in this chapter and further discussed in 6.5. It is interesting to note the emphasis placed on self-reliance and honesty. Comments made at the first stage of data collection suggested that Italian high school students are generally proud of their prowess in cheating at exams. For example Francesco stated that at school: “The first thing you learn is how to cheat” (FG1.1.50). The value of self-assessment partly rests on its requirement for honesty.

At stages 1 and 2 of data collection the general finding was that the participants did not express favourable opinions about self-assessment. As detailed below, they also expressed doubts about the wording of the learning aims used for self-assessment by the Institution. However, these doubts might not have surfaced had there been greater belief in self-assessment. Remarks which won agreement when they were made included: "It's a nonsense the self-assessment" (FG2.1:93) and "It tells us what we already know, we have to work."(FG2.1:68) There were several participants who called for teacher assessment rather than self-assessment. Some of the remarks on this topic included: "I would prefer teacher's assessment" (FG2.1:68), "A personal interview with the teacher can help the student understand what is a right way to follow to reach a personal target" and "a more personal relation and assessment between the teacher and the student" (FG2.1:101). This would seem to indicate a clear preference for teacher assessment over self-assessment. However, the situation is complicated by the fact that I was both the teacher and the interviewer. The participants could have been using the group interview as an opportunity to tell me what they wanted from me as a teacher rather than expressing their opinion of self-assessment.

The most surprising result at the third stage of data collection was how opinions towards self-assessment had shifted over the course of the study. As presented above, at stage 1 the participants were sceptical, at stage 2 they were all, without exception, hostile to both self-assessment and the list of descriptors, but by stage 3 the majority of participants, with some provisos, were positive about self-assessment and gave several reasons for this. Orlando summed up the positive opinion of self-assessment by stating: "I think every intelligent person can't avoid to make a self-assessment."(FG3.1:112)

When asked directly if self-assessment had improved the course, the comments were generally favourable. Anna stated: “No I think it is important to speak about it. It’s a good thing.”(FG3.3:60) Marco added that: “I think it [self-assessment] is interesting” (FG3.3:61). In the second group interview of stage 3 Sara stated that using the learning aims had made the course better because: “they helped us to understand more things.”(FG3.2:40) I interpret more things to mean the knowledge gained about how to learn languages and the realisation of the importance of goal setting. From the first group interview of stage 3 Maria Pia stated: “Yes it can definitely help. As I said before it is a good tool, a good means to evaluate. It is a good way to think how we have gone.” (FG3.1:166) Thus, I would argue, there has been a quite dramatic shift in the participants’ position on self-assessment.

An interesting result was a partial shift away from the exam being the only source of information about a student’s level. Mario, amongst many, made the point: “Yes these are more general, for example in the exam you have to fill in the gaps but these refer to real life” (FG3.2:38). A further example comes from Stefano who stated:

I think that, for example, I am preparing for the exam and I am focussing first on the words, trying to understand what I need to do for the exam. So maybe this piece of paper is useful because there are specific abilities. (FG3.2:37)

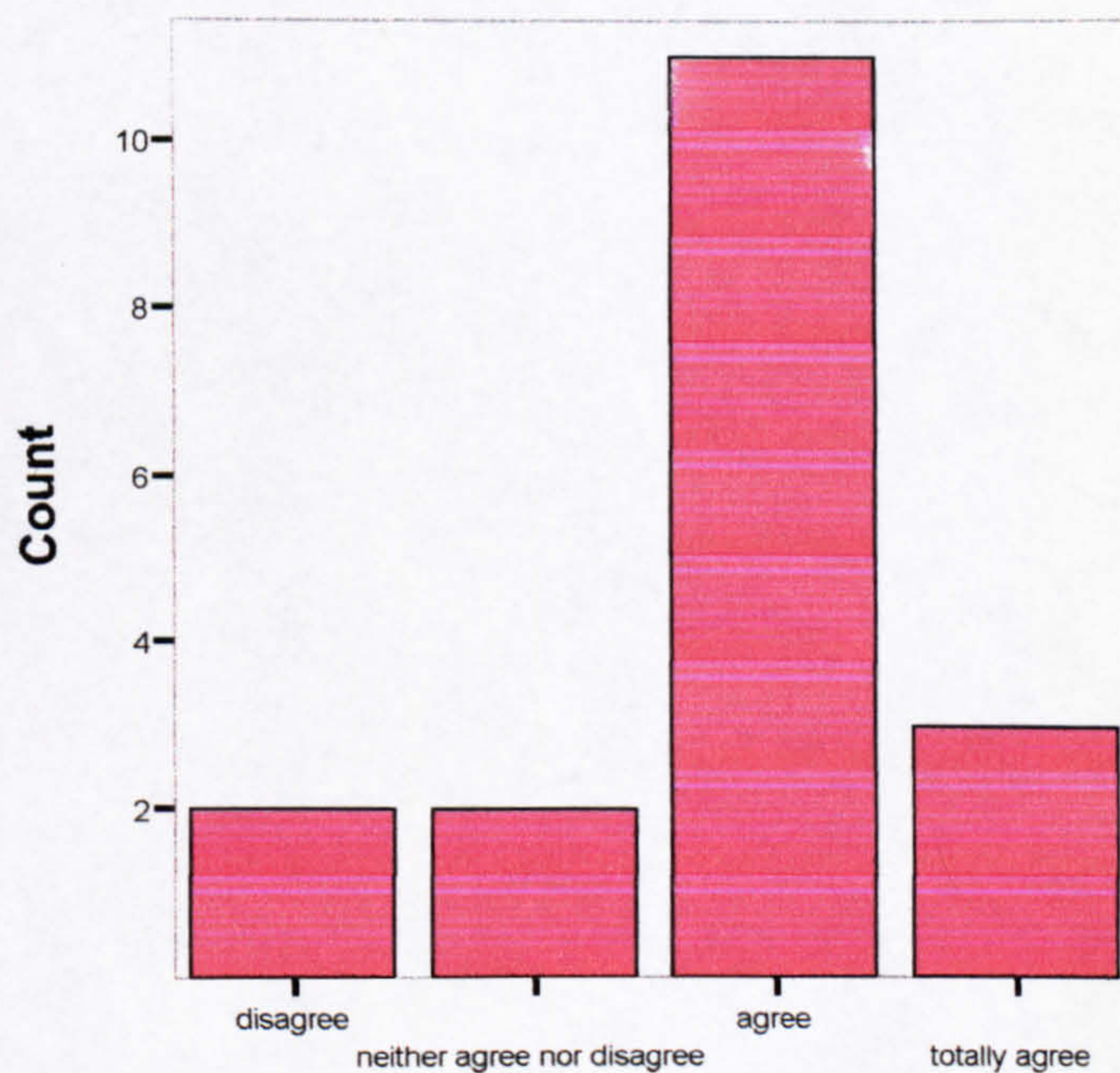
However, whilst acknowledging the importance of self-assessment some felt that it was best used in conjunction with exams. The following two statements typify comments made:

No I think it is important to evaluate yourself but you also need external evaluation so I think a combination would be better. (FG3.3:68)

Still it helps you to be self-critical but after you have the real one, the results of the exam and then you can know, you can accept your self-critical approach. (FG3.3:71)

I think that this shift towards a more positive view of self-assessment can also be demonstrated in the way that teacher assessment became less dominant. When the attitude survey was distributed at stage 1 of data collection, teacher assessment was regarded as vital. The table below demonstrates clearly that the overwhelming majority of the participants were in favour of teacher assessment.

Table 5.1 Support for teacher assessment N=18



The fact that fourteen student participants expressed agreement with this statement would seem to indicate that teacher assessment was very important to the participants. This can perhaps be explained by the teacher dominated culture of the Italian education system in which teachers have a great deal of authority and control as they decide the curriculum to be taught and the textbooks to be used. Furthermore, examinations in Italian schools are mainly oral interviews conducted by teachers, even those for school leaving certificates.

A further piece of evidence which supports my argument that teacher assessment had become less important and self-assessment more important comes from Eleonora. In the second of the final set of group interviews Eleonora explained:

I think it depends on different points of view now even if you ask her (indicating the teacher) you only have an opinion you don't have the truth, it is an opinion like you have an opinion of yourself . (FG3.1:151)

I feel that this is a significant finding as it represents a huge shift in opinion from the beginning to the end of the course with evidence in the data supporting a shift from the teacher being central to the assessment process to being part of an assessment process that includes other voices, including that of self-assessment. This claim is supported by evidence in 5.4 where I reported a shift away from examinations as being the best source of assessment and to appreciating that learning a language was a more complex task than passing an examination. The teacher and the exam have both become less important while self-assessment has taken on increased importance. The participants' view of assessment has broadened. As discussed in 3.4 one of the rationales for self-assessment is the broadening of the range of assessment for learners. My findings appear to offer support for this claim.

5.2.3 Self-assessment and personality

Having described the three most significant findings of this research project, I now present further findings relating to the question about student perceptions of self-assessment. A theme found at all three stages of data collection was a concern that the self-assessment was too easily affected by either the participants' mood at the time of making the assessment or their personality type. During the final group interview Orlando observed:

I can also imagine that everyone answering this question could make or judge the situation in a different [way] according to his temper in that precise moment because if you are in a good mood maybe you have just watched a movie the week before you are proud because you have understood everything you put a tick on everything “I can do this very well” if you are in a bad mood because you have experienced a bad exam practice then no. (FG3.1:159)

Furthermore, Andrea wrote in his composition:

And you can find the same troubles in self-assessment: your own impression about the progress you made could be affected by your personality and attitudes. (C4.1.2)

He went on to state:

Optimistic people are inclined to emphasise their success while pessimists will always be disappointed by their performances.

This would seem to conflict with Oscarsson’s (1989), Ross’s (1998) and Alderson’s (2005) findings that self-assessment was not affected by personality, gender, age or other similar factors. So, it would seem that the findings of this study contrast with those conducted previously.

5.2.4 Self-assessment and the native speaker of English

The Council of Europe (2001) stated that the native speaker is not a role model for language learners. As discussed in chapter 2 “effective mastery” is the goal to which the Council of Europe considers appropriate for learners of English to aspire towards. The participants in this study, however, made frequent reference to the need for interaction with a native speaker. This desire for interaction, does not, however, imply that the participants had taken native speakers to be a model for language learners. Rather, the participants saw native speakers as a resource on which they could exploit.

Despite being EFL learners who use English for international communication, the majority of the participants took native speakers of English as a resource and felt that

native speakers had some role to play in language assessment. Below are comments selected from the group interviews which typify the need for native speaker comparison. Orlando is very explicit in expressing this need.

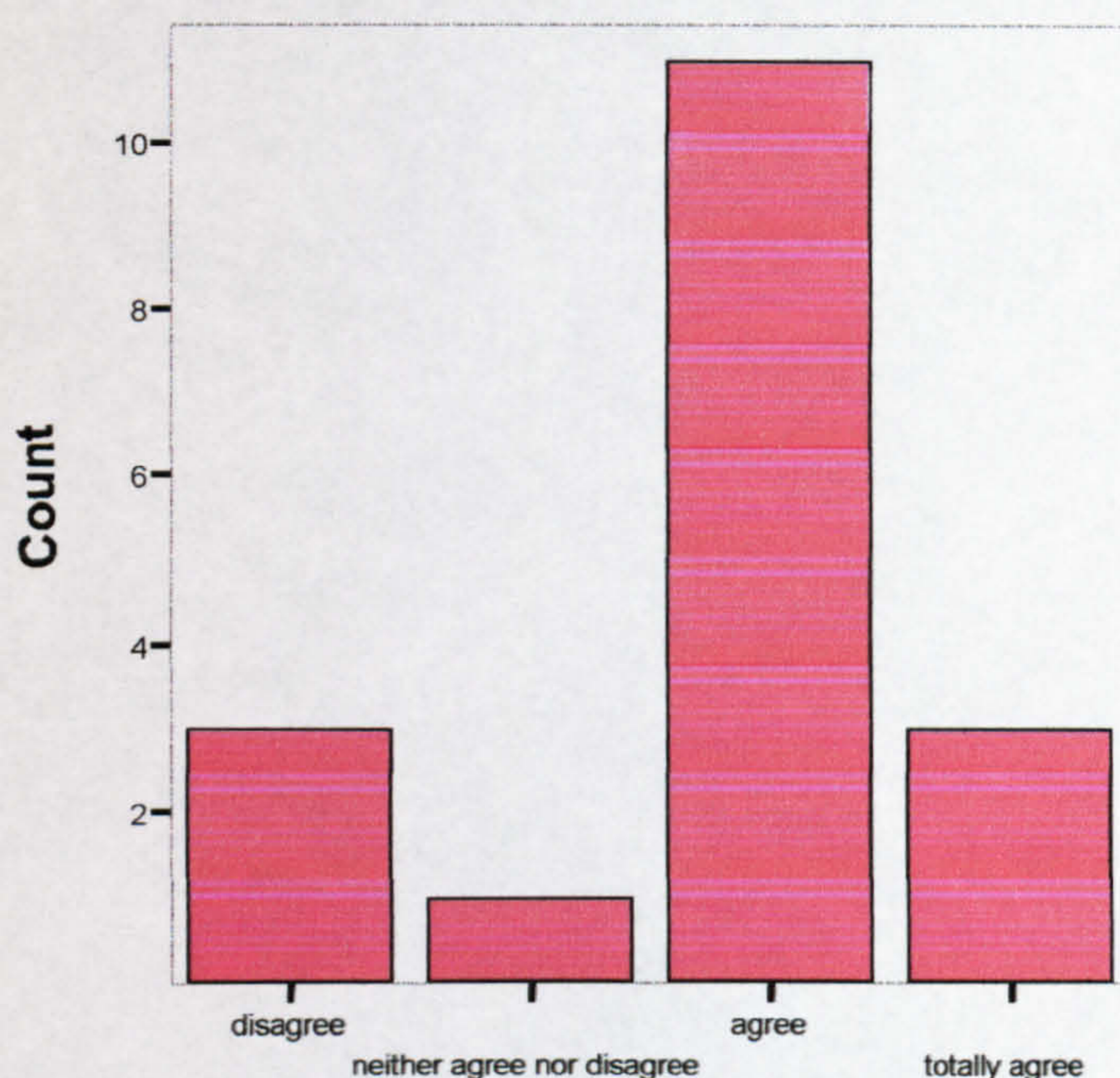
I find this question quite strange because the ways to assess your knowledge of the language are a lot you know I mean that if you just want to test your capacity you just have to take a ticket and fly to London and stay there for a while and check out if your capabilities are good or not (FG1.1:170)

Several participants made comments about films or television. Here is one example:

“Testing your ability of understanding something like a movie or the BBC to understand” (FG1.3.107). A direct appeal for comparison with a native speaker was made by Sylvia when she stated: “I would like to speak with a native speaker to see the weak areas.” (FG1.2:47) A further call came from the compositions: “You cannot have the effective tools to judge if your level is good because you are not a native speaker.” (C4.7.7)

The following table shows that the results of the attitude survey further demonstrate the desire for native speaker comparison.

Table 5.2 Strong desire for native-speaker comparison (n=18)



As can be seen from Table 5.2 above, there is overwhelming support (N=16, aggregating the responses “agree” and “totally agree”) for the idea that making a comparison with a native speaker is a way to assess language. I would posit the view that the desire for native-speaker comparison is a significant result as it would seem to suggest that learners wish to have native speaker interaction to aid self-assessment. This is not an aspect of self-assessment that has received much attention in the research conducted to date.

5.2.5 Self-assessment and the 4 language skills

The final aspect of self-assessment to be considered here relates to how the participants considered the four language skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. As discussed in the literature review (see 3.4), research into self-assessment of language skills produces conflicting findings. Ross (1998) and Blue (1998), on the one hand,

reported that reading was the most accurately assessed skill and speculated that this was because the participants spent more time reading than engaged in the other language skills. Alderson (2005), on the other hand, reported that participants were most accurate when assessing productive skills, suggesting that participants were used to receiving feedback from teachers in these skills and this made their self-assessments more accurate. In both the first and second stage of group interviews participants separated language learning into its constituent parts when considering self-assessment. Generally, they considered language to be made up of the four skills, plus vocabulary and grammar. Grammar was the area which was least discussed but this may not be surprising given the nature of the learning aims. Writing was considered by Marita amongst others to be a hard skill to self-assess:

It's a tough question because I need to think that it is difficult to self-evaluate. In reading you have exercises and in writing it could be a problem I think it could be better to have an evaluation from another person. (FG2.1:51)

One participant gave a very detailed breakdown of the differences in the self-assessment of skills in the different skills in her composition:

Reading/Writing/Vocabulary skills – these are easier to check, both in examination and in self-evaluation: a learner clearly perceives his ability to understand or enjoy a text, as well as the (hopefully decreasing) difficulty in composing a text – with or without support (e.g. reading with occasional help from translated text, or writing with the help of a dictionary). (C4.10.12)

She went on to contrast the relative simplicity of the above mentioned skills with the complexity of the others.

Speaking/listening skills – are more elusive – a conversation or speech usually leaves little room for “background” thought – it is often difficult to perform a rational analysis of what you are saying while you are speaking! (C4.10.13)

This is an atypical result, as it was not mentioned by other participants. However, it raises an interesting point. It may be the case that some skills are more amenable to self-assessment than others.

In the third and final set of interviews all participants discussed the skills separately. They also approached the descriptors more critically. Some participants complained that the reading learning aims included genre which they were not interested in. For example, Orlando, amongst others, made the point:

In my case I don't read poetry in Italian too so I'm not able to say if I can do it or not, whenever I start to read it I will be able to say I can do it. (FG3.1:20)

Listening was considered by most of the participants to be the most difficult skill to assess. At each stage of data collection, each group complained of the difficulties they encountered when performing listening tasks. One participant described the problem as a kind of "psychological block". In addition many participants complained of the difficulty of writing in an informal register.

For example, Cinzia stated:

I think that it is easier the formal than the informal. I use these kinds of words in my job for example and not like some messages to friends for example in informal way the biggest difficulty I find is to make a difference between formal and informal writing I tend to use always the same register. For me it is much more difficult to write informal than formal. (FG3.3.23)

The same point was made by Carlo:

Yes me too, I only write serious letters so I don't find it easy to remember informal expressions. I only use English for business and not to relax. (FG3.3.29)

The important result here is that the participants were able to go beyond making a simple good/bad judgement and were able to analyse the roots of the problem.

Francesco, for example, made the point which was echoed by many participants that:

I think for me the biggest problem is the informal letter because I don't know many colloquial expressions. For me it's not hard to write a formal letter. (FG3.2.27)

Thus, the participants were not only able to self-assess but also to ascribe reasons for their successes and failures. This would seem to suggest that they developed their own

capacity to reflect on their language performance thus providing further evidence in support of the notion that self-assessment promotes learner autonomy.

5.3 How do participants arrive at their decisions when making a self-assessment?

I argued (3.4. and 3.7) that there was a gap in the literature concerning the processes of self-assessment as many studies investigated self-assessment solely from a reliability perspective, i.e. the reliability of self-assessment as compared to assessment made by an expert assessor. These studies made recommendations for improving the accuracy of self-assessment which were based on the concept that self-assessment activities should be closely linked to classroom activity. That is to say, the self-assessment activities should mirror classroom activities. I had, therefore, developed an expectation that the participants in this research project would base their self-assessments on what had gone on in class and the activities in which they had participated. This did not prove, however, to be the case. In fact, the evidence suggests that the participants based their decisions on affective factors using, as discussed below, terms such as feelings, confidence and relaxation when describing how they came to make their decisions when self-assessing.

The findings that emerge from my study evidence how students make their judgements and engage with self-assessment. Their descriptions would appear to contradict in some respects those described in the manual for using the ELP

(http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Publications_EN.asp#P94_2950). At each stage of data collection participants described how their self-assessment decisions were based on intuitive responses. The results of the attitude survey seem to support this finding as Table 5.3 demonstrates. Two participants made comments about the fact that feeling

was an important factor in the self-assessment decision making process. Firstly, there was: “when things become more relaxing so they come more” (FG1.3:109). Secondly, there was: “when this becomes more relaxing so they become more automatic.”(FG1.4:91)

At the second and third data collection stage more comments of this type were made. In the second group interview all participants stated that their decisions were based on feeling. This comment by Anna shows how much feeling was invested in these decisions:

I am quite, very obsess me because before putting a tick in the box that I can somehow communicate in a good way I must feel very confident about this so I prefer to admit that I am not able and work on it before saying that I can do it (FG2.1:52)

During the third round of group interviews the following comments were made which built on those of the previous two rounds. Marzia (FG3.3:34) summed up a group discussion when she stated: “Based on what we are feeling inside when we are speaking and writing.” Francesco stated:

We had the feeling that all of us in some way were good at it. Instead I had a bad feeling about the writing mostly because it can be said that I never achieved. (FG3.2:35)

“Gut instinct” seems to be the basis of the decision making process when self-assessing.

In summary, there are two significant findings for RQ3 which investigated how students arrived at their decisions when self-assessing. These are summarised in the Table 5.3 below.

Table 5.3 Summary of findings for RQ3

Category	Frequency	Example
Self-assessment based on feeling	7	When things become more relaxing so they come more (FG1.3.108)
Self-assessment affected by mood or personality	5	Your own impression about the progress you make could be affected by your personality and attitudes (C4.2.3)

The first result, i.e. that self-assessment was based on feeling, allows an insight into the process of self-assessment. It would seem that the participants relied on emotion rather than recalling occasions when they had successfully completed a task. This seems to contradict some of the claims covered in section 3.4 which stated that self-assessment was more accurate if based on specific classroom activity. As I was not investigating the accuracy of self-assessment I cannot determine if judgements based on feeling were less accurate than those based on specific classroom activity. However, Alderson (2005) and Oscarson (1989) both reported that personality, gender, age and other such traits did not affect the accuracy of self-assessment. This is in stark contrast with the views of the participants of this study who felt that personality would influence a person's capability to self-assess. This would suggest that this is an area for further research as personality had previously been discounted as having an influence on self-assessment.

5.4 What are student perceptions of examinations?

As can be recalled from chapter 4, this research project was designed to track students' perceptions of self-assessment over the length of the course. In order to give these perceptions a context, I started by investigating student perceptions of examinations. Little and Perclová (2001) and Oscarson (1989) both suggest that past learning and assessment experiences may negatively influence learner opinions of self-assessment.

My findings, as presented below, seem to suggest that and Oscarson (1989) were right to raise these concerns, but I would argue that with time and exposure to self-assessment these difficulties can be limited.

Data were gathered by three different procedures: the compositions (4.9), the attitude survey (4.9) and the focus group (4.9 - 4.11). The findings have also been supplemented by data gathered during interviews with teachers at stage 2 of data collection. Exams, as can be seen below, were considered to be motivating and an essential part of student life.

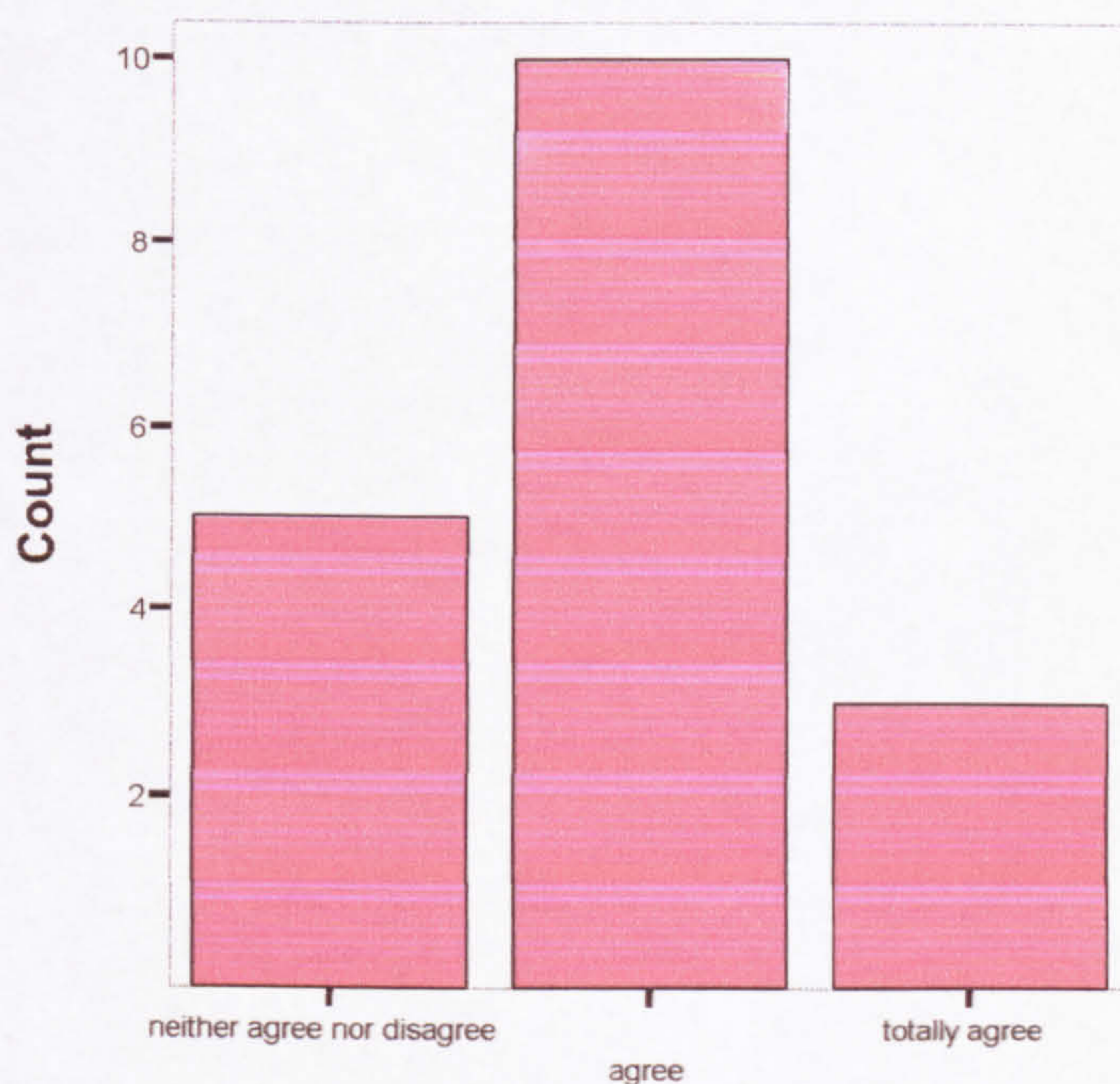
During the first set of group interviews and in the compositions a widely held opinion expressed was that exams were very motivating and an important rite of passage. One participant stated, and this is representational of many, that: "if I shouldn't take an exam I wouldn't study" (FG1.1:46). In a similar vein another participant remarked: "I never would have studied all those boring things if it wasn't for the exam." (FG1.1:51) Furthermore, many participants made comments similar to the following remark: "the exam lets you focus on something."(FG1.3:51) From the compositions the following comments reinforce the points made during the group interviews. One participant asked the question: "To be honest, if you didn't have exams why on earth would you do all that work?" (C1.2.4) Similarly, another participant wrote: "There is no doubt that exams represent one of the most powerful incentives to study."(C3.2:3) Furthermore, Maria wrote that: "It is a fact easily observable that people do not study unless they know that a course includes a final exam."(C3.2.3)

Examinations were perceived to be an important part of being a student which was considered to be a series of challenges and trials with examinations taking the form of a challenge. Several participants made reference to a famous Italian play “Exams never end”. This play is so popular that the title has become an idiomatic expression which is used frequently. Ludovica stated: “In Italy we have a very famous play entitled ‘Exams never end’ it’s about our life that is an endless range of proofs, trials and tests, sometimes very difficult to overcome” (C1.2.5). This is reinforced by this comment: “The entire existence is full of exams. The school exams are only a kind of exam we have to pass in life” (C7.3.1). Examinations were viewed not only as a trial to be overcome but as something which could be positively enjoyed. A sizable minority opined that examinations were something to be enjoyed. Cinzia stated: “I like doing exams because it is like a trial. It’s a challenge.”(FG1.2:56) In addition to which Maria Grazia added: “How would a student’s life be if we cancelled exams? An uneventful, boring dull life?” (C1.4.6)

Support for the notion that exams are a challenge was also found in the results of the attitude survey. For example, there is very strong agreement with the statement: “Exams are a challenge” (see Appendix 4.4 for the attitude survey). It seems that exams were viewed positively as an opportunity for personal growth and development as it is through rising to a challenge that we grow. It can be recalled that the statements used in the attitude survey were drawn from the focus group interviews (see section 4.5).

Below is a table which shows the high level of agreement with this statement.

Table 5.4 Exams are a challenge N=18



As can be seen from the above table, the levels of agreement with this statement were very high when aggregating the numbers who responded agree and totally agree and taking into account that none of the participants disagreed with this statement.

The longevity of the examination system was taken as proof of its success. Paolo, during FG1.3 stated quite categorically, and his comments found a warm reception, with other participants indicating their agreement by nodding and saying yes, that: “If assessment is done like that and has always been done like that there must be some reasons to do it like that. I trust in exams.” (FG1.3:85) In an earlier focus group the participants discussed how examinations had been used since the first universities were founded during the middle ages. This was taken as the demonstration of how good the examination system was. Seventeen out of thirty compositions contained favourable comments about examinations. Thus, more than 50% of participants spontaneously

made favourable comments. Andrea wrote: "This system is still in use and apparently in all these years no other method has been able to work better." (C3.4.2) Carlotta stated: "They are a safe means, which have been used for a long time and have always given ensuring guarantees." (C2.4.6) Finally, Maria Carla stated: "Taking exams is still the most useful, easy and complete way of checking out the students' preparation." (C3.3.8)

Although the participants were generally favourable about examinations there were some negative comments. Taking examinations was considered by many participants to be stressful. Ten of the composition writers mentioned stress and fear. This represented 30% of the total. The comments ranged from stating that examinations made people feel fearful to stating that performance was adversely affected. Marzia wrote that: "It's interesting how a piece of paper can make you feel more frightened than Hannibal Lector" (C1.4.5), while Caterina stated: "They may produce in your mind wrong ideas of your abilities and make you feel incapable." (C2.4.3) Francesco tried to quantify this fear by commenting:

More than 70% of people get panic in the exams, and a good percentage of these completely fail the exam, only for panic. (C4.4.2)

He sought to explain why people are so afraid of examinations. He wrote that:

Exams are often associated with the idea of judgement. For that reason most of the people having to face an examination, are not able to do their best, frightened by the idea of being severely and irreparably judged. (C4.4.5)

The importance of having a certificate was mentioned by 75% of the participants. The passing of an examination is the usual way of obtaining a certificate. The third focus group, in particular, was very consistent in expressing their need for a piece of paper. At one point in the second round of interviews they made a chorus to make clear their

desire to have a recognised qualification in English. Marco offered a rationale for this when he wrote in his composition: “If you have passed an English exam with a good mark you will get a job easier.” (C4.2.1) Orlando was very insistent on the importance of having a certificate at the end of the course. He stated firstly that:

... we need to have a certificate at the end and so it’s absolutely important to have an exam there are no alternatives unfortunately. (FG1.1:66)

He then went on to declare:

I find this question quite strange because the ways to assess your knowledge of the language are a lot you know; I mean that if you just want to test your capacity you just have to take a ticket and fly to London and stay there for a while and check out if your capabilities are good or not but I think that for me the important fact is to have a degree at the end of the course (FG1.1:70)

Further evidence about the importance of examinations can be found in the teacher interview data. T2 seemed to vindicate the position that the exam and the certificate at the end of the course were far more important than self-assessment or using the learning aims. She stated that:

This is a CAE exam preparation course. It is very serious. We don’t do anything about the learning aims...the aims are the exam. (T3.3)

Her focus on the exam suggested to me that she felt her job was to push the students through the examination so that they would obtain their certificate rather than focus on self-assessment and learner autonomy. Her juxtaposition of the seriousness of the examination with the perceived triviality of the learning aims was very interesting. It would seem to imply that preparation for the examination allows the teacher to be in the position of being the knowledgeable one who tells the students how to pass the examination, whereas the promotion of self-assessment and learner autonomy changes the teacher role from that of knower to being that of facilitator.

The following table summarises the findings for RQ2 which focussed on the participants' perceptions of exams.

Table 5.5 Summary of data for RQ2

Category	Frequency	Example
Motivating	12	Without an exam I wouldn't study (FG1.3.11)
Exams are part of life	9	The entire existence is full of exams (C2.4.45)
Best system	16	The power of exams probably lies in their reliability (C1.3.56)
Source of stress	11	It is interesting how a piece of paper can sometimes make you more stressed than Hannibal Lector (C1.4.5)

As can be seen from Table 5.5, overall the participants had positive opinions about exams. They believed exams to be the best system and to be highly motivating. I would suggest that these results indicate the need to introduce self-assessment and language learning portfolios in a way which will not lead them to be rejected for not being the same as examinations. Thus, the two assessment systems should not be promoted as being in competition with each other or that the use of one excludes the use of the other. Implications of the findings of this research project on professional practice will be explored in the following chapter (6.5).

5.5 What are the effects of self-assessment in the classroom?

The level of teacher hostility towards the CEFR and self-assessment was marked. This result confirmed the results of research which I had previously undertaken at the Institute for the taught units of the EdD, but was nevertheless surprising to me in some ways as it contrasted with studies of teacher perceptions of the CEFR (see 3.5). The three teachers who participated in this research project did not ask their students to self-

assess which, in itself, indicates the level of hostility felt by the teachers towards self-assessment and the CEFR. Below I analyse the reasons for this hostility. Although none of the teachers used the learning aims for self-assessment one teacher did use the learning aims with students and the interview with this teacher produced interesting findings concerning how the CEFR could be best put to use with Italian learners of English. She described her experience of using the learning aims thus:

they didn't know what was coming they weren't ready because the learning aim lesson was go in with a can do statement elicit vocabulary elicit the situation then you set up a situation where they do it themselves they weren't, they were disorientated they didn't have any reference any particular reference material they didn't know where the lesson was going and they weren't clear about the grammar structure and the line of the whole thing. (T1.56)

Her students found the lesson to be very challenging. She attributed this to a lack of reference material. This would suggest that the participants had a need for structure and relied on text books to provide it. Her comment also implies a high level of dependency on the teacher as the person who guides them through the textbook. This theme is discussed in greater detail below.

Two of the teachers refused to use of learning aims. The third teacher had tried to incorporate them into the classroom but felt that their use was particularly problematic for Italian learners of English. She stated that:

They have been teacher dependent all their lives. They have also had a different exam expectation where what they regurgitate in sheer quantity is more important than how you evaluate things and your opinion on things, so asking students for opinions or to express an opinion in writing, or to discuss an opinion to share answers with people in order to predict or to listen more carefully next time is just something they are not familiar with. And I think they don't quite understand the difference because we are talking about exam systems and the reason for learning the difference between what they have done in school and the exam they are going to do in June is that they will be expected to actually to perform and not just regurgitate things. (T1: 60)

Thus, both the examinations system and the authoritarian role of the teacher were according to T3 reasons why implementation of the CEFR could be problematical for

Italian learners of English. T2, who was most vocal in his opposition, taught a lesson which contained many examples of the type of behaviour which I had been expecting to see in a classroom where learner autonomy was being promoted. This could indicate that good teaching is in some ways a precursor for learner autonomy rather than self-assessment. T3 felt that use of the learning aims was incompatible with examination preparation. The data which supports these assertions is outlined below.

The incompatibility of the learning aims with the textbook was one reason for the hostility felt by the teachers towards the CEFR. T3 stated that her lesson plans were dictated by the textbook. She said: "We have been using the book solidly with intermittent exam practice. We do everything in the book, all the end of unit tests, everything" (T3.3). This would seem to imply that this teacher felt that the textbook was a better guide for learning and teaching than the CEFR. When I observed T3 teaching (see Appendix 5 for the lesson notes), the coursebook was the source of nearly all the classroom activities. All class activity was performed in lockstep and directed by the teacher. The students seemed to be quiet and rather passive, as evidenced by this extract from the lesson transcript:

9.00 When the listening is finished the teacher writes the correct answers on the board. This is all done in silence. One student points out that one of the answers is wrong. The teacher checks the answer and confirms that the answer on the board was wrong and corrects it. The teacher asks for a total out of ten from each student. (T3:33)

It is possible that my presence as an observer may have subdued the atmosphere in the classroom. At the end of an examination style listening exercise, T3 wrote the correct answers on the whiteboard. The students then marked their work. T3 asked each student in turn to state the total of correctly answered questions. This seemed to be reminiscent of the type of behaviour described by T1, below, as being typical of the

Italian education system. That is to say, T3 dominated with students expected to share their marks with the whole class.

Although T2 was as hostile towards the CEFR as T3, the lesson I observed was very different from the one described above. T2 was openly hostile about the use of learning aims to the point that he cut the pre-lesson interview short rather than talk about them. During the lesson I observed the students spending most of the lesson engaged in self-directed activity. The lesson had been created on the basis of a needs analysis which T2 had undertaken at the beginning of the course. The lesson seemed to engage the students more than the teacher dominated lesson by T3. When T2 gave the class instructions he always explained the reasoning behind his decisions. The decisions in the classroom seemed to be made collaboratively. T2 stated that the lesson content of the lesson had been negotiated with the class in a prior lesson. During the lesson I observed the students self-correcting. Whilst this is not the same as making a self-assessment in the sense that they were not using the learning aims to reflect on their performance, it did suggest to me that the students were aware of the language learning process and were conscious of their own responsibilities within it.

In contrast to T2 and T3, T1 incorporated the learning aims into her classroom practice as discussed above. Appendix 4.3 contains an example of a learning aim lesson and demonstrates the type of activity T1 asked her students to engage in. She nonetheless had misgivings about the CEFR which I analyse below. T1 felt that using the learning aims was difficult for Italian learners, on the grounds that the education system was very teacher and examination dominated. This seems to echo comments made by the participants in the group interviews at all three stages of data collection. Indeed, one

participant stated that in the Italian education system the pupils were as important as worms and another remarked that teachers were gods. T1 went on to say:

They read for detail before they skim or scan and it's why they don't really predict but this is also an inheritance from the learning style of their school, their scholastic history and when they learn Latin they translate, when they do Greek they translate, when they do English they read literature when they are 14 and are tested on rote learning rather than evaluation of the text or general content. (T1:39)

This would seem to echo concerns about the appropriateness of the CEFR and ELP in teacher dominated cultures. They state that learners who have experienced a teacher-dominated education culture can struggle to accept the concept of self-assessment. Self-assessment would seem to imply a change of role for both teacher and student. The teacher becomes less of a knower and more of a facilitator while the student is expected to take more control over her learning. For teachers and learners whose experience of education has been teacher-dominated these shifts in roles could prove to be both threatening and challenging.

In addition, T1 stated that the amount of material Italian students were expected to cover in an examination prevented them from being analytical about their approach to learning. She repeated on several occasions that even though Italian students may find the action-orientated approach to language learning challenging that was no reason not to try to use it. She stated:

Yes the CEFR is incompatible with the Italian school system but that is not a reason to abandon it. It is a good language strategy, a good learning guide. (T1:40)

This would seem to be consistent with students' opinions of assessment and the Italian state education system.

T1 suggested that the way the learning aims were being used at the Institute may have undermined their relevance for the student. She suggested that they might be more

useful at the course planning stage rather than for self-assessment or use in the classroom, declaring that:

I think learning aims are useful if you are planning a course in advance and you want to make sure the course has got all the relevant elements, making sure that each lesson or set of lessons has a balanced content; but I don't think that finding a learning aim to fit a lesson or a lesson to fit an aim is particularly useful especially when you are not taking into account student needs day to day. (T1:25)

T1 seemed to imply that incorporating the learning aims into lessons reduced the possibilities for students to set the learning agenda. T1, like T2, was strongly in favour of negotiating a syllabus with students. She felt that the CEFR created a barrier between the teacher and the students. Teaching to learning aims interfered with responding directly to the needs of the students. As an alternative to using the learning aims T1 proposed listening more attentively to students. She suggested:

Perhaps we should analyse our own lessons and decide what strategy they are learning in each lesson rather than finding a strategy that somebody else has decided they should be learning and applying it to the lesson you are preparing on the basis of the needs of the students. (T1.35)

The perceived interference from an outside authority seems to be very much resented. Perhaps this indicates that teacher hostility to self-assessment and the CEFR is partly based in fear of losing position.

Although mentioned by only one of the teachers I consider the issue of training to be significant. As discussed in 1.3 one of my motivations for this research project was to gain insights so as to try to improve professional practice. T3 lamented about the amount and quality of training she had received. She stated that:

There should've been more structured training... We need much more preparation for these courses. We need more help to manage the structure of the course. We need there to be examples in the book which match the learning aims. With this course I've never taken in the learning aims. (T3.22)

It would seem that training is the only way to break down teacher resistance and without training, as in the case of two of the participants in this research, teachers feel free to ignore the implementation of the CEFR. This would seem to support Little's (2007) assertion that teachers need to be compelled to use the CEFR and ELP and that without an element of compulsion no teacher would change their practice. His comment also seems to suggest that resistance could also be explained in part, by a type of dependence on the textbook.

5.6 What does the documentary evidence say about self-assessment?

The unanticipated findings presented in section 5.5, i.e. the level of teacher hostility to the CEFR and their refusal to implement it with students, led me to conduct further analysis and examine the documentary evidence available within the Institution in which self-assessment had been introduced as an innovation. I examined documents produced by the Institute, specifically focussing on what was written about the CEFR and self-assessment. I used the same methods of analysis for the documentary evidence as I had used for the group interview data (see section 4.11 for detailed explanation of how the document search was conducted). It was important for me to establish whether teacher hostility focussed directly on the CEFR or if it focussed on how the CEFR had been implemented at the Institution.

When I conducted my document search I used a variety of key words including: alternative assessment, autonomy, and peer assessment, as well as behaviours associated with autonomous learning, such as goal setting and learning strategies. I found 26 references out of a total of 50 to represent what I have chosen to describe as business benefits. These include value for money, a need to improve registration figures, a need to offer a different product from that offered by competitors, making explicit to

sponsors the results of the courses and a need to find a way to communicate with students. Whilst these are all valid business aims, they are not, I would argue, related in anyway to self-assessment or learner autonomy.

The first result which surprised me was how infrequently self-assessment was mentioned. Out of 25 documents produced by the Institute, I found only two references to self-assessment. These were in a document which described the benefits of adopting a language learning portfolio. The first of the two references was:

Promote reflective learning, through self-assessment of language level and the analysis of linguistic experiences (D2.4)

The second was:

The self-assessment grid plays a central role on getting learners to assess themselves. (D8.6)

The grid refers to the learning aims and the three tick boxes, an example of which is included in Appendix 4.2. I believe that the scarcity and brevity of the statements is a significant discovery as it seems to suggest that as an organisation the Institute had not placed the promotion of self-assessment at the core of its activities and yet, on the other hand, all teachers had been required to attend training on promoting self-assessment and all students were given sets of learning aims. Additionally, there was only one reference to learner autonomy which was designed as the: “desire to 'empower' learners to become more responsible for their own learning and progress.” Whilst these two statements would seem to be an appropriate aim for educational institution teaching, it is also the case that resources were not invested in achieving it.

The final document consulted was the write up of an interview between a leading authority on the CEFR and the Institute staff member (not the present researcher) who

was leading the CEFR implementation project. The interview was conducted to mark the end of the official component of the CEFR implementation project. It was to serve as a review of work conducted so far and to suggest directions for future CEFR related work. Here I found corroborative evidence for documentary analysis findings. The expert consulted was a leading European linguist who had worked as a consultant to the Council of Europe. Here I found corroborative evidence for the documentary analysis findings. He made the recommendation that centres should offer:

More systematic learner training for the self-assessment elements (e.g. a series of activities which could be made available for download centrally). (D4.9)

I interpret this as meaning that the Institute needs to further develop a more coherent approach to self-assessment. He also detailed the need to allow students to self-assess in all the languages they knew and not just about their English. In addition, he stated that students should be able to see a range of descriptors instead of only looking at those which referred to their current level. More allowances to be made for a staggered profile was the final recommendation made by the CEFR expert.

As previously stated, the disappointing results obtained at stage 2 of data collection led me to conduct a document search. The table below would seem to indicate that the focus of Institute policy was on attracting new students rather than on promoting learner autonomy with existing students. Thus, the teachers at the Institute may have understood that self-assessment and learner autonomy were not real priorities and felt justified in not asking their classes to self-assess.

Table 5.6 Summary of findings for RQ5

Category	Frequency	Example
Autonomy	2	Desire to empower learners to become more responsible for their own learning (D2.5)
Business benefits	26	Focus on customers needs and the want to “get something” for their money (D17.8)

The infrequency of references to autonomy is, I would contend, a significant result. It would seem to show that the fostering of learner autonomy is not a priority for the Institute in that they had not spent enough time on the training and did not monitor whether teachers were incorporating self-assessment into their classes. The high number of references to business benefits clearly demonstrates the priorities of the Institute. Although, the fact that an expert was interviewed could suggest that they were working towards getting better. This would seem to suggest that self-assessment needs considerable support from policy makers and administrators if it is to be taken up by teachers. In addition, I would argue that teachers need to be convinced by the theory and offered training and guidance throughout a course if self-assessment is to be successfully implemented.

5.7 Summary

This chapter presented the findings for five research questions which focussed on student and teacher perceptions of self-assessment, how students arrived at their decisions when self-assessing and the effects of self-assessment on the classroom. As argued above, I consider the most significant findings to be related to the processes of self-assessment and how the participants’ attitudes towards self-assessment changed significantly over the duration of the course. Some of the findings were surprising and

led me to collect data from sources which I had not expected to (see the document search). In summation, the main findings were:

- Students' attitudes to self-assessment changed over the duration of the course from hostility to appreciation
- Students based their self-assessment decisions on affective factors rather than on specific classroom activity
- Students reported that self-assessment helped them to set learning goals – this is a typical indicator of autonomous learning.

In the next chapter I discuss the significance of these findings and proceed to make recommendations for professional practice. Furthermore, I reflect on my research and on my own learning in undertaking research. I also make suggestions for further research.

Chapter 6 Summary, Conclusions and Implications

6.1 Introduction

This dissertation concludes with an overview of the completed study (6.2) and its findings (6.3). I briefly summarise what I did in this study and then review its main findings, followed by a discussion in 6.4. I evaluate the implications of this research in 6.5 I then provide a critique of the research study (6.6) and reflect on my own learning (6.7)

6.2 Summary of the study

This study investigated the implementation of self-assessment at the Institution where I was teaching. The context for the implementation of the self-assessment was the adoption of the CEFR at the institute. I used a case study strategy to frame my investigation (4.7). At stage 1, I began with questions about student perceptions of self-assessment and of assessment of foreign language study (4.9). Data were collected through group interviews, an attitude survey and compositions. The participants were adult learners of English who were drawn from some of the classes I taught at the Institute. At stage 2, the question about student perceptions of self-assessment was augmented by one that focussed on how the students arrived at their decisions when self-assessing, as well as on the effects of self-assessment in the classroom (4.10). In addition to the group interviews, which followed the same format as those used at stage 1, I conducted three classroom observations and interviewed the teachers about the observed lessons using the stimulated recall technique. During my data analysis, a further research question was generated as I needed to account for the unexpected results of stage 2. Thus, at stage 3 in addition to the two previously used research questions about perceptions of self-assessment and how the students came to their self-

assessment decisions, a question about the Institute's policy towards self-assessment was introduced (4.11). Data to answer this last question were gathered using a document search. Having summarised the study I now continue to discuss the main findings.

6.3 Findings

The research questions are listed below:

RQ 1. What are student perceptions of assessment?

RQ 2. What are student perceptions of self-assessment?

RQ 3. How do students arrive at their self-assessment decisions?

RQ 4. What are the effects of self-assessment on the classroom?

RQ 5. What does the documentary evidence show about self-assessment as promoted by the Institute?

As will be recalled from Chapter 4 the research questions evolved during data collection. RQ2 provided the main impetus for the study, while the other questions fulfilled important complementary functions. RQ1 established a context through which to interpret the results to RQ2. The third research question was created to explore the processes the participants went through when self-assessing. RQ4 shifted the focus from the participants' opinions of self-assessment and assessment to the effects of self-assessment on the classroom. As indicated above, the fifth research question arose out of unexpected findings to question 4.

6.3.1. What were the participants' perceptions of assessment?

The findings for this question were closer to my expectations than the other research questions. The participants stated that they found exams to be motivating and a challenge (5.2). However, at the end of data collection the participants expressed

dissatisfaction with the limited range of language used in examinations and the artificiality of the tasks included in exams (5.3.2). The teachers in the study reported that self-assessment was trivial compared with examinations (5.2). As discussed below, this could have significant implications for the successful adoption of self-assessment (6.5).

6.3.2. What are the participants' perceptions of self-assessment?

There were four findings which I considered to be particularly significant. Firstly, the participants' perceptions of self-assessment changed markedly during the course. The participants started the course being, generally, very hostile to self-assessment (5.3.2). They considered it to be a waste of time. Specifically, they considered that self-assessment was impossible for foreign language learners as they did not have knowledge of the language as a whole. That is to say being a learner of a foreign language precluded the possibility of being able to self-assess. At the second stage of data collection the participants continued to express hostility towards self-assessment. They considered it to be a futile practice and could not see the utility of it. At stage 3 of data collection, a surprising shift in opinion had occurred (5.3.2). The participants had not only overcome their previous hostility but had to come to endorse self-assessment in glowing terms, reporting that it was beneficial for goal setting and they appreciated the relationship to real world communication.

This leads on to the second significant finding that has emerged from this research. Goal setting is usually identified as being an autonomous learning behaviour. The participants reported using self-assessment to identify future learning goals (5.3.1). I would, therefore, posit that self-assessment promotes learner autonomy, as without self-

assessment the participants would not have had a mechanism for setting goals or for identifying the progress which they had made.

The third significant finding was the importance of the “native-speaker” to the participants of this study (5.3.4). They felt that self-assessment was more beneficial when it was being conducted in the context of communication with a native speaker. That is to say, the participants wished to use native speakers as a resource when self-assessing.

The fourth finding is linked to the second. The participants were able to understand the reasons for their successes and failures (5.3.5). For example, participants were able to identify which aspects of writing in English proved to be the hardest for them and why this was the case. This ability to identify and understand the reasons for success and failure is one aspect of learner autonomy. Thus, another autonomous behaviour has been demonstrated and lends further weight to my claim that self-assessment promotes autonomy.

6.3.3. How did the participants arrive at their self-assessment decisions?

I previously argued (3.4 and 3.7) that studies investigating the processes used by students to make their self-assessment decisions were few in number. Those that existed indicated that students based their decisions on classroom activity (3.4).

However, rather than basing their decisions on classroom activities the participants in this study reported that they based their decisions on affective factors (5.4) using emotional terms such as feeling, confidence and obsession. A second result, which also

seems to contradict the existing literature, was that self-assessment was affected by personality traits (5.3.3).

6.3.4. What were the effects of self-assessment in the classroom?

As will be recalled (5.5) this question produced surprising findings. I encountered considerable teacher hostility to the CEFR. One teacher stated that the learning aims were incompatible with the examination focussed course which she taught. Whilst another stated that the CEFR could be of use to course designers, she considered it irrelevant to teachers in the classroom on a day-to-day basis.

6.3.5. What does the documentary evidence show about self-assessment as promoted by the Institute?

The findings at this stage did partly explain the unexpected results for RQ4 as the Institute did not place any emphasis on self-assessment. The documents all focussed on the business benefits of adopting the CEFR. In some ways this echoes some of the weaknesses of the CEFR as outlined in Chapter 2 (see 2.5).

6.4 Discussion

The data gathered in stages 1 and 2 of the study (5.3.2) revealed negative attitudes on the part of the students towards self-assessment. It is suggested here that through the interview data, and the student compositions, the majority of the participants were hostile towards the use of self-assessment. Indeed, as evidenced in section 5.3.2, only one participant spoke positively about self-assessment. The reasons for the students' negative positioning towards self-assessment can be explained in terms of two aspects. Firstly, the need to reference their own language abilities in comparison with native-

speakers emerged as a key issue (5.3.4). By this the students in this study meant that they felt that they could only accurately make an assessment when communicating with a native-speaker as in this way they could judge whether they were communicating effectively. Thus, the native-speaker was considered to have complete knowledge which is necessary for the language learner to make a self-assessment. Little (2002) argues that access to native-speakers could be vital for the successful acceptance of self-assessment. This research study would seem to suggest that Little was correct in stating these concerns. . The findings discussed here would seem to suggest that foreign language learners look to the native-speaker as a source of information when assessing levels of language proficiency.

Secondly, the students expressed concerns that the accuracy of self-assessment could be affected by mood or personality trait (5.3.3). The students speculated that pessimists would be too harsh in their judgements and optimists too generous. This finding contradicts Oscarsson's (1989) report that self-assessment was unaffected by such external factors. Alderson (2005) also argues that gender, age and other similar factors do not negatively impact on self-assessment. The participants also expressed concerns that self-assessment could be easily affected by the mood of the person making the assessment. As is observed below, the relationship between affective factors, such as mood, and self-assessment comprise some of the most significant findings of this research.

In contrast to the hostility expressed towards self-assessment at stages 1 and 2 of data collection, at stage 3 the participants stated that self-assessment was beneficial for language learning (5.2.2). I would suggest three explanations for this shift in attitude.

Firstly, the participants had begun to feel the benefits of engaging in self-assessment. They could appreciate the progress they were making as they came to set new language learning goals. Therefore, self-assessment came to be seen a guide for the language learning process. Secondly, the participants had developed a broader view of assessment as a process. They had moved away from regarding teacher assessment or examinations as the best ways of assessing language proficiency. The participants had become more appreciative of self-assessment as the mechanism through which their understanding of the assessment process had broadened. Thirdly, self-assessment had become part of the participants' language learning repertoire. Thus, hostility to self-assessment as an innovation or as being different to their past learning experiences was either partially or totally eliminated.

The data gathered in stages 2 and 3 of the study (5.4) revealed insights into the processes by which the participants came to their decisions when engaging in self-assessment. It is suggested here that through the interview data the majority of the participants based their decisions on affective factors. Indeed, as evidenced in 5.4, they used such terms as a "psychological block" and described how mood could affect self-assessment. This finding contradicts that of Bachman and Palmer (1990) and Janssen-van Dieten (1989) who found that self-assessment was more accurate when based on previous classroom experience. I would argue that the self-assessment is a more complex construct than has previously been articulated. There is not a linear relationship between classroom activity and self-assessment. Rather, it is mediated through affective factors. Perhaps this can be explained by students' fears of losing face and by how much of ourselves we put into our attempts at communication in a foreign language.

The data gathered in stage 2 of the study (5.5) revealed negative attitudes on the part of the teachers towards self-assessment and the CEFR. It was evident through the interview data and classroom observations that (see 4.11) the teachers were hostile towards the use of self-assessment. Indeed, as evidenced in 5.5, teacher hostility was so strong that the teachers refused to introduce self-assessment to their students, even though it was Institute policy to do so. The reasons for the teachers' negative positioning towards self-assessment are explained in terms of three concerns. Firstly, self-assessment was perceived as trivial compared with the CAE examination or indeed coverage of the coursebook (5.5). Secondly, the learning aims were considered more suited for course planning rather than classroom use (5.5). Thirdly, self-assessment was felt to be inappropriate for Italian learners (5.5).

Teacher hostility discovered in this research project was in marked contrast to studies reported to date (Lazenby Simpson 2003, Ushioda, 2003, Little, 2002) which found teachers to be very positive about the CEFR. I would suggest that teacher hostility could be accounted for by looking at the role of the teacher. The teachers in this research felt that the learning aims were trivial compared to the exam, but I think it is significant that the learning aims were freely available to the students. Whereas the textbook and the exam preparations are within the teacher's control, self-assessment was in the students' control. Self-assessment represents a threat to the traditional role of the teacher as knower and being in control of learning and assessment.

The final aspect of the observed teacher hostility to be discussed is the suitability of self-assessment for Italian learners of English. Little and Perclová (2002) argued that

past learning experiences could negatively impact on the successful adoption of self-assessment. I found limited support for this claim. A teacher dominated culture would seem to affect self-assessment, but I would argue, that this is, perhaps, more a problem for the teacher than the student. As shown above (5.3.2) the students in this research significantly changed their attitudes over the course of this study and came to appreciate self-assessment, but it was the teachers who appeared to need more guidance and support through the process of implementing self-assessment with students.

The data gathered in stage 3 of the study (5.6) revealed ambivalent attitudes on the part of the Institute towards self-assessment. It is suggested here that through the document search (see 5.6) the Institute was not actively promoting self-assessment. Indeed, as evidenced in 5.6 only two references were made to self-assessment in all the documents published by the Institute. There were numerous mentions of business benefits and needing a mechanism to assist learners to track their progress but only two references to self-assessment. The reasons for the Institute's ambivalent positioning towards self-assessment are explained in terms of two features. Firstly, there is a discrepancy between the aspirations of some members of the management team and the staff. The Institute management considered self-assessment to be part of the CEFR and therefore did not invest in promoting it. However, as discussed above, the teachers remained unconvinced by the CEFR and so did not incorporate it into classroom practice. Little (2007) states that unless teachers are obliged to incorporate self-assessment into their practice they will not do so. This research project would seem to support Little's contention. Secondly, there is the desire of the Institute to use the CEFR as a form of external validation. It seems that the CEFR is to be used more as a marketing tool than a pedagogic one. This misuse of the CEFR as a marketing device would seem to provide

evidence for some of the weaknesses of the CEFR discussed in Chapter 2. It is being taken as a quality indicator rather than offering support for self-assessment in the classroom.

6.5 Implications

This research study has enabled me to identify a number of implications with reference to both professional practice and research in language testing and assessment. With reference to the domain of professional practice, four implications in particular are identified. Firstly, students need time to appreciate the full benefits of self-assessment. Policy makers and academic management should take into account the time needed to successfully implement and promote self-assessment and should not expect to realise immediate benefits from the introduction of self-assessment. Teachers should expect a time lag from the introduction of self-assessment to when students begin to fully appreciate the value of engaging in self-assessment and should not be afraid to persevere with self-assessment even when faced with initial hostility by students. Secondly, self-assessment should be incorporated into everyday practice rather than at fixed points in the course. This might help to reduce student hostility more quickly. Thirdly, teachers need to be given more training on how to promote self-assessment within their own professional practice and the benefits for both teachers and students in encouraging students to engage with it. In particular, this training should - in time - lead to a change in teacher beliefs about self-assessment. Fourthly, the Institute had dedicated teacher time and resources to creating a bank of assessment materials which were based on classroom activities for use when self-assessing. The findings of this research project would seem to suggest that such activities are not needed as the

decisions made by students in this research were based on affective factors and not on classroom-based activities.

With reference to the research domain, three implications in particular have been identified. Firstly, there needs to be more research into the claim that self-assessment fosters learner autonomy. This project has provided limited empirical evidence for this claim but more research is needed. Secondly, more research needs to be undertaken into the processes involved when making a self-assessment. For example, the literature suggested that learners base their self-assessment decisions on classroom activity whereas my findings suggested that affective factors played a more important role in self-assessment decisions. This study would seem to indicate that there is much to be understood and the knowledge in this area is rather incomplete. Thirdly, more research needs to be undertaken in terms of the effects of personality traits on self-assessment. My findings indicated that personality affected the decision process whereas the studies reviewed in Chapter 3 found that personality traits did not affect self-assessment.

6.6 Critique of research study

In this section the strengths and weaknesses of this research are outlined and suggestions offered as to how the latter might be addressed. The first strength I would like to identify concerns the high ethical standards maintained throughout the project (4.13). All participation was entirely voluntary. I did not, for example, ask the participants to write a composition during class time. The participants had paid to attend lessons and had not paid or been paid to be part of my study. The participants chose to write a composition in their free time. Permission was sought from the management of the centre and from the participants at each stage of data collection. The

identity of individual participants has been disguised and so participants cannot be identified (4.5).

The multiple methods approach adopted (see 4.8) is, I would suggest, a strength of the dissertation. The use of this approach has strengthened any claims which can be made as a result of this research. The multiple methods approach allows me to claim greater trustworthiness for the results and conclusions of the dissertation, as there has been internal verification and triangulation. In addition, the multiple methods approach combined well with the bounded data collection strategy which was important as it helped to keep the project within manageable proportions; this was important as the project was limited in terms of both time and money (4.12). The multiple methods employed allowed me to understand how the different themes developed over the period of data collection. It further allowed me to find tentative explanations for certain results as the project developed as well as being suited to the iterative process of data collection (4.9 -4.11). As new research questions developed I was able to use different data collection methods to capture the newly available data (4.11).

Chapter 3 delineated how much of the work previously conducted into self-assessment focussed on the reliability of self-assessment when compared with the assessment of an expert. The closer the self-assessment was found to be to the expert assessment, the more reliable the self-assessment was declared to be (3.4). I argued that this was not a satisfactory approach for two main reasons. The reliability of the expert assessment is open to question as teachers need considerable periods of training before they can become assessors and therefore may not be considered a suitable measure of comparison for the scores of other types of assessment. Furthermore, such an approach

does not offer any insights into the process of self-assessment or the relationship between autonomy and self-assessment. I felt that by not investigating the reliability of self-assessment I have, in some way, shifted the focus towards looking at self-assessment as a concept in its own right rather than in comparison to something else. In addition, this dissertation produced interesting insights into the process of self-assessment and the possible relationships between self-assessment and autonomy.

Having identified some of strengths of this dissertation, I next identify some weaknesses. As was stated in 4.4, this research had to be run to a very limited budget both in terms of time and money. The deadlines were imposed on my research by my contractual status. I knew that I only had one more academic year at the Institute in question. I had used my time there to complete pilot projects, which were used for the taught modules of this doctorate. This provided me with confidence that I could find rich data at the site. However, I was worried that the time I had left available would not permit me to do justice to the data or investigate more fully supplementary research questions. It would have been interesting to have followed the participants over a more substantive longitudinal perspective and seen whether there were any further changes in their perceptions of self-assessment. Had more time been available, it might have been appropriate to have followed up teacher perceptions of the language learning portfolio and self-assessment, through interviews and questionnaires. The teachers who participated in this project expressed a great deal of hostility towards self-assessment but I was not able to investigate this issue further and in more depth over a longer time period.

The least successful data collection method was the stimulated recall of classroom observation (5.5). However, I felt this was a weakness of execution rather than design. The fact that two out of the three teachers who agreed to participate at this stage stated that they did not use learning aims and they did not encourage their students to self-assess was disappointing. I was not able to find other teachers to participate in the study as my teaching timetable did not allow for it. However, I do not think that changing teachers would have greatly affected the results at this stage. Anecdotal evidence gathered in the staff room suggested that very few teachers were actively promoting self-assessment with their student groups. This would suggest that my groups of students were atypical in respect of the amount of time I dedicated to self-assessment with them.

The participants who took part in the group interviews and who wrote the compositions were all at the same level of proficiency in English. They were all at C1 level and were in courses leading to the June 2005 session of the Cambridge ESOL Certificate of Advanced English. This lack of variety in the level of the participants might have had an effect on the trustworthiness of the data produced. That is to say, the inclusion of learners from different levels might have generated a wider range of responses. The fact that the participants were all due to take an external examination at the end of the course might have influenced their reactions towards self-assessment.

At each stage of data collection only small numbers of participants were involved and data was only collected at one site (4.9 - 4.11). This meant that insights gained were limited in nature. This dissertation might have been enhanced if more participants had been involved and this might have been achieved by conducting the study at two

Institutes instead of one. There are a further two branches of the Institute in Italy. Also, learners at different levels of proficiency could have been included. Furthermore, it would have helped to have shown if the results obtained were such because of the conditions in the particular Institute in which the research took place.

6.7 Reflections on own learning

I stated in Chapter 1 that my interest in this topic developed from my professional practice. I came to view my practice differently after coming into contact with that of my fellow professionals as I developed a better understanding of my students and the complexities of the language learning and assessment process. I earlier evoked Holliday's mystery metaphor (see 4.4). I feel that I can claim to have explored areas, which were mysterious. Visiting my colleagues' classrooms was a journey into unknown territory. In addition, the project developed to explore areas which were much more personal than I had expected. I came to realise how important the role of the self is in self-assessment as evidenced by the importance of affective factors. The roles of both students and teachers changed dramatically because of self-assessment and the teachers seemed to experience this change as being in some way threatening.

In Chapter 4, I described how I transcribed all the tapes. On reflection, I feel that my time would have been better employed if I had only transcribed relevant parts of the discussion. I think that in some ways my anxieties about having a relatively short period of time in which to collect the data made me worry that I could have lost important data if I had not transcribed every word. In future research projects I will transcribe more selectively. In my field notes I noted sentences which I felt were significant. I would transcribe the conversation around these sentences and/or episodes, carefully.

In addition to the learning described above there is one final area which I would like to discuss. This area could be described as methodological. I learnt about the different approaches to conducting educational research as well as different data collection techniques. For example, the skills required to successfully facilitate a group interview were new to me, as were taking field notes (4.9 - 4.11). Data analysis such as coding and memoing, and the software e.g. NVivo used to conduct it, also represented an area of new learning (4.12). Academic writing proved to be very challenging and I struggled to find the appropriate register.

6.8 Conclusion

In my introductory chapter, I explained that I wanted to conduct this study because of my own experiences of the implementation of the CEFR and self-assessment (1.3).

When I began this research I had hoped to gain insights into the effects of self-assessment on the classroom. Having completed the study the insights gained were not those which I had expected. The most important findings seemed to be centred on affective factors. This would seem to show that Holliday's mystery metaphor was the most appropriate metaphor for my work.

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Appendix 1 List of conference presentations by this author

This list of papers is included to demonstrate why I felt self-assessment was a sufficiently interesting topic upon which to conduct research.

Delivered a paper at the 39th International Annual IATEFL Conference and Exhibition (3-9 April, 2005, City Hall, Cardiff) entitled “ Self-assessment – I can do that!”

Delivered a paper at the British Council Glasgow Conference (27-30, July 2004, Radisson Hotel, Glasgow) entitled “Better Testing for Better Teaching”

Delivered a paper at the British Council Milan Two-day conference for Media and Superiore Teachers (22-23 November, 2004, British Council, Milan) entitled “Testing times”

Delivered a paper at the British Council Italy Annual Conference of Teachers of English (18-20, March, 2004, Palazzo del Cinema, Lido di Venezia) entitled “Teaching better for better testing”

Delivered a paper at the British Council Naples 5th Annual ELT conference for Language Teachers (23-24 October, 2003, Hotel Terminus, Naples) entitled “ Putting the Portfolio into Practice”

Delivered a paper at the British Council Milan Two-day Conference for Media and Superiore Teachers (3-4 March, 2003, British Council, Milan) entitled “Combining the Common European Framework with Cambridge ESOL main suite examinations”

Appendix 2.1 Language scale

This appendix shows the six levels of the CEFR which range from A1 to C2.

Council of Europe levels		
User	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.
	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently-used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
Independent	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
Proficient	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.

Appendix 2.2 European Language Portfolio

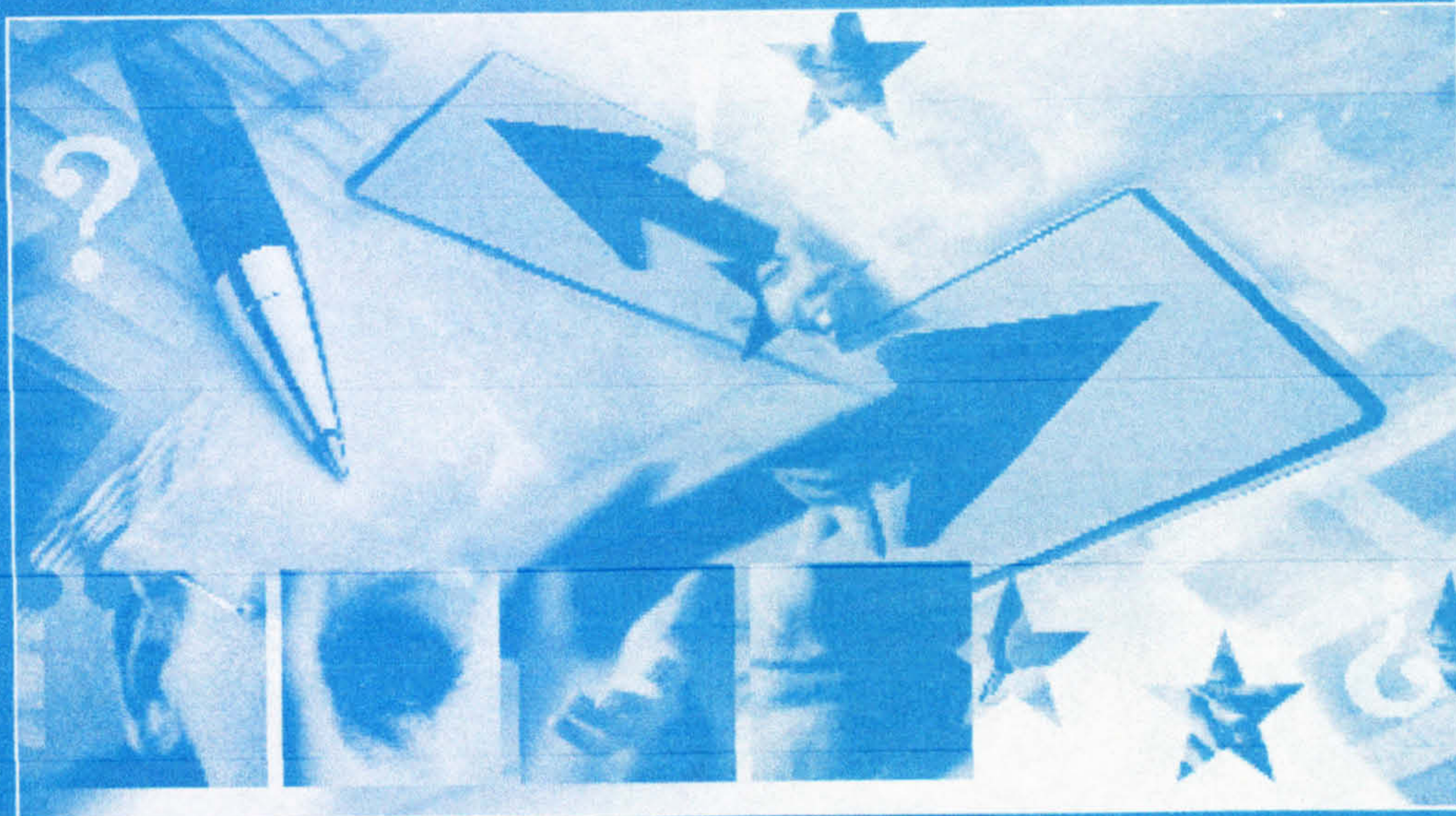
Below is an ELP which has been approved by the validation committee. It contains the three components of the ELP: a biography, a dossier and language passport. These elements were not included in the portfolio used at the Language Institute.

European Language Portfolio – Adult version: Revised edition

For personal and work-related language learning

Portfolio européen des langues pour adultes

Name:



Portfolio Européen des Langues: modèle accrédité N° 9.2001-rev.2006

European Language Portfolio: accredited model No. 9.2001-rev.2006

Accordé à/Awarded to

Le présent modèle est conforme aux Principes et Lignes directrices communs

COMITE DIRECTEUR DE L'EDUCATION –
COMITE DE VALIDATION DU PEL

This model conforms to common Principles and Guidelines

STEERING COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION –
ELP VALIDATION COMMITTEE



COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE
European Language Portfolio
Portfolio européen des langues

CiLT The National
Centre for
Languages

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Introduction

What is the European Language Portfolio?

The Council of Europe has developed the European Language Portfolio (ELP), and validated models in more than 20 countries, as a means of encouraging linguistic diversity and international mobility, and promoting plurilingualism.

The ELP is a means of recording your language skills and intercultural experiences without the need for formal assessment. Although it is a European document, it is not designed for European languages exclusively: it can be used to record skills in any language, wherever you may have learnt it. The ELP also helps you to reflect on the ways in which you learn languages and what you might want to achieve in future.

Various versions of the ELP have been developed across Europe, tailored to the needs of different nationalities, age groups or types of learner. Each validated model follows common principles and guidelines, however, to ensure that your record of skills is recognised internationally.

Who is it for?

This version, the *European Language Portfolio – Adult version: Revised edition* is the United Kingdom's sole model for use by adults who have developed or are developing language skills, whether for work or social reasons. It is also suitable for students aged 14–16, particularly those who are learning a language in a work-related context. It complements CILT's *European Language Portfolio – Junior version*, which is suitable for younger learners.

The ELP is designed to be your personal property: a document that you own and continuously update. You can use it on your own or with the help of a language teacher. It is not a qualification, so it does not have to be sent to any official body for checking or endorsement.

Employers can also use the ELP as a reference document, to identify what language skills they need their employees to develop, or when recruiting new staff.

Why should I use the ELP?

Many people have language skills which are not reflected in the qualifications or certificates they have gained – simply because they have not been assessed or learned in formal education. At the same time, a little language can go a long way, so even basic levels of skills in another language can help you break the ice, build relationships, orientate yourself abroad or get more enjoyment from foreign films, music, etc.

The ELP enables you to complete the picture: to recognise and value what you can do in another language, and to record all your language skills and experiences with other cultures. Completing the ELP can be a positive, motivating experience in itself.

As well as enabling you to record your current skills, the ELP is a useful tool for developing skills through practice and experience. It helps you to think about and plan for the future – your strengths, weaknesses, what you enjoy being able to do with another language – and to chart your progress. If you want to learn a new language or improve on existing knowledge, the ELP will help you to understand your background and abilities. It will help you become aware of different learning styles, to identify which ways of learning are best suited to you, and to develop reflective practice as a language learner.

If you are looking for a job that involves languages, the ELP can complement your CV. You might, for example, take it to a job interview and show a potential employer the evidence you have gathered in the Dossier section to illustrate what you can do using another language.

The ELP is based on common principles and guidelines, and the skills levels described are based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This means that it has validity beyond the UK and, potentially, will be recognised by employers in many different countries.

Here is what some previous users have said about the ELP:

The ELP helps me assess my own language skills and abilities, even though I don't have formal qualifications.

It's attractive to employers: it records my non-academic relevant experience, e.g. travel, overseas customer contact, etc.

The ELP allows me to record my progress since gaining my language degree and encourages me to take my languages further.

How can I use the ELP?

The ELP has three sections:

- The A5 booklet, the Language Passport, is where you can summarise your skills, experiences and achievements in languages; its format is identical across most European models for adults, so that it can be recognised easily. The UK version also contains a mapping chart so you can see how European competence levels compare to UK qualifications.
- The Language Biography allows you to explore your formal and informal language learning in more depth and to reflect on your approach to learning. It contains a section on contacts with other cultures, to help you identify and consider the intercultural skills you have developed through your experiences.
- The Dossier is a collection point for evidence of your language skills: course certificates, qualifications, witness statements and examples of work produced in another language.

There are no rules about how to complete your ELP, but here are some suggestions of how to get started:

- 1 First, read through the Language Passport. Pay particular attention to the self-assessment grid on pages 6–7. This describes language competence at the six levels of the CEFR, from Breakthrough (A1) to Mastery (C2). There are five separate language skills: Listening, Reading, Spoken Interaction (i.e. two-way or group conversations), Spoken Production and Writing. Taking one language at a time, think about which statements best describe your skills.
- 2 Next, you might find it helpful to think about where and how you learned your language(s), what you can do at the moment and what you would like to be able to do with your language(s) in future. For this, turn to the Language Biography and start building a picture of yourself as a language learner. The checklists which start on page 6 are mapped to each CEFR level. They might not all be relevant to you – just select those which are.
- 3 If you want to use your ELP to support an application for a language course or a job, now might be a good time to complete the Passport and work on building a portfolio of evidence in your Dossier. Make sure you take copies or save an electronic version, so that you can update the documents as necessary.

If you already have evidence of your skills (e.g. qualifications or certificates, letters you have written in another language, reference letters from an employer), you might find it easier to start by collating these and mapping them to the CEFR levels.

Remember, every part of the ELP is designed to give a picture of your current skills, so you should revisit and update it regularly.

Where can I get more information?

www.coe.int/portfolio

Information on the Council of Europe and ELP developments in other countries. To download the self-assessment grid from the Common European Framework of Reference in a variety of languages, select Levels from the main menu.

www.cilt.org.uk

Further information about the UK Adult and Junior versions of the ELP and the work of CILT, the National Centre for Languages. Details of resources and support for language learning and teaching throughout the UK. Information on auditing language skills for work.

www.blis.org.uk

One-stop online shop for language and cultural expertise, including details of job vacancies and language courses.

www.languageswork.org.uk

Information, advice and case studies on using languages to help you in your career.

Language Biography

Biographie Langagière



COUNCIL
OF EUROPE

CONSEIL
DE L'EUROPE

European Language Portfolio

Portfolio européen des langues

Accredited model No 9.2001-rev.2006

How to use the Biography

This section is designed to help you reflect on your previous language learning and cultural experiences and your present motivation to continue to learning languages.

It helps you and any language teacher you may have (now or in the future) to understand your language learning background, the strategies which help you learn and what language skills you most need to learn, either for work or personal reasons.

The ELP is a personal document which is your property. The main object of the Biography is to help you reflect upon and record your own development – how you respond to language learning and intercultural situations, why this may be, ways in which you find yourself changing in the light of experience and so on.

The Biography is designed to be a dynamic document: you should refer to it regularly to chart your progress and revisit your goals.

My language background (continued)

For each language, use the boxes below to comment on your learning experience, for example:

- Reasons for learning the language
- Aspects of the learning process which you particularly enjoyed or disliked
- Aspects of learning the language which you found difficult or easy
- How the language is of use to you now and/or how it could prove useful in the future
- Whether learning the language has helped you cope with learning other languages

Language	
Comments:	

Language	
Comments:	

Language

Comments:

Language

Comments:

Language

Comments:

My current language learning

The following pages give a list of descriptions designed to help you identify in detail:

- the language skills you have at the moment.
- the language skills you would like to develop in future.

The descriptions are split into sections describing the five different linguistic skills: Listening, Reading, Spoken Interaction (i.e. two-way or group conversations), Spoken Production and Writing. They are ordered according to the six different Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) levels, from Breakthrough (A1) to Mastery (C2), and are based on the Council of Europe's approved 'bank of descriptors'.

For an overview and further explanation, look in the Language Passport (the CEFR Self-assessment grid on pages 6–7 and the Language assessment scales – a comparison on page 16).

How to use this section

For each language you already know, you are currently learning or you are planning to learn:

- 1 Read through the five language skill sections and decide which level applies to you. (You may find it easier to look first at the CEFR Self-assessment grid in the Language Passport, to get an idea of which levels are most appropriate for you.)
- 2 Select the statements which best describe what you can do now.
- 3 Use the remaining descriptions at that level and the level(s) above to identify what sorts of things you would like to be able to do with your language skills in future.

The descriptions are designed to be used by language learners or users in a range of contexts. So you may find that some of them describe situations or activities which do not apply to you. Just select those which are relevant. For example, if you are not learning the language for work, you can concentrate on the descriptions related to personal and social activities. Extra lines have been added at each level so that you can add in your own descriptions of your achievements so far or your objectives for the future.

If you are learning a language, you may wish to discuss this with your tutor. S/he will help you identify what you will need to do to reach the level you are aiming for.

It is perfectly normal and acceptable for you to have a mixture of higher and lower levels of skill in different aspects of understanding or using a language. For example, if you have grown up with some members of your family speaking Urdu, your listening skills may be at level B2, your speaking skills at level B1 and your reading and writing skills, which you may have had fewer opportunities to practise, at level A2. In fact, depending on what you want to do with the language, you may not need or want to have equal levels of proficiency in all five language skills.

NB As with all parts of the ELP, you should be able to update this section as your language competence improves. Ensure you have enough copies of these pages to keep records of your skills in different languages and so that you can update your records.

Language:

Date

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CEFR	Listening	I do this now	I'd like to do this in future
A1	I can understand basic greetings and phrases e.g. 'hello', 'good morning', 'excuse me', 'sorry', 'thank you'.		
	I can understand simple questions about myself when people speak slowly and clearly.		
	I can understand very simple information concerning numbers and time, e.g. days of the week, months of the year, numbers, prices and times.		
	I can understand short simple instructions and directions given in clear slow speech.		
	I can understand very short dialogues when people speak slowly and clearly.		
	I can understand simple words concerning myself, my family, my immediate environment when people speak slowly and clearly.		
A2	I can understand simple phrases, questions and information relating to basic personal needs, e.g. shopping, eating out, going to the doctor.		
	I can understand everyday words and phrases relating to areas of personal interest, e.g. social life, holidays.		
	I can understand basic information about people, their family, home, work and hobbies.		
	I can identify the topic of conversation around me when people speak slowly and clearly.		
	I can grasp the essential elements of clear, short, simple messages and recorded announcements, e.g. on the telephone, at the railway station.		
	I can follow simple directions, e.g. how to get from X to Y on foot or by public transport.		
	I can identify the main topic of TV news items reporting events, accidents etc if there are accompanying pictures.		
	I can follow simple instructions and descriptions of operations related to my work, if they are supported by practical demonstration.		

CEFR	Listening	I do this now	I'd like to do this in future
B1	I can understand straightforward factual information about everyday, study or work-related topics, identifying both general meaning and specific details, provided that speech is clear and in a familiar accent.		
	I can follow the gist of everyday conversation and short narratives on familiar topics when delivered in clear standard speech.		
	I can catch the main elements of many radio or TV news bulletins, and recorded audio material on topics of personal and professional interest delivered in relatively slow, clear standard speech.		
	I can understand detailed directions, instructions and messages relating to everyday personal and work matters (e.g. travel arrangements, answering machines).		
	I can work out the meaning of unknown words from a familiar context.		
	I can understand the main points of a conversation or short presentation in clear standard speech on matters regularly encountered at work.		
	I can understand specific details and general information from routine telephone calls.		
B2	I can understand standard spoken language on both familiar and unfamiliar topics in everyday situations.		
	I can identify information, ideas and opinions in extended speech and follow complex lines of argument, provided the topic is reasonably familiar and/or related to my work and delivered in standard spoken language.		
	I can follow lively conversations with several fast speakers, although I may have a problem joining in.		
	I can grasp the overall meaning of most radio programmes and audio material delivered in standard speech and identify the speaker's mood, tone etc.		
	I can grasp the overall meaning of most films, TV news programmes, documentaries, interviews, chat shows in standard speech.		

CEFR	Listening	I do this now	I'd like to do this in future
C1	I can follow most talks, discussions and debates related to my area of work or study with relative ease.		
	I can follow extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when links between ideas are only implied and not signalled explicitly.		
	I can easily follow complex interactions between third parties in group discussion and debate, including those on abstract and unfamiliar topics.		
	I can recognise a wide range of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms and appreciate different styles and degrees of formality.		
	I can understand complex technical information, such as operating instructions, specifications for familiar products and services.		
	I can understand complex work-related procedures, e.g. recruitment policy, equal opportunities policy.		
	I can understand a wide range of recorded and broadcast audio material, including some non-standard usage and identify finer points of detail including implicit attitudes and relationships between speakers.		
C2	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.		
	I can follow specialised lectures and presentations employing a high degree of colloquialism, regional usage or unfamiliar terminology.		
	I can understand all complex technical instructions regarding a product or equipment.		
	I can understand any native speaker, given an opportunity to adjust to non-standard accent or dialect.		

Language:

Date

CEFR	Reading	I do this now	I'd like to do this in future
A1	I can understand simple forms well enough to give basic personal details, e.g. name, address, date of birth.		
	I can pick out familiar names, words and phrases in very short simple texts.		
	I can understand very short simple greetings and messages, e.g. on birthday cards, party invitations or text messages.		
	I can pick out the information I need from catalogues, lists and posters, e.g. football league tables, film showing times.		
	I can understand words and very short phrases on common public notices, e.g. 'No smoking', 'Private'.		
	I can understand common commands, e.g. computer commands 'print', 'save', 'copy'.		
	I can follow instructions that have clear pictures and few words.		
	I can follow short simple written directions, e.g. to go from X to Y.		
A2	I can understand short simple messages and texts containing basic everyday vocabulary relating to areas of personal relevance or interest or to my job.		
	I can understand basic information in simple standard letters, documentation and faxes, e.g. hotel reservations, bills, invoices.		
	I can understand short simple messages about my work or my interests, e.g. e-mails, webchats, postcards or notes.		
	I can skim simple everyday materials for specific predictable information, e.g. use a directory to find a service, find the prices of secondhand items in classified newspaper adverts, use a menu.		
	I can understand everyday signs and public notices, e.g. on the street, in shops, hotels, railway stations.		
	I can identify key information in short newspaper/magazine reports recounting stories or events.		
	I can follow clear, simple, step-by-step instructions, e.g. for using a telephone, taking out cash or buying a drink from a machine.		

CEFR	Reading	I do this now	I'd like to do this in future
	I can read straightforward factual texts on subjects related to my interests or work with a reasonable level of understanding.		
	I can find and understand relevant information in everyday and work-related material, e.g. brochures, short official documents, short reports, job adverts.		
	I can follow the plot of clearly structured narratives and modern literary texts.		
	I can skim short texts (e.g. news summaries) and find relevant facts and information, e.g. who has done what and where.		
B1	I can scan longer texts in order to locate specific factual information.		
	I can understand standard business letters.		
	I can identify the main conclusions in clearly written argumentative texts.		
	I can follow clear, routine instructions, e.g. for a game, recipe, using equipment, or installing computer software.		
B2	I can read correspondence relating to my field of interest and readily grasp the essential meaning.		
	I can understand in detail texts directly related to my specialist personal or work interests.		
	I can understand articles on a range of specialised topics using a dictionary and other appropriate reference resources.		
	I can quickly grasp the content and relevance of news items, articles and reports on a variety of topics connected with my interests or my job, and decide if a closer reading is worthwhile.		
	I can read and understand articles and reports in which writers express opinions or viewpoints, e.g. arts reviews, political commentary, evaluations.		
	I can understand lengthy instructions (e.g. in a user manual for a TV or technical equipment), used in my work, as long as I can reread difficult sections.		
	I can quickly look through a manual (e.g. for a computer programme) and find and understand the relevant explanations and help for a specific problem.		

CEFR	Reading	I do this now	I'd like to do this in future
C1	I can read contemporary literary texts with ease.		
	I can understand any correspondence given the occasional use of a dictionary.		
	I can understand long complex instructions, e.g. for the use of a new piece of equipment, even if these are not related to my job or field of interest, provided I have enough time to reread them.		
	I can extract information, ideas and opinions from highly specialised texts in my own field, e.g. research reports.		
C2	I can understand and interpret critically virtually all forms of the written language including abstract, structurally complex, or highly colloquial literary and non-literary writings.		
	I can understand complex factual documents such as technical manuals and legal contracts.		
	I can understand a wide range of long and complex texts, appreciating subtle distinctions of style and implicit as well as explicit meaning.		

Language:

Date

CEFR	Spoken interaction	I do this now	I'd like to do this in future
A1	I can make basic introduction, e.g. say who I am, ask someone's name and introduce someone.		
	I can use basic greetings and courtesy phrases, e.g. 'please', 'thank you', 'how are you?', 'I'm fine'.		
	I can make simple purchases, using pointing and gestures to support what I say.		
	I can ask and answer very simple questions about my place of work or study, my job, my family or interests, if I can take my time and get help from the person I am talking to.		
	I can reply to simple direct questions about personal details if these are spoken very slowly and clearly in standard language.		
	I can indicate that I understand or do not understand.		
A2	I can ask and answer simple questions about familiar topics and routine activities, e.g. weather, family, interests, times of working day, location of company departments.		
	I can address people in both informal and formal ways.		
	I can make and respond to invitations, suggestions, apologies and requests for permission.		
	I can carry out simple transactions, e.g. in shops, post offices, railway stations and order something to eat or drink.		
	I can make simple plans with people, e.g. what to do, where to go and when to meet.		
	I can express what I feel in simple terms, and express thanks.		
	I can handle simple phone calls, e.g. say who is calling, ask to speak to someone, give my number, answer a call, take a simple message.		
	I can ask for and provide simple, practical information, e.g. directions, times, dates, quantities, job roles, basic safety at work.		
	I can give or follow simple instructions, e.g. explain how to get somewhere or how to do something.		
	I can show that I am following what people say, and can get help if I cannot understand.		

CEFR	Spoken interaction	I do this now	I'd like to do this in future
B1	I can start, maintain and close simple face-to-face conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or related to everyday work, with generally appropriate use of formal or informal language.		
	I can handle most practical tasks in everyday situations, e.g. making telephone enquiries, asking for a refund, negotiating purchase.		
	I can express and respond to feelings and attitudes, e.g. surprise, happiness, sadness, interest, uncertainty, indifference.		
	I can agree and disagree politely, exchange personal opinions, discuss what to do next, compare and contrast alternatives.		
	I can cope linguistically with unexpected events e.g. needing a dentist/ doctor or getting a breakdown service.		
	I can ask for and give detailed practical instructions and directions.		
	I can repeat back what is said to check if I have understood.		
B2	I can participate fully in conversations on general topics with a degree of fluency and naturalness, and appropriate use of formal or informal language.		
	I can express my ideas and opinions clearly and precisely, and can present and respond to complex lines of reasoning convincingly, providing relevant explanations, arguments and comments.		
	I can cope linguistically with potentially complex problems in routine situations, e.g. complaints about goods and services.		
	I can exchange detailed factual information on matters related to my study, work or interests.		
C1	I can join in most lively conversations with several fast speakers, even if the subject is not very familiar.		
	I can participate effectively in extended discussions and debates on complex topics of personal, professional, social or cultural interest.		
	I can argue a formal position convincingly, responding to questions and comments and answering complex lines of counter argument fluently, spontaneously and appropriately.		
	I can participate fully in an interview, as either interviewer or interviewee, fluently expanding and developing the point under discussion, and handling interjections well.		

CEFR	Spoken interaction	I do this now	I'd like to do this in future
C2	I can hold my own in formal discussions of complex issues, arguing articulately and persuasively and without being at a disadvantage compared with native speakers.		
	I have a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms with an awareness of implied meaning and meaning by association.		
	I can express myself naturally and effortlessly; I need only to pause occasionally in order to select precisely the right words.		

Language:

Date

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CEFR	Spoken production	I do this now	I'd like to do this in future
A1	I can introduce myself and say what I do very briefly and simply using set phrases.		
	I can give basic information about myself, e.g. age, address, job title, company name, family, interests.		
	I can give very short rehearsed statements, e.g. to introduce a speaker, propose a toast.		
A2	I can use simple words and phrases to describe people I know.		
	I can give short simple descriptions of events or tell a simple story.		
	I can simply describe my educational background, my present or most recent job.		
	I can give a short rehearsed presentation on a familiar subject in my area of work or study.		
	I can explain what I like or dislike about something.		
B1	I can give straightforward descriptions on familiar subjects related to my work, study or interests.		
	I can describe dreams, hopes and ambitions.		
	I can explain and give reasons for my plans, intentions and actions.		
	Given time to prepare, I can present my work colleagues, my work place and its organisation and conduct a short guided tour of my place of work.		
	I can explain simply how to use a piece of equipment or a machine.		
	I can give a short and straightforward prepared presentation on a chosen topic in my academic or professional field in a reasonably clear and precise manner.		

CEFR	Spoken production	I do this now	I'd like to do this in future
B2	I can give clear, detailed descriptions on a range of subjects related to personal, cultural, social or work issues.		
	I can develop a clear coherent argument, linking ideas logically and expanding and supporting my points with appropriate examples.		
	I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue or work proposal giving advantages and disadvantages of various options.		
	I can give a clear, systematically developed presentation on a topic in my area of work, study or special interest, highlighting significant points and relevant supporting detail.		
	I can in detail describe technical equipment or work routines in my place of work.		
	If I do not know a word or expression I can find another way of saying what I mean.		
C1	I can give clear detailed descriptions of complex subjects in my area of work, study or special interest.		
	I can elaborate a detailed argument or narrative, integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.		
	I can give a clear, well-structured presentation on a complex subject in my area of work, study or special interest, expanding and supporting points of view with appropriate reasons and examples.		
C2	I can present a complex topic confidently and articulately to an audience unfamiliar with it, structuring and adapting the talk flexibly to meet the audience's needs.		
	I can substitute an equivalent term for a word I cannot recall without distracting the listener.		

Language:

Date

CEFR	Writing	I do this now	I'd like to do this in future
A1	I can write a greeting card or simple postcard.		
	I can fill in a simple form or questionnaire with my personal details, e.g. date of birth, address, nationality.		
	I can order material, tools and other things on a pre-printed order form.		
A2	I can write about aspects of my everyday life (e.g. family, job, studies or interests, holidays) in simple linked sentences.		
	I can write very short basic descriptions of events and activities.		
	I can write very basic standard letters requesting information, e.g. about hotel accommodation.		
	I can write a simple note or letter to a friend or colleague to accept or offer an invitation, thank someone or apologise.		
	I can place simple orders and using set expressions ask about quality, price, delivery dates etc.		
	I can fill in a questionnaire giving an account of my educational background, my job, my interests and my specific skills.		
B1	I can write simple, clear instructions about work routines or how a machine works.		
	I can write my CV in summary form.		
	I can describe an event, e.g. a recent business trip or holiday.		
	I can write messages and very brief reports in a standard format communicating enquiries and factual information, explaining problems.		
	I can write standard letters giving or requesting detailed information. e.g. replying to an advertisement, applying for a job.		
	I can write personal letters giving news, describing experiences and impressions, and expressing feelings.		

CEFR	Writing	I do this now	I'd like to do this in future
B2	I can write clear, detailed text on a range of subjects relating to my personal interests, work or studies.		
	I can write summaries of articles on topics of general interest, or related to my job or studies, and summarise information from different sources and media.		
	I can write about my place of work, different job roles of staff and the functions of different departments.		
	I can write a short review of a film, play or book.		
	I can write an essay or report which develops an argument, giving reasons to support or negate a point of view, weighing pros and cons.		
	I can write letters and e-mails which are more or less formal, according to how well I know the person I am writing to.		
	I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences and expressing a variety of views and feelings.		
C1	I can write fluently and accurately on a wide range of topics related to my job, studies or personal interests, varying my vocabulary and style according to the context.		
	I can write clear, well-structured texts on complex subjects in my area of work, study or special interest, underlining the relevant issues, developing a well-supported argument at some length.		
	I can write accurate formal letters that I could confidently send, without getting another person to check the language.		
	I can write detailed letters, e-mails etc, choosing phrases that subtly reflect my mood, e.g. humour, annoyance, irony, affection.		
	I can write clear, detailed descriptions and imaginative texts in an assured, personal, natural style appropriate to the reader in mind.		
C2	I can write a well-structured review of a paper or a project giving reasons for my opinion.		
	I can produce clear, smoothly-flowing, complex reports, articles or essays which present a case or elaborate an argument.		
	I can write clear, well-structured complex letters in an appropriate style, e.g. applications or requests, proposals to clients.		

My plans

Use this page to capture things you may not have been able to log using the checklists. Write down:

- 1 what you are good at in the language;
- 2 what you need to work harder on;
- 3 why you want to learn the language (e.g. for your job, for travel or for study);
- 4 what you want to achieve (e.g. to be able to write an answer to a job advertisement, to be able to chat to someone about your travel experiences, to be able to find information quickly on the Internet).

When I learn a language ...

People learn in many ways: by seeing and hearing; reflecting and acting; reasoning logically and intuitively; memorising and visualising.

You may find it helpful to reflect on your own learning styles. Each individual is different. Look at the learning styles described below and see which might apply to you.

Tick the boxes for the approaches which best describe the learning style you feel most comfortable with and add further comments. This will help you identify the best way of working to improve your language skills.

I enjoy reading and prefer to see the words I am learning. I like to learn by looking at pictures and flashcards.

My additional comments

I prefer to learn by listening. I enjoy conversations and the chance for interactions with others.

My additional comments

I prefer to concentrate on the details of language, such as language rules and structures, and enjoy taking apart words and sentences.

My additional comments

I prefer an interactive approach to learning a new language, to 'take risks' when communicating and learn from my mistakes.

My additional comments

I prefer learning a language to convey an idea, rather than worry about whether I have used language rules and structures correctly.

I prefer to think about the language and how to convey what I want to say accurately. I prefer to take my time in formulating what to say.

My additional comments

My additional comments

Use this space to write about the language learning experiences that you have particularly valued and/or that have made a strong impression on you:

The next section will help you to think about what intercultural experiences you have had and what you have learnt from them.

Contacts with people and countries with different cultures

These pages enable you to describe and record previous and ongoing intercultural experiences, that is, any events or experiences which involve contacts with another country or culture, including interaction with people. Together, they form your Biography of Intercultural Competence¹.

Section 1

You can enter any interesting details of your personal history that may have influenced how you respond to intercultural situations.

Section 2

You are invited to think about what kind of a person you are in an intercultural context and what aspects of different cultures you find particularly easy or difficult to adjust to.

Section 3

A diary of intercultural encounters and experiences in which you can report what occurred and how this was valuable to you in:

- making you more open to understanding and respecting differences;
- broadening and deepening your knowledge of other cultures;
- giving opportunities to practise adapting your behaviour to different expectations.

¹ © INCA, LdV II, 2004. The INCA (Intercultural Competence Assessment) project, funded by the Leonardo da Vinci programme and led by CILT, the National Centre for Languages, distilled expertise from across the EU to create and framework and set of tools for assessing intercultural competence. For more information, see www.incaproject.org.

Section 1

My intercultural background: factors that may have influenced how I respond to intercultural situations

My family background

Travel to other countries (short term visits) for holiday or work

Time spent living abroad (long term stay)

Time spent in a multicultural community in home country

Social contacts, friends from abroad

Social contacts, friends from within multicultural community in home country

Work experience in other countries

Other factors that have helped me experience cultures other than my own

Section 2

How I see myself in intercultural contexts

These are brief notes on how you feel about various intercultural situations. Place a short comment in each topic box and, against each, tick a column conveying your feelings about this area of contact expressed on a 5-point scale:

- 1 This makes me feel very uncomfortable.
- 2 This feels strange but I make allowances.
- 3 This feels fairly normal – I have neutral feelings.
- 4 This feels quite good – I tend to be at ease.
- 5 This feels very good – I often seek out such a situation.

Here is an example of the type of answer you might give:

A Encounters with different cultures in my own country	1	2	3	4	5
Eating and drinking in other cultural contexts, e.g. mealtime procedures, menus etc. <i>Comment: Being offered a glass of strong spirit (like vodka?) with my starter salad in Bulgaria was strange at first, but I've acquired a taste for it!</i>					✓

My comments (examples personal to me under each heading)

A Encounters with different cultures in my own country	1	2	3	4	5
Eating and drinking in other cultural contexts, e.g. mealtime procedures, menus etc.					
Encountering the different customs of people from other cultures, e.g. dress, special occasions, etc.					
Encountering the different values of people from other cultures, e.g. rules, beliefs etc.					
Encountering the different behaviour of people from other cultures, e.g. ways of greeting one another, courtesies, expression of feelings etc.					
Communicating with people of different cultures, e.g. coping with their spoken language, facial expressions, hand gestures, body language etc.					
Communicating with people of different cultures, e.g. coping with misunderstandings, a different sense of humour etc.					

B Encounters with people of different cultures in their own countries or communities	1	2	3	4	5
Coping with the customs of host countries or communities, e.g. rules and courtesies that local people observe and may expect me to observe.					
Encountering the different customs of people from other cultures, e.g. dress, special occasions, etc.					
Adapting to the rhythm of life in other cultures, e.g. getting used to different mealtimes etc.					
Integrating with the customs or behaviour of host countries, e.g. beginning to use forms of greeting that are very different from my own.					

C Encounters with different cultures in the workplace	1	2	3	4	5
Clarifying areas of uncertainty about work arrangements, e.g. describing what I am used to and asking what happens in the other culture.					
Adapting to other work practices, e.g. using unfamiliar procedures to complete a work task.					
Coping with different formalities, e.g. learning new ways of showing respect to senior colleagues from other cultures.					
Relating to colleagues from other cultures, e.g. learning what they like to talk about during work breaks.					
Being aware of issues arising within a different cultural group, e.g. learning what topics seem to be avoided and what the group's views are likely to be about a current political situation.					
Building bridges between colleagues of my own culture and those of a different culture, e.g. sensing that someone of my culture has said the wrong thing and explaining the misunderstanding to both sides.					

Section 3

A continuing record of intercultural encounters

In this section you can record many kinds of intercultural experiences and encounters that you feel have helped you develop your intercultural skills.

In each record, describe what happened and how this enabled you to advance your knowledge and understanding of – or attitude to – intercultural 'events' (interactions with people from other cultures, etc).

Date	Description of experience of encounter
Place	
How this influenced me (what I felt, thought or did, as a consequence)	

Date	Description of experience of encounter
Place	
How this influenced me (what I felt, thought or did, as a consequence)	

Date	Description of experience of encounter
Place	
How this influenced me (what I felt, thought or did, as a consequence)	

Date	Description of experience of encounter
Place	
How this influenced me (what I felt, thought or did, as a consequence)	

Dossier *Dossier*



COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

European Language Portfolio

Portfolio européen des langues

Accredited model No 9.2001-rev.2006

Contents

Your Dossier allows you to keep any evidence you may have of your ability to use and/or understand languages. This might include certificates and qualifications; but there are all sorts of other ways of collecting evidence. Using the Dossier will help you show a potential employer or language trainer that you can do what you say you can do!

You can collect evidence in whatever way you choose; these pages simply show some examples which might help you get started.

You can arrange your evidence according to the language in question. To help you do this, this contents page allows you to allocate a section number to each language concerned.

The Dossier includes:

- the 'practical competence statement' (page D2) – a list of the tasks for which you're providing evidence. Use a 'Dossier reference number' if appropriate to identify the language and the piece of evidence (e.g. 2.4 = section 2, 4th sample);
- a title sheet (page D3) headed by a reference number (see above) for each sample of evidence you collect;
- a summary of certificates (page D4). These may be nationally recognised or issued by an institution; certificates of competence (e.g. examination certificates) or certificates of attendance (e.g. at courses, conferences etc);
- 'witness statements' (page D5) from colleagues, friends etc, who can vouch for your competence in the language.

Language

Section 1

Section 2

Section 3

Section 4

Section 5

Section 6

Practical competence statement

This table can be used to list typical work or other tasks which you can carry out using the language in question. You should make sure that you have assigned a level from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to each task. We have also included space to log the National Language Standards and Languages Ladder levels, in case this is helpful to you.

Description of tasks I can carry out using

(Language)

Task	Dossier reference number (if applicable)	Level of competence		
		Common European Framework	National Language Standards	Languages Ladder

Evidence sample – title sheet

Some evidence will be self-explanatory but if you wish to describe the circumstances under which the evidence was produced this page provides that opportunity. The sample might be stuck or clipped to this sheet or placed with it in a sleeve.

Language:	Sample reference number:
Task:	
Skill:	
Date of performance:	
Circumstances (e.g. purpose, location, what support was available, outcome):	

Certificates awarded – summary

Date of award	Title of award	CEFR nearest equivalent

Certificates of attendance (courses, conferences, etc)

Date of award	Title of event	Outcomes/ achievements

Witnessed competent performance statement

(Name)

has demonstrated his/her competence in

(Language)

in the following way:

This performance corresponds to Level of the CEFR in (relevant skill)
(Give nearest equivalent on the Global Scale A1-C2. See the Language Passport for details.)

Signature of witness to competent performance (if appropriate):

Name and position:

Date:

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European Language Portfolio

Portfolio européen des langues

Language Passport

Passeport de langues





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European Language Portfolio
Portfolio européen des langues

European Language Portfolio : accredited model No.9.2001-rev.2006
Portfolio européen des langues : modèle accrédité N°9.2001-rev.2006

This model conforms to common Principles and Guidelines.

COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL CO-OPERATION
EDUCATION COMMITTEE – ELP VALIDATION COMMITTEE

Le présent modèle est conforme aux Principes et Lignes directrices communs.

CONSEIL DE LA COOPERATION CULTURELLE
COMITE DE L'EDUCATION – COMITE DE VALIDATION DU PEL

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The Council of Europe

The Council of Europe is an Intergovernmental organisation with its permanent headquarters in Strasbourg, France. Its primary goal is to promote the unity of the continent and guarantee the dignity of the citizens of Europe by ensuring respect for our fundamental values: democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

One of its main aims is to promote awareness of a European cultural identity and to develop mutual understanding among people of different cultures. In this context the Council of Europe is coordinating the introduction of a European Language Portfolio to support and give recognition to language learning and intercultural experiences at all levels.

Contact:

Language Policy Division, Strasbourg Directorate
General IV Council of Europe, Strasbourg, France
Website: www.coe.int/lang
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This Language Passport is part of the European
Language Portfolio (ELP) issued by:
CILT, the National Centre for Languages
www.cilt.org.uk

Le Conseil de l'Europe

Le Conseil de l'Europe est une organisation intergouvernementale dont le siège permanent est à Strasbourg, France. Sa mission première est de renforcer l'unité du continent et de protéger la dignité des citoyens de l'Europe en veillant au respect de nos valeurs fondamentales: la démocratie, les droits de l'homme et la prééminence du droit.

Un de ses objectifs principaux est de susciter la prise de conscience d'une identité culturelle européenne et de développer la compréhension mutuelle entre les peuples de cultures différentes. C'est dans ce contexte que le Conseil de l'Europe coordonne l'introduction d'un Portfolio Européen des Langues, comme étant un document personnel fait pour encourager et faire reconnaître l'apprentissage des langues et les expériences interculturelles de toutes sortes.

Contact:

*Division des Politiques Linguistiques, Strasbourg
Direction Générale IV Conseil de l'Europe, Strasbourg,
France
site Internet: www.coe.int/lang.fr
© 2000 Conseil de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France*

*Ce Passeport de langues fait partie du Portfolio
européen des langues (PEL) remis par:
CILT, the National Centre for Languages
www.cilt.org.uk*

The Language Passport

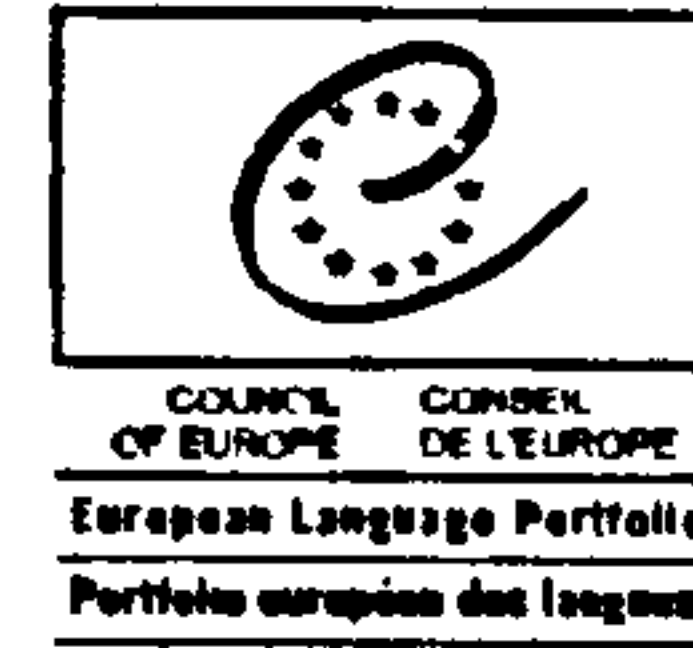
This document is a record of language skills, qualifications and experiences. It is part of a European Language Portfolio which consists of a Passport, a Language Biography and a Dossier containing materials which document and illustrate experiences and achievements. Language skills are defined in terms of levels of proficiency presented in the document "A Common European Framework of reference for languages: learning, teaching, assessment". The scale is illustrated in this Language Passport (Self-assessment grid).

The Language Passport lists the languages in which the holder has some competence. The contents of this Language Passport are as follows:

- a profile of language skills in relation to the Common European Framework
- a résumé of language learning and intercultural experiences
- a record of certificates and diplomas

For further information, guidance and the levels of proficiency in a range of languages, consult the Council of Europe website: www.coe.int/portfolio.

Le passeport de langues



Ce document est un bilan des savoir-faire, des certifications ou des diplômes ainsi que des expériences vécues dans différentes langues. Il fait partie d'un Portfolio Européen des Langues qui se compose du présent Passeport, d'une Biographie Langagière et d'un Dossier comprenant des matériaux qui documentent et illustrent les expériences effectuées et les compétences acquises. Les compétences en langues sont décrites dans les termes des niveaux de compétence présentés dans le document «Un Cadre européen commun de référence pour les langues: apprendre, enseigner, évaluer». L'échelle est présentée dans le présent Passeport de langues (grille pour l'auto-évaluation).

Le Passeport de langues inclut la liste des langues dans lesquelles le titulaire a des compétences. Il se compose:

- *d'un profil des compétences en langues en relation avec le Cadre Européen Commun*
- *d'un résumé d'expériences linguistiques et interculturelles*
- *d'une liste de certificats et diplômes*

Pour tout renseignement concernant les niveaux de compétences en plusieurs langues, consultez le site Internet du Conseil de l'Europe: www.coe.int/portfolio/fr.

Name:
Nom:

Profile of language skills

Profil des compétences linguistiques

Mother tongue(s)
Langue(s) maternelle(s)

Other languages
Autres langues


Self-assessment
Auto-évaluation

 Listening
Ecouter

 Spoken interaction
Prendre part à une conversation



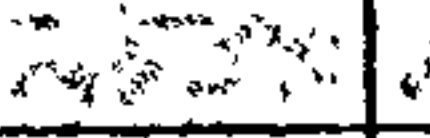



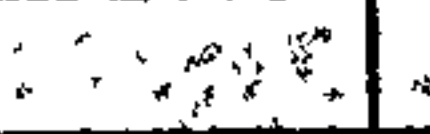
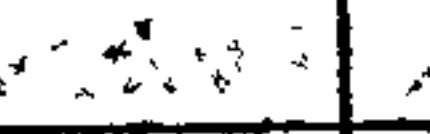



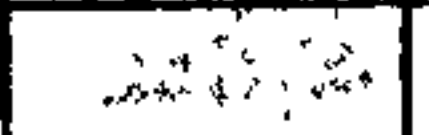

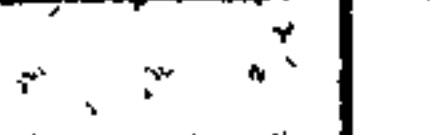

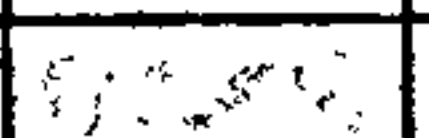
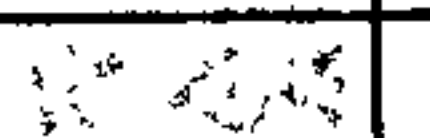


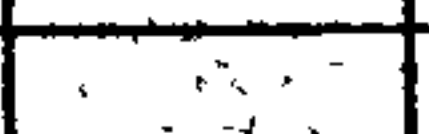
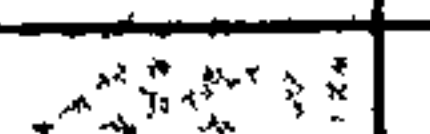
 Writing
Ecrire

 Reading
Lire






 Spoken production
S'exprimer oralement en continu

Language *Langue*






language langue

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
						
						
						
						
						

Language *Langue*

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
						
						
						
						
						

Language *Langue*

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
						
						
						
						
						

Name
Nom



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Self-assessment
Auto-évaluation

Listening
Ecouter

Spoken interaction
Prendre part à une conversation

Writing
Ecrire

Reading
Lire

Spoken production
S'exprimer oralement en continu

Language *Langue*

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2

Language *Langue*

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2






Language *Langue*

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2

Language *Langue*

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2

Self-assessment grid

	A1	A2	B1
Understanding  Listening	<p>I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.</p>	<p>I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.</p>	<p>I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.</p>
 Reading	<p>I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.</p>	<p>I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.</p>	<p>I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.</p>
Speaking  Spoken interaction	<p>I 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 me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.</p>	<p>I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.</p>	<p>I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).</p>
 Spoken production	<p>I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.</p>	<p>I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job</p>	<p>I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.</p>
Writing  Writing	<p>I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.</p>	<p>I can write short, simple notes and messages. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.</p>	<p>I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.</p>



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B2

C1

C2

<p>I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect</p>	<p>I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.</p>	<p>I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.</p>
<p>I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.</p>	<p>I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.</p>	<p>I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.</p>
<p>I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.</p>	<p>I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.</p>	<p>I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.</p>
<p>I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.</p>	<p>I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.</p>	<p>I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points</p>
<p>I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.</p>	<p>I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select a style appropriate to the reader in mind.</p>	<p>I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.</p>

Grille pour l'auto-évaluation

	A1	A2	B1
Comprendre  Ecouter	<p>Je peux comprendre des mots familiers et des expressions très courantes au sujet de moi-même, de ma famille et de l'environnement concret et immédiat, si les gens parlent lentement et distinctement.</p>	<p>Je peux comprendre des expressions et un vocabulaire très fréquent relatifs à ce qui me concerne de très près (par ex. moi-même, ma famille, les achats, l'environnement proche, le travail). Je peux saisir l'essentiel d'annonces et de messages simples et clairs.</p>	<p>Je peux comprendre les points essentiels quand un langage clair et standard est utilisé et s'il s'agit de sujets familiers concernant le travail, l'école, les loisirs, etc. Je peux comprendre l'essentiel de nombreuses émissions de radio ou de télévision sur l'actualité ou sur des sujets qui m'intéressent à titre personnel ou professionnel si l'on parle d'une façon relativement lente et distincte.</p>
 Lire	<p>Je peux comprendre des noms familiers, des mots ainsi que des phrases très simples, par exemple dans des annonces, des affiches ou des catalogues.</p>	<p>Je peux lire des textes courts très simples. Je peux trouver une information particulière prévisible dans des documents courants comme les petites publicités, les prospectus, les menus et les horaires et je peux comprendre des lettres personnelles courtes et simples.</p>	<p>Je peux comprendre des textes rédigés essentiellement dans une langue courante ou relative à mon travail. Je peux comprendre la description d'événements, l'expression de sentiments et de souhaits dans des lettres personnelles.</p>
Parler  Prendre part à une conversation	<p>Je peux communiquer, de façon simple, à condition que l'interlocuteur soit disposé à répéter ou à reformuler ses phrases plus lentement et à m'aider à formuler ce que j'essaie de dire. Je peux poser des questions simples sur des sujets familiers ou sur ce dont j'ai immédiatement besoin, ainsi que répondre à de telles questions.</p>	<p>Je peux communiquer lors de tâches simples et habituelles ne demandant qu'un échange d'informations simple et direct sur des sujets et des activités familiers. Je peux avoir des échanges très brefs même si, en règle générale, je ne comprends pas assez pour poursuivre une conversation.</p>	<p>Je peux faire face à la majorité des situations que l'on peut rencontrer au cours d'un voyage dans une région où la langue est parlée. Je peux prendre part sans préparation à une conversation sur des sujets familiers ou d'intérêt personnel ou qui concernent la vie quotidienne (par exemple famille, loisirs, travail, voyage et actualité).</p>
 S'exprimer oralement en continu	<p>Je peux utiliser des expressions et des phrases simples pour décrire mon lieu d'habitation et les gens que je connais.</p>	<p>Je peux utiliser une série de phrases ou d'expressions pour décrire en termes simples ma famille et d'autres gens, mes conditions de vie, ma formation et mon activité professionnelle actuelle ou récente.</p>	<p>Je peux articuler des expressions de manière simple afin de raconter des expériences et des événements, mes rêves, mes espoirs ou mes buts. Je peux brièvement donner les raisons et explications de mes opinions ou projets. Je peux raconter une histoire ou l'intrigue d'un livre ou d'un film et exprimer mes réactions.</p>
Ecrire  Ecrire	<p>Je peux écrire une courte carte postale simple, par exemple de vacances. Je peux porter des détails personnels dans un questionnaire, inscrire par exemple mon nom, ma nationalité et mon adresse sur une fiche d'hôtel.</p>	<p>Je peux écrire des notes et messages simples et courts. Je peux écrire une lettre personnelle très simple, par exemple de remerciements.</p>	<p>Je peux écrire un texte simple et cohérent sur des sujets familiers ou qui m'intéressent personnellement. Je peux écrire des lettres personnelles pour décrire expériences et impressions.</p>



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B2

C1

C2

<p>Je peux comprendre des conférences et des discours assez longs et même suivre une argumentation complexe si le sujet m'en est relativement familier. Je peux comprendre la plupart des émissions de télévision sur l'actualité et les informations. Je peux comprendre la plupart des films en langue standard.</p>	<p>Je peux comprendre un long discours même s'il n'est pas clairement structuré et que les articulations sont seulement implicites. Je peux comprendre les émissions de télévision et les films sans trop d'effort.</p>	<p>Je n'ai aucune difficulté à comprendre le langage oral, que ce soit dans les conditions du direct ou dans les médias et quand on parle vite, à condition d'avoir du temps pour me familiariser avec un accent particulier.</p>
<p>Je peux lire des articles et des rapports sur des questions contemporaines dans lesquels les auteurs adoptent une attitude particulière ou un certain point de vue. Je peux comprendre un texte littéraire contemporain en prose.</p>	<p>Je peux comprendre des textes factuels ou littéraires longs et complexes et en apprécier les différences de style. Je peux comprendre des articles spécialisés et de longues instructions techniques même lorsqu'ils ne sont pas en relation avec mon domaine.</p>	<p>Je peux lire sans effort tout type de texte, même abstrait ou complexe quant au fond ou à la forme, par exemple un manuel, un article spécialisé ou une œuvre littéraire.</p>
<p>Je peux communiquer avec un degré de spontanéité et d'aisance qui rende possible une interaction normale avec un locuteur natif. Je peux participer activement à une conversation dans des situations familières, présenter et défendre mes opinions.</p>	<p>Je peux m'exprimer spontanément et couramment sans trop apparemment devoir chercher mes mots. Je peux utiliser la langue de manière souple et efficace pour des relations sociales ou professionnelles. Je peux exprimer mes idées et opinions avec précision et lier mes interventions à celles de mes interlocuteurs.</p>	<p>Je peux participer sans effort à toute conversation ou discussion et je suis aussi très à l'aise avec les expressions idiomatiques et les tournures courantes. Je peux m'exprimer couramment et exprimer avec précision de fines nuances de sens. En cas de difficulté, je peux faire marche arrière pour y remédier avec assez d'habileté et pour qu'elle passe presque inaperçue.</p>
<p>Je peux m'exprimer de façon claire et détaillée sur une grande gamme de sujets relatifs à mes centres d'intérêt. Je peux développer un point de vue sur un sujet d'actualité et expliquer les avantages et les inconvénients de différentes possibilités.</p>	<p>Je peux présenter des descriptions claires et détaillées de sujets complexes, en intégrant des thèmes qui leur sont liés, en développant certains points et en terminant mon intervention de façon appropriée.</p>	<p>Je peux présenter une description ou une argumentation claire et fluide dans un style adapté au contexte, construire une présentation de façon logique et aider mon auditeur à remarquer et à se rappeler les points importants.</p>
<p>Je peux écrire des textes clairs et détaillés sur une grande gamme de sujets relatifs à mes intérêts. Je peux écrire un essai ou un rapport en transmettant une information ou en exposant des raisons pour ou contre une opinion donnée. Je peux écrire des lettres qui mettent en valeur le sens que j'attribue personnellement aux événements et aux expériences.</p>	<p>Je peux m'exprimer dans un texte clair et bien structuré et développer mon point de vue. Je peux écrire sur des sujets complexes dans une lettre, un essai ou un rapport, en soulignant les points que je juge importants. Je peux adopter un style adapté au destinataire.</p>	<p>Je peux écrire un texte clair, fluide et stylistiquement adapté aux circonstances. Je peux rédiger des lettres, rapports ou articles complexes, avec une construction claire permettant au lecteur d'en saisir et de mémoriser les points importants. Je peux résumer et critiquer par écrit un ouvrage professionnel ou une œuvre littéraire.</p>

Summary of language learning and intercultural experiences
Résumé des expériences linguistiques et interculturelles

Language: Langue:								
Language learning and use in country/region where the language is not spoken: <i>Apprentissage et utilisation de la langue dans le pays/ la région où la langue n'est pas utilisée:</i>	→1	→3	→5	5→	→1	→3	→5	5→
Primary/secondary/vocational education <i>Enseignement primaire / secondaire / professionnel</i>								
Higher education <i>Enseignement supérieur</i>								
Adult education <i>Education des adultes</i>								
Other courses <i>Autres cours</i>								
Regular use in the workplace <i>Utilisation régulière sur le lieu de travail</i>								
Regular contact with speakers of the language <i>Contacts réguliers avec des locuteurs de cette langue</i>								
Other <i>Autre</i>								
Further information on language and intercultural experiences <i>Informations complémentaires concernant des expériences linguistiques et interculturelles</i>								

Name _____
 Nom _____



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→1 Up to 1 year
 Jusqu'à 1 an

→3 Up to 3 years
 Jusqu'à 3 ans

→5 Up to 5 years
 Jusqu'à 5 ans

5→ Over 5 years
 Plus de 5 ans

→1	→3	→5	5→	→1	→3	→5	5→	→1	→3	→5	5→	→1	→3	→5	5→

Summary of language learning and intercultural experiences
Résumé des expériences linguistiques et interculturelles

Language: Langue:								
Stays in a region where the language is spoken: <i>Séjours dans une région où la langue est utilisée:</i>	→1	→3	→5	5→	→1	→3	→5	5→
Attending a language course <i>Participation à un cours de langue</i>								
Using the language for study or training <i>Études, formation dans la langue</i>								
Using the language at work <i>Utilisation professionnelle de la langue</i>								
Other <i>Autre</i>								
Further information on language and intercultural experiences <i>Informations complémentaires concernant des expériences linguistiques et interculturelles</i>								

Name
Nom



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→1 Up to 1 month
Jusqu'à 1 mois

→3 Up to 3 months
Jusqu'à 3 mois

→5 Up to 5 months
Jusqu'à 5 mois

5→ Over 5 months
Plus de 5 mois

→1	→3	→5	5→	→1	→3	→5	5→	→1	→3	→5	5→	→1	→3	→5	5→

Language assessment scales – a comparison

Les échelles d'évaluation linguistiques – une comparaison

This chart indicates how, approximately, European and UK frameworks and qualifications compare. Further sources of information are given on the last page of the Passport.

		SCALE				
		Common European Framework (Council of Europe Global Scale)	UK National Language Standards (revised 2005)	Languages Ladder ¹ Stages	Common English/Welsh/Northern Irish General Qualifications	Scottish National Units, Courses and Group Awards
LEVEL	A1 Breakthrough	Entry Level	Breakthrough: grades 1–3	Entry 1–3	Access 3 Foundation Standard	
	A2 Waystage	Level 1	Preliminary: grades 4–6	Foundation GCSE	Intermediate 1 General Standard Grade	
	B1 Threshold	Level 2	Intermediate: grades 7–9	Higher GCSE	Intermediate 2 Credit Standard Grade	
	B2 Vantage	Level 3	Advanced: grades 10–12	AS/A/AEA	Advanced Higher Higher ²	
	C1 Effective Operational Proficiency	Level 4	Proficiency: grades 13–15	Honours degree	Honours degree	
	C2 Mastery	Level 5	Mastery: grades 16 & 17	Postgraduate, e.g. professional linguist	Postgraduate	

¹ The Languages Ladder, the national recognition scheme for languages in England, for more information see www.dfes.gov.uk/languages

² The Scottish Higher qualification is deemed to be midway between B1 and B2

Useful contacts

Contacts utiles

www.coe.int/portfolio

Information on the Council of Europe and ELP developments in other countries. To download the self-assessment grid from the Common European Framework in a variety of languages, select 'Levels' from the main menu.

www.cilt.org.uk

Further information about the adult and junior ELPs and the work of CILT, the National Centre for Languages. Details of resources and support for language learning and teaching throughout the UK.

www.cilt.org.uk/standards

The UK National Language Standards, in a downloadable file. Information about the National Occupational Standards in Translation and in Interpreting.

www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk

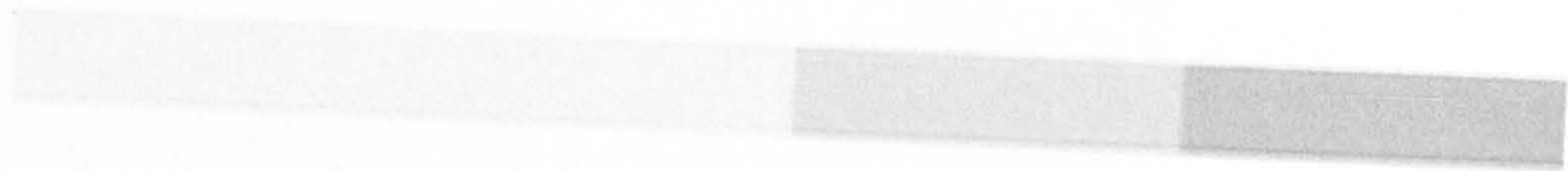
Online database of accredited qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

www.sqa.org.uk

Scottish Qualifications Authority.

www.blis.org.uk

One-stop online shop for language and cultural expertise, including details of job vacancies and language courses.

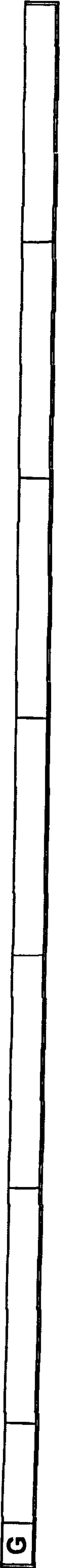


Appendix 2.3 Self-assessment grid

This version of the self-assessment grid was distributed to the Language Institutes.

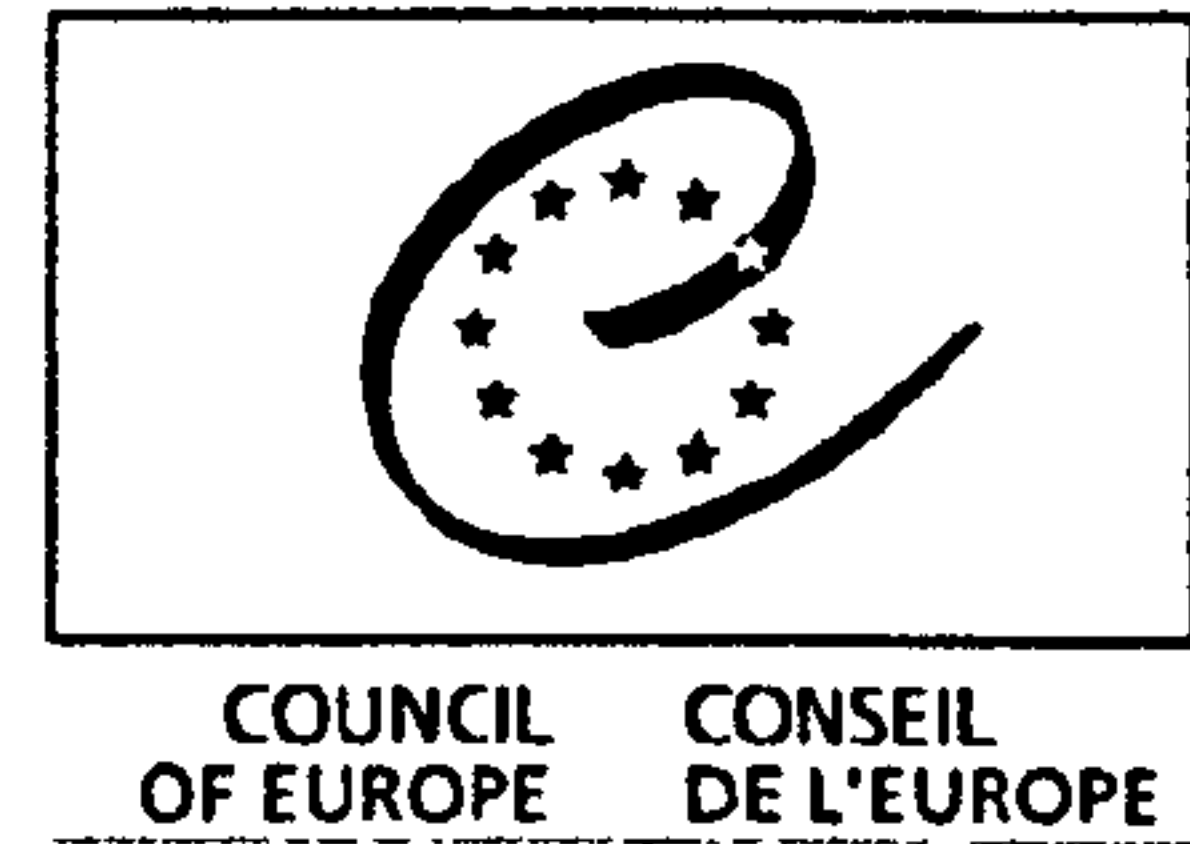
	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
UNDERSTANDING						
Listening	I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
Reading	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.
Spoken Interaction	I 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 me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
Spoken Production	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
Writing	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select a style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.

G



Appendix 2.4 Validation Process

Below is a summary of the validation process for an ELP. The portfolio used at the Language Institute had not been submitted for validation as the management chose not include several key components of the ELP.



DGIV/EDU/LANG (2002) 12

EUROPEAN LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO (ELP)

**Guidelines for the submission of
ELP models for validation**

**Language Policy Division
Strasbourg**

Guidelines for the submission of European Language Portfolio models for validation

The key documents to be consulted when designing a European Language Portfolio are:

- *European Language Portfolio – Principles and Guidelines* (DGIV/EDU/LANG (2000) 33)
- *European Language Portfolio – Guide for Developers*, by Günther Schneider and Peter Lenz

The validation and accreditation of ELP models by the ELP Validation Committee is governed by three documents:

- *European Language Portfolio – Principles and Guidelines* (DGIV/EDU/LANG (2000) 33)
- *Rules for the Accreditation of ELP Models* (DGIV/EDU/LANG (2000) 26 rev.)
- *European Validation Committee (ELP) Terms of Reference*

Applications for the validation and accreditation of ELP models must be made on the official application form (*Application for Validation and Accreditation of an ELP Model*).

All of these documents are available from the Council of Europe in printed form and can also be downloaded from the Council of Europe's ELP website (<http://culture.coe.int/portfolio>).

Note that the *Rules on Accreditation of ELP Models* include the following provision: "Educational authorities or institutions undertaking to produce an ELP model may ask for guidance and a preliminary reaction from the Validation Committee at an early stage."

When preparing to submit an ELP model for validation, you should take the following points into account:

1. According to the *European Validation Committee (ELP) Terms of Reference*, ELP models will normally be submitted by one of the following: national or regional authority; NGO or INGO; independent educational institution; private commercial or non-profit institution. The *Rules for the Accreditation of ELP Models* (DGIV/EDU/LANG (2000) 26 rev.2) state (i) that "the committee will consider the advice of national committees or other relevant bodies" and (ii) that "the advice of national and regional educational authorities on ELP models for the school sectors is taken into account".

If possible and appropriate, please elicit this advice and enclose it with your submission.

2. Paragraph 3.3 of the *Principles and Guidelines* (DGIV/EDU/LANG (2000) 33) requires ELP developers to "adhere to terminological conventions, standard headings and rubrics as specified by the Council of Europe in at least one of the official languages of the Council of Europe (English or French) in addition to any other languages". This principle must be applied to the Language Passport without exception. The self-assessment grid included in the Language Passport has been officially translated into many languages; the translations are available from the Secretariat and should be used.

For purposes of validation every part of your ELP must be translated into either French or English so that it is linguistically accessible to the Validation Committee.

ELP models are registered for validation only when every part of them has an accompanying translation into French or English. Failure to meet this requirement inevitably delays the validation process.

3. The *Rules for the Accreditation of ELP Models* require that “the application should be accompanied by a mock-up of the ELP model proposed”. For practical reasons it is not always possible to present a model in exactly the form in which it will be disseminated once it has been validated. However, any ELP model submitted for validation should be presented in a form that indicates clearly what the finished ELP will look like.

The form in which you submit your ELP for validation should be as close as possible to the form in which it will be disseminated after validation. If its final form will differ in any significant respect from the form in which it is submitted, you should describe and explain the difference in your covering letter (see 5 below).

4. Sections 1, 9 and 10 of the Application Form must be completed in full. The remainder of the form should be completed in a maximally informative way. The principle of self-declaration (see *Rules for the Accreditation of ELP Models*) implies that it is not enough simply to tick all the YES boxes: many of the questions on the form may also require some kind of comment.

The Application Form has been designed to allow you to show in detail how your ELP model conforms to the Principles and Guidelines. It is in your own interest to provide as much information as possible on the form as well as in the covering letter (see 5 below).

5. The validation process will be greatly assisted by a covering letter that explains in sufficient detail the relevance of your ELP model to its target audience, draws attention to any special features of content or design, and describes how the implementation of the ELP will be supported.

Use a covering letter to – for example – (i) briefly describe the learner population at which your ELP model is aimed, (ii) explain the relevance of your ELP to this population, (iii) draw attention to any special features of content and design, (iv) describe the support that will be provided for teachers working with your ELP, and (v) outline what role (if any) will be played by national, regional and local educational authorities in the implementation of the ELP.

6. ***Only ELP submissions that comply with the above requirements will be registered for validation. Submissions must be registered at least six weeks before the meeting of the Validation Committee at which they are to be considered.***

Appendix 2.5 Can – do statements

Below are listed Can-do statements from A1 to C2 taken from the Institute Intranet site. It can be seen that at higher levels of language proficiency there are fewer descriptors. Furthermore, the descriptors at higher levels become more similar to each other.

A1

Listening

I can understand when someone speaks very slowly to me and articulates carefully, with long pauses for me to assimilate meaning.

I can understand simple directions how to get from X to Y, by foot or public transport.

I can understand questions and instructions addressed carefully and slowly to me and follow short, simple directions.

I can understand numbers, prices and times.

Reading

I can understand information about people (place of residence, age, etc.) in newspapers.

I can locate a concert or a film on calendars of public events or posters and identify where it takes place and at what time it starts.

I can understand a questionnaire (entry permit form, hotel registration form) well enough to give the most important information about myself (name, surname, birth, nationality).

I can understand words and phrases on signs encountered in everyday life (for instance "station", "car park", "no parking", "no smoking", "keep left")

I can understand the most important orders in a computer programme such as "PRINT", "SAVE", "COPY", etc.

I can follow short simple written directions (e.g. how to go from X to Y)

I can understand short simple messages on postcards, for example holiday greetings.

In everyday situations I can understand simple messages written by friends or colleagues, for example "back at 4 o'clock".

Spoken Interaction

I can introduce somebody and use basic greeting and leave-taking expressions.

I can ask and answer simple questions, initiate and respond to simple statements in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.

I can make myself understood in a simple way but I am dependent on my partner being prepared to repeat more slowly and rephrase what I say and to help want.

I can make simple purchases where pointing or other gestures can support what I say.

I can handle numbers, quantities, cost and time.

I can ask people for things and give people things.

I can ask people questions about where they live, people they know, things they have, etc. and answer such questions addressed to me provided they are art and clearly.

I can indicate time by such phrases as "next week", "last Friday", "in November", "three o'clock".

Spoken Production

I can give personal information (address, telephone number, nationality, age, family and hobbies)

I can describe where I live.

Strategies

I can say when I don't understand

I can very simply ask somebody to repeat what they said

I can very simply ask somebody to speak more slowly

Writing

I can fill in a questionnaire with my personal details (job, age, address, hobbies).

I can write a greeting card, for instance a birthday card.

I can write a simple postcard (for example with holiday greetings).

I can write a note to tell somebody where I am or where we are to meet.

I can write sentences and simple phrases about myself, for example where I live and what I do.

A2

Listening

I can understand what is said clearly, slowly and directly to me in simple everyday conversation; it is possible to make me understand, if the speaker can talk slowly and clearly.

I can generally identify the topic of discussion around me when people speak slowly and clearly.

I can recognise phrases, words and expressions related to areas of most immediate priority (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local employment).

I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.

I can understand the essential information in short recorded passages dealing with predictable everyday matters which are spoken slowly and clearly.

I can identify the main point of TV news items reporting events, accidents, etc., when the visual supports the commentary.

Reading

I can identify important information in news summaries or simple newspaper articles in which numbers and names play an important role and which are clear and illustrated.

I can understand a simple personal letter in which the writer tells or asks me about aspects of everyday life.

I can understand simple written messages from friends or colleagues, for example saying when we should meet to play football or asking me to be at work.

I can find the most important information on leisure time activities, exhibitions, etc., in information leaflets.

I can skim small advertisements in newspapers, locate the heading or column I want and identify the most important pieces of information (price and size of cars, computers).

I can understand simple user's instructions for equipment (for example, a public telephone).

I can understand feedback messages or simple help indications in computer programmes.

I can understand short narratives about everyday things dealing with topics which are familiar to me if the text is written in simple language.

Spoken Interaction

I can make simple transactions in shops, post offices or banks.

I can use public transport: buses, trains, and taxis, ask for basic information and buy tickets.

I can get simple information about travel.

I can order something to eat or drink.

I can make simple purchases by stating what I want and asking the price.

I can ask for and give directions referring to a map or plan.

I can ask how people are and react to news.

I can make and respond to invitations.

I can make and accept apologies.

I can say what I like and dislike.

I can discuss with other people what to do, where to go and make arrangements to meet.

I can ask people questions about what they do at work and in free time, and answer such questions addressed to me.

Spoken Production

I can describe myself, my family and other people.

I can describe where I live.

I can give short, basic descriptions of events.

I can describe my educational background, my present or most recent job.

I can describe my hobbies and interests in a simple way.

I can describe past activities and personal experiences (e.g. the last weekend, my last holiday).

Strategies

I can ask for attention.

I can indicate when I am following.

When I don't understand something, I can very simply ask the speaker to repeat what they said.

Language Quality

I can make myself understood using memorised phrases and single expressions.

I can link groups of words with simple connectors like "and", "but" and "because".

I can use some simple structures correctly.

I have a sufficient vocabulary for coping with simple everyday situations.

Writing

I can write short, simple notes and messages.

I can describe an event in simple sentences and report what happened when and where (for example a party or an accident).

I can write about aspects of my everyday life in simple phrases and sentences (people, places, job, school, family, hobbies).

I can fill in a questionnaire giving an account of my educational background, my job, my interests and my specific skills.

I can briefly introduce myself in a letter with simple phrases and sentences (family, school, job, hobbies).

I can write a short letter using simple expressions for greeting, addressing, asking or thanking somebody.

I can write simple sentences, connecting them with words such as "and", "but", "because".

I can use the most important connecting words to indicate the chronological order of events (first, then, after, later).

B1

Listening

I can follow clearly articulated speech directed at me in everyday conversation, though I sometimes have to ask for repetition of particular words and phrases.

I can generally follow the main points of extended discussion around me, provided speech is clearly articulated in standard dialect.

I can listen to a short narrative and form hypotheses about what will happen next.

I can understand the main points of radio news bulletins and simpler recorded material on topics of personal interest delivered relatively slowly and clearly.

I can catch the main points in TV programmes on familiar topics when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.

I can understand simple technical information, such as operating instructions for everyday equipment.

Reading

I can understand the main points in short newspaper articles about current and familiar topics.

I can read columns or interviews in newspapers and magazines in which someone takes a stand on a current topic or event and understand the overall mean
I can guess the meaning of single unknown words from the context thus deducing the meaning of expressions if the topic is familiar.
I can skim short texts (for example news summaries) and find relevant facts and information (for example who has done what and where).
I can understand the most important information in short simple everyday information brochures.
I can understand simple messages and standard letters (for example from businesses, clubs or authorities).
In private letters I can understand those parts dealing with events, feelings and wishes well enough to correspond regularly with a pen friend.
I can understand the plot of a clearly structured story and recognise what the most important episodes and events are and what is significant about them.

Spoken Interaction

I can start, maintain and close simple face-to-face conversation on topics that are familiar or of personal interest.
I can maintain a conversation or discussion but may sometimes be difficult to follow when trying to say exactly what I would like to.
I can deal with most situations likely to arise when making travel arrangements through an agent or when actually travelling.
I can ask for and follow detailed directions.
I can express and respond to feelings such as surprise, happiness, sadness, interest and indifference.
I can give or seek personal views and opinions in an informal discussion with friends.
I can agree and disagree politely.

Spoken Production

I can narrate a story.
I can give detailed accounts of experiences, describing feelings and reactions.
I can describe dreams, hopes and ambitions.
I can explain and give reasons for my plans, intentions and actions.
I can relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.
I can paraphrase short written passages orally in a simple fashion, using the original text wording and ordering.

Strategies

I can repeat back part of what someone has said to confirm that we understand each other.
I can ask someone to clarify or elaborate what they have just said.
When I can't think of the word I want, I can use a simple word meaning something similar and invite "correction".

Language Quality

I can keep a conversation going comprehensibly, but have to pause to plan and correct what I am saying – especially when I talk freely for longer periods.
I can convey simple information of immediate relevance, getting across which point I feel is most important.
I have a sufficient vocabulary to express myself with some circumlocutions on most topics pertinent to my everyday life such as family, hobbies and interest and current events.
I can express myself reasonably accurately in familiar, predictable situations.

Writing

I can write simple connected texts on a range of topics within my field of interest and can express personal views and opinions.
I can write simple texts about experiences or events, for example about a trip, for a school newspaper or a club newsletter.
I can write personal letters to friends or acquaintances asking for or giving them news and narrating events.

I can describe in a personal letter the plot of a film or a book or give an account of a concert.

In a letter I can express feelings such as grief, happiness, interest, regret and sympathy.

I can reply in written form to advertisements and ask for more complete or more specific information about products (for example a car or an academic course).

I can convey – via fax, e-mail or a circular – short simple factual information to friends or colleagues or ask for information in such a way.

I can write my CV in summary form.

B2

Listening

I can understand in detail what is said to me in standard spoken language even in a noisy environment.

I can follow a lecture or talk within my own field, provided the subject matter is familiar and the presentation straightforward and clearly structured.

I can understand most radio documentaries delivered in standard language and can identify the speaker's mood, tone, etc.

I can understand TV documentaries, live interviews, talk shows, plays and the majority of films in standard dialect.

I can understand the main ideas complex speech on both concrete and abstract topics delivered in a standard dialect, including technical discussions in my field of specialisation.

I can use a variety of strategies to achieve comprehension, including listening for main points, checking comprehension by using contextual clues.

Reading

I can rapidly grasp the content and the significance of news, articles and reports on topics connected with my interests or my job, and decide if a closer read is worthwhile.

I can read and understand articles and reports on current problems in which the writers express specific attitudes and points of view.

I can understand in detail texts within my field of interest or the area of my academic or professional speciality.

I can understand specialised articles outside my own field if I can occasionally check with a dictionary.

I can read reviews dealing with the content and criticism of cultural topics (films, theatre, books, concerts) and summarise the main points.

I can read letters on topics within my areas of academic or professional speciality or interest and grasp the most important points.

I can quickly look through a manual (for example for a computer program) and find and understand the relevant explanations and help for a specific problem.

I can understand in a narrative or play the motives for the characters' actions and their consequences for the development of the plot.

Spoken Interaction

I can initiate, maintain and end discourse naturally with effective turn-taking.

I can exchange considerable quantities of detailed factual information on matters within my fields of interest.

I can convey degrees of emotion and highlight the personal significance of events and experiences.

I can engage in extended conversation in a clearly participatory fashion on most general topics.

I can account for and sustain my opinions in discussion by providing relevant explanations, arguments and comments.

I can help a discussion along on familiar ground confirming comprehension, inviting others in, etc.

I can carry out a prepared interview, checking and confirming information, following up interesting replies.

Spoken Production

I can give clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my fields of interest.

I can understand and summarise orally short extracts from news items, interviews or documentaries containing opinions, argument and discussion.

I can understand and summarise orally the plot and sequence of events in an extract from a film or play.

I can construct a chain of reasoned argument, linking my ideas logically.

I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.

I can speculate about causes, consequences, hypothetical situations.

Strategies

I can use standard phrases like "That's a difficult question to answer" to gain time and keep the turn while formulating what to say.

I can make a note of "favourite mistakes" and consciously monitor speech for them.

I can generally correct slips and errors if I become conscious of them or if they have led to misunderstandings.

Language Quality

I can produce stretches of language with a fairly even tempo ; although I can be hesitant as I search for patterns and expressions, there are few noticeably long pauses.

I can pass on detailed information reliably.

I have sufficient vocabulary to express myself on matters concerned to my field and on most general topics.

I can communicate with reasonable accuracy and can correct mistakes if they have led to misunderstandings.

Writing

I can write clear and detailed texts (compositions, reports or texts of presentations) on various topics related to my field of interest.

I can write summaries of articles on topics of general interest.

I can summarise information from different sources and media.

I can discuss a topic in a composition or "letter to the editor", giving reasons for or against a specific point of view.

I can develop an argument systematically in a composition or report, emphasising decisive points and including supporting details.

I can write about events and real or fictional experiences in a detailed and easily readable way.

I can write a short review of a film or a book.

I can express in a personal letter different feelings and attitudes and can report the news of the day making clear what – in my opinion – are the important events.

C1

Listening

I can follow extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly.

I can understand a wide range of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms, appreciating shifts in style and register.

I can extract specific information from even poor quality, audibly distorted public announcements, e.g. in a station, sports stadium etc.

I can understand complex technical information, such as operating instructions, specifications for familiar products and services.

I can understand lectures, talks and reports in my field of professional or academic interest even when they are propositionally and linguistically complex.

I can without too much effort understand films employing a considerable degree of slang and idiomatic usage.

Reading

I can understand fairly long demanding texts and summarise them orally.

I can read complex reports, analyses and commentaries where opinions, viewpoints and connections are discussed.

I can extract information, ideas and opinions from highly specialised texts in my own field, for example research reports.

I can understand long complex instructions, for example for the use of a new piece of equipment, even if these are not related to my job or field of interest, enough time to reread them.

I can read any correspondence with occasional use of a dictionary.

I can read contemporary literary texts with ease.

I can go beyond the concrete plot of a narrative and grasp implicit meanings, ideas and connections.

I can recognise the social, political or historical background of a literary work.

Spoken Interaction

I can keep up with an animated conversation between native speakers.

I can use the language fluently, accurately and effectively on a wide range of general, professional or academic topics.

I can use language flexibly and effectively for social purposes, including emotional, allusive and joking usage.

I can express my ideas and opinions clearly and precisely, and can present and respond to complex lines of reasoning convincingly.

Spoken Production

I can give clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects.

I can orally summarise long, demanding texts.

I can give an extended description or account of something, integrating themes, developing particular points and concluding appropriately.

I can give a clearly developed presentation on a subject in my fields of personal or professional interest, departing when necessary from the prepared text at spontaneously points raised by members of the audience.

Strategies

I can use fluently a variety of appropriate expressions to preface my remarks in order to get the floor, or to gain time and keep the floor while thinking.

I can relate own contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.

I can substitute an equivalent term for a word I can't recall without distracting the listener.

Language Quality

I can express myself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language.

I can produce clear, smoothly-flowing, well-structured speech, showing control over ways of developing what I want to say in order to link both my ideas a expression of them into coherent text.

I have a good command of a broad vocabulary allowing gaps to be readily overcome with circumlocutions ; I rarely have to search obviously for expression on saying exactly what I want to.

I can consistently maintain a high degree of grammatical accuracy, errors are rare and difficult to spot.

Writing

I can express myself in writing on a wide range of general or professional topics in a clear and user-friendly manner.

I can present a complex topic in a clear and well structured way, highlighting the most important points, for example in a composition or a report.

I can present points of view in a comment on a topic or an event, underlining the main ideas and supporting my reasoning with detailed examples.

I can put together information from different sources and relate it in a coherent summary.

I can give a detailed description of experiences, feelings and events in a personal letter.

I can write formally correct letters, for example to complain or to take a stand in favour of or against something.

I can write texts which show a high degree of grammatical correctness and vary my vocabulary and style according to the addressee, the kind of text and th

I can select a style appropriate to the reader in mind.

C2

Listening

I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some familiarity with the accent.

Reading

I can recognise plays on words and appreciate texts whose real meaning is not explicit (for example irony, satire).

I can understand texts written in a very colloquial style and containing many idiomatic expressions or slang.

I can grasp fine stylistic differences and implicit meanings in articles and books.

I can understand manuals, regulations and contracts even within unfamiliar fields.

I can understand contemporary and classical literary texts of different genres (poetry, prose, drama).

I can read texts such as literary columns or satirical glosses where much is said in an indirect and ambiguous way and which contain hidden value judgements.

I can recognise different stylistic means (puns, metaphors, symbols, connotations, ambiguity) and appreciate and evaluate their function within the text.

Spoken Interaction

I can take part effortlessly in all conversations and discussions with native speakers.

Spoken Production

I can summarise orally information from different sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation.

I can present ideas and viewpoints in a very flexible manner in order to give emphasis, to differentiate and to eliminate ambiguity.

Strategies

I can backtrack and restructure around a difficulty so smoothly the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.

Language Quality

I can express myself naturally and effortlessly; I only need to pause occasionally in order to select precisely the right words.

I can convey finer shades of meaning precisely by using, with reasonable accuracy, a wide range of expressions to qualify statements and pinpoint the extent to which something is the case.

I have a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms with an awareness of implied meaning and meaning by association.

I can consistently maintain grammatical control of complex language even when my attention is otherwise engaged.

Writing

I can write well structured and easily readable reports and articles on complex topics.

In a report or an essay I can give a complete account of a topic based on research I have carried out, make a summary of the opinions of others, and give an account of detailed information and facts.

I can write a well structured review of a paper or a project giving reasons for my opinion.

I can write a critical review of cultural events (film, music, theatre, literature, radio, TV).

I can write summaries of factual texts and literary works.

I can write narratives about experiences in a clear, fluent style appropriate to the genre.

I can write clear, well structured complex letters in an appropriate style, for example an application or request, an offer to authorities, superiors or commerc

In a letter I can express myself in a consciously ironical, ambiguous and humorous way.

Appendix 4.1 Institute Portfolio

Below is the portfolio as given to students at the Language Institute. I have eliminated the Italian translation. When I obtained permission from the Institute for data collection I promised not disclose the name of the centre. I have made some minor alterations to the portfolio in order to maintain this promise.

Your Language Learning folder

We hope that you like this folder — it is yours and it is designed to help you keep track of your language learning and to make the most of your studies with us. We are here to help you make noticeable progress while enjoying your study programmes.

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The Common European Framework

All of our courses fit the Council of Europe's guidelines on language learning. This is useful for you because these levels are meaningful to employers, schools and universities. They also tie in with internationally recognised exams such as the Cambridge suite (First Certificate, CAE, Proficiency etc.)

The Common European Framework, which describes levels of all European languages, has been devised by the Council of Europe.

The aim of the Council of Europe is to promote awareness of a European cultural identity and to develop mutual understanding among people of different cultures. In this way it is like the xxxxxx — we're here to promote a better understanding of Britain. The Council of Europe has introduced the European Language Portfolio to help learners of all European languages. We, at xxxxxxxx, believe that this is a valuable resource and have adapted the European portfolio to suit the way in which you learn with us in Italy.

1. When do you use English?

Here are some ideas – think about when you use English and which things you would like to do better. Add some of your own ideas and discuss these with your teacher and your classmates.

When do you use English?	often	sometimes	never	I would like to do this more often
I meet and talk to people who speak English				
I use English in my job				
I read books in English				
I read English newspapers & magazines				
I write e-mails/letters/ postcards in English				
I watch films at the cinema in English				
I use the Internet and look at English websites				
I have to study some subjects in English at school and university				
I have English-speaking friends I see regularly				

I speak English on holidays				
I chat with friends on the Internet in English				

1.1 What can you expect to do in class?

Which language learning activities do you like to do in class? Discuss with your class mates.

Activity	Done	Enjoyable	Not enjoyable	Comments
a) speaking to my classmates in pairs or groups in English				
b) doing roleplays and drama activities in pairs or groups				
c) making presentations to the class				
d) listening to songs in English				
e) watching video clips in English				
f) reading articles from books, magazines and newspapers				
g) writing letters, articles or short stories				
h) playing language games				
i) studying grammar rules				
j) doing project work e.g. making a class magazine or researching a topic of interest				
k) using CD-Roms or the Internet				
l)				

1.2 How do you like to be assessed?

Assessment To find out how my English is progressing, I would like...				
Activities	Done	Useful	Not useful	Comments
a) the teacher to correct all my oral mistakes in class				
b) my classmates to correct my oral mistakes				
c) to have regular written tests in class				
d) the teacher to correct my work				
e) to correct my homework myself				
f) to talk to the teacher about my work				
g)				
h)				

1.3 How do you like to learn outside of the class?

Out of class To improve my English out of class, I am going to..	Yes/no	Date	Date	Date	Date
a) read books or magazines in English					
b) listen to songs in English and read the lyrics					
c) watch TV programmes, DVDs or videos in English					
d) go to the cinema and watch a film in English					
e) use English on the Internet					
f) study from grammar and vocabulary from self-study books					
g) do homework regularly					
h)					
i)					
j)					

2. What you can expect from classes

Our aim in all our classes is to help you use English more effectively. We help you learn grammar and vocabulary, as these are the building blocks of language. However, this alone won't help you to communicate. We aim to give you as many opportunities as possible to use the language to help you speak more fluently.

Some students say that they want all their mistakes corrected and other say that they don't want any correction. They just want to speak. The most helpful thing that your teacher can do is to correct the important mistakes and help you understand how to improve.

As well as speaking we also work on your reading, writing and listening skills. Good communication relies on being able to understand what is being said to you. Therefore we help you to develop your ability to understand everyday speech. Reading and writing are also good ways of revising language and extending the range of your vocabulary. For almost all our courses the syllabus and Learning Aims are based around a course book. Your teachers will use this a lot, but to make the course more interesting for you your teacher will include other materials and exercises. Don't worry if you don't use all of the book — your teacher will cover all the syllabus and the Learning Aims.

We use a variety of teaching techniques — such as role-plays, quizzes, discussion and games. We hope these make your lessons more enjoyable, but these activities also have a language learning point. Our teachers will explain why they are doing an activity in class: we want you to understand why we teach you in a certain way.

Homework

Your teacher will give you a piece of homework every week. These are practical tasks such as reading an article or writing a letter. To make good progress you need to study outside the class as well.

3. Language levels

Where are you now?

Here are the language levels that relate to our courses. These are Council of Europe levels and are being used by more and more schools, universities and employers.

What level do you think you are? Read the statements. The language placement test that we have given you has put you in a class at one of these levels.

The time and number of study hours it takes to get from one level to the next varies. For example, to get from advanced C1 to very advanced C2 usually takes students two courses, whereas most students can get from A2 to B1 after one course

Council of Europe levels		
User Basic	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.
	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently-used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
User Independent	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
User Proficient	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.

4. The tools for the job

4.1 Course Learning Aims

Your teacher will give you a set of Learning Aims for your course. These Learning Aims are linked to “can do” statements that are included in the Common European Framework.

For example: “I can ask for things in a polite way using the correct grammar and understand the answer.” To be able to do this you will study the grammar of question words, the word order, use of modal auxiliary verbs (can, may, could) and practise this language in situations — such as in a restaurant, pub or office.

4.2 Your course book

We have chosen what we think are the best published course books because they give a language syllabus that fits into the course Learning Aims. You need to buy the course book and workbook at the beginning of the course.

4.3 A dictionary

You should have a good monolingual or bilingual dictionary and bring it to lessons.

4.4 Extra study

You need to study a minimum of 1 hour extra per week in order to complete the work on the syllabus. We will provide you with all the resources and facilities that you need to do this.

1 You can borrow books, cassettes and videos

2 Global Village — you are a member of an on-line worldwide club. Talk to students from anywhere in the world. It’s free and it’s fun

3 Our free website

4 You can use additional multimedia resources and study plans

5 Seminars and workshops

5. How to measure your progress

It is important to measure the progress that you are making. This will help you recognise your strengths and the areas you need to work on.

5.1 Assessed tasks

You and your teacher can use some homework exercises to assess how well you are doing. It is a good idea to keep copies of written homework that has been marked and returned to you. You can then see where you made mistakes and learn from them. Keep your written homework in your box file” - that’s what it’s for!

5.2 Progress

You will do a short test at the end of the course. Your teacher will give you feedback. It is good to know how accurate you are but remember a test is only one way to assess your progress.

5.3 Reviewing the Learning Aims

Your teacher will remind you of the Learning Aims during the course. You should be able to tick off (✓) things from the list that you can do or can do better than before in English.

5.4 Recommended next level

Most students cannot reach their desired level from one course — learning a language takes a long time. Towards the end of your course your teacher will recommend the next level for you. There should be no surprises if you have been monitoring your progress at regular intervals during the course.

6. Learner Training Activities

We hope that your classes with us will help you to make real progress in your English. However, you will learn best if you develop a set of strategies that you can employ inside and outside the classroom to make your language learning more effective. Here are a few ideas to help you approach the different English language skills you will need.

6.1 Speaking

You could set up chat groups with classmates, where you can meet and talk about things in English. Or if you have a friend or colleague who is also learning, you can arrange a certain time of day when you only speak English. Try to use the xxxxxx as an English Speaking Zone”, where you speak English to everyone you meet (outside the classroom as well as in it).

6.2 Reading

If you are not a natural “bookworm”, it is very important that you keep motivated in your reading. Vary the topics and the types of reading you do. Read about things that interest you personally. There are lots of magazines and newspapers available, and the internet is full of things to read. You can also choose a ‘graded reader’ at your level.

One important approach when reading is not to get stuck if there is a word or phrase you don’t understand. Your objective should be to understand the text generally. You can highlight or underline words you don’t understand and check them in a dictionary later.

6.3 Listening

Similar to reading, your objectives should be clear when you listen to something. You don’t have to understand every word. just the general meaning There are several sources of authentic listening in English. Films and TV with subtitles are useful, and learning the words to your favourite song is very motivating. Find out your local frequency for the BBC World Service radio. Try to make sure you listen to a variety of accents (for example British and American English).

There are also things other than practice that will help improve your listening. Learning a lot of vocabulary gives you an increased chance of understanding more. Also make sure you check the pronunciation of any new words.

6.4 Writing

Make writing a habit instead of just something you do for exams. You don’t have to write long essays each time~ Keep a little diary so that you’re writing a little on a regular basis. Always plan your writing. A few minutes thinking about and planning a piece of writing has a very positive effect on the finished product. Use the teacher’s corrections to analyse your mistakes and guide you to the areas where you need extra practice.

6.5 Pronunciation

Appendix 4.2 Learning Aims

Below are the learning aims for A2. These were created by the Director of Studies at the centre. Some are taken from approved Council of Europe sources whilst others were based on the coursebook. There are three boxes beside each learning aim and students were asked to put a tick in the appropriate box based on a self-assessment.

	I can do this very well	I can do this okay	I need to study this more
Spoken Interaction			
I can keep up with most of an animated conversation between native speakers.			
I can generally use the language fluently, accurately and effectively on a range of general, professional or academic topics.			
I can use language flexibly and effectively for social purposes.			
I can generally express my ideas and opinions clearly and precisely, and can present and respond to lines of reasoning convincingly.			
Spoken production			
I can give clear, detailed descriptions of fairly complex subjects.			
I can orally summarise long demanding texts, in a degree of detail.			
I can give a description or account of something, developing particular points and concluding appropriately.			
I can give a presentation on a subject in my fields of personal or professional interest, departing when necessary from the prepared text.			
Listening			
I can follow extended speech even when it is not clearly structured.			
I can understand a range of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms, appreciating shifts in style and register.			

I can usually extract some specific information from even poor quality, audibly distorted public announcements, e.g. in a station, sports stadium etc.			
I can mostly understand complex technical information, such as operating instructions, specifications for familiar products and services.			
I can generally understand lectures, talks and reports in my field of professional or academic interest.			
I can with some effort understand films which contain some slang and idiomatic usage.			
Writing			
I can express myself in writing on a limited range of general or professional topics in a clear and user-friendly manner.			
I can present a topic in a clear and well-structured way, highlighting the most important points, for example in a composition or a report.			
I can present points of view in a comment on a topic or an event, underlining the main ideas.			
I can put together information from a limited range of different sources and relate it in a coherent summary.			
I can give a reasonably detailed description of experiences, feelings and events in a personal letter.			
I can write letters, for example to complain or to take a stand in favour of or against something, in an a reasonably appropriate formal style.			
I can write texts which show a reasonably high degree of grammatical correctness and vary my vocabulary and style according to the addressee, the kind of text and the topic.			
I can usually select a style appropriate to the reader in mind.			
Reading			
I can generally understand reasonably long demanding texts and summarise them orally.			
I can read reasonably complex reports, analyses and commentaries where opinions, viewpoints are discussed.			
I can usually extract information, ideas and opinions from specialised texts in my own field.			

I can usually extract information, ideas and opinions from specialised texts in my own field.			
I can understand complex instructions, for example for the use of a new piece of equipment, even if these are not related to my job or field of interest, provided I have enough time to reread them more than once.			
I can read almost any correspondence with occasional use of a dictionary.			
I can read most contemporary literary texts with only a little difficulty.			
I can go beyond the concrete plot of a narrative and attempt to grasp implicit meanings, ideas and connections.			
I can recognise the social, political or historical background of a literary work to a limited degree.			

Appendix 4.3 Learning Aims lesson

Below is an example is an example of a Learning Aims lesson. The writers were instructed to take a learning aim and to think of a situation to which it was applicable. To facilitate this process the writers were asked to write a sample dialogue. The sample dialogue was never seen by the students and served to only to help the lesson writers to understand the grammar and lexis needed for the students to achieve a learning aim. Once the dialogue had been written, the writers analysed the sample and identified key grammatical and lexical points. These were recorded in the language and language work sections of the lesson plans. The lessons started with the task/frame. The purpose of this section of lesson was to introduce the topic to the students and to activate lexical schemata. This lesson stage also focussed on the necessary grammatical structures. The second stage of the lesson (Activate) was a task for students to complete. The final stage of the lesson (Report) gave the students the opportunity for the students to demonstrate that they had successfully completed the task. Four weeks after the first learning aim lesson the teachers used the follow up lesson. The purpose of the learning aim review lesson was to consolidate previous learning and to provide students with concrete examples of achieving learning aims and this ensured the students had sufficient evidence for their self-assessments.

Spoken Interaction

SI2 I can use the language fluently, accurately and effectively on a wide range of general, professional

Context 1

Talking about education in schools and universities

Sample dialogue

Do you think you got a good education at school?
 Lord no! It was all heads down and no real input from the teacher.
 I had a good History teacher. She taught us research skills and how to study autonomously.
 That was good. I bet that stood to you afterwards.
 Yes, it was invaluable when I started University. I would have been at sea.
 I know. It took me ages to get around the system when I started.
 What about University. What was that like?
 Well my Fresher year was awful. I didn't like the subjects I had chosen.
 I know what you mean. I think you're too young when you leave school.
 You need a gap year to mature a bit and be more informed about decisions.
 You know they teach you to drive in school in Canada. It's compulsory.
 Now that's what I call getting an education! that's what you need in life.

Language

Past narrative tense
 Passives
 Language association
 Phrasal verbs
 Wishes, regrets

Task / Frame

Brain storm on a spidergram words associated with
 (a) school and (b) University

Working alone, make notes on positive and negative experiences you had in both places.

Try to think of ways it could have been better or

Language work

I was taught in / by
 The methodology
 In those days..
 The ethos of my u
 It was expected of
 On the whole..
 It didn't do me any
 It did untold harm.
 What's needed is.

worse.

My school was a c
My school taught t
I did nothing Uni b

Activate

Find a partner and ask them to tell you about their experiences in both institutions.

Listen carefully and try to find a common experience in your life.

Make a note of similar experiences to report back to class.

Report

Do a quick class survey to find out how many people had a generally positive experience or a negative one.

x Make suggestions about preventing the bad experiences in the future.

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This is an example of a follow up learning aims lesson.

Spoken Interaction

SI2 I can use the language fluently, accurately and effectively on a wide range of general, professional

Context 3

Talking about reality TV

Sample dialogue

What do you think of all these fly on the wall, reality things on TV?

Well, it shows just how low the level of entertainment has got, I think.

The lowest common denominator. That kind of thing?

Mmm. Even people you would think know better are taking part.

Yes, A friend of mine wants to go on "Make a Million" because he feels that the end justifies the means.

You mean he would demean himself in order to make a lot of cash.

He says it wouldn't matter after he was a millionaire what anyone thinks.

I can see his point in a way. Are we being snobbish about this?

Well after all it is just entertainment. A way of relaxing and unwinding.

Yes, I know. But you can unwind without turning your brain to mush.

Ah. Bring back candlelight reading sessions and oral story telling by the fire.

Something like that, I suppose. Why don't we have the literary channel

Oh the "Edutainment " channel. You'd be top of the ratings!

Task / Frame

You are asked to take part in one of these TV shows:

A reconstruction of an historical event or era

A money making quiz show

An endurance programme where you run around and get muddy and lost.

1 Find someone else who wants to choose the same show.

2 Work together making a plan of the show. What happens? What do the contestants have to do? What is the goal or reward.

3 What type of person would like this show (a) as a viewer, (b) as a contestant?

Language

Verb patterns: ger

Phrases with prep

Expressing points

Conditionals

Phrases related to

Language work

To dream of doing

To dare to....

A sense of sth

a need to do sth /

for...

Fly on the wall doc

Docudrama

Reality shows

Historical reconstru

What would you d

Activate

How would you co
Would you descri

You are going to interview potential candidates for your show.
Prepare some questions to ask them to find a suitable contestant.
Example: Their hobbies, their ambitions, their past experience, fitness.

Report

Book Link (Cuttir

Set up an interview and find people for your show.
Report to the class who is the most suitable.

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5 = totally agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neither agree or disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = totally disagree.

1. I study because I have an exam.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

2. Only an exam shows what you know.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

3. There are no alternatives to exams.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

4. A written test shows your views points.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

5. It is totally useless to judge yourself.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

6. The exam is just an intermediate step you have to do to reach your goal.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

Appendix 4.4 Attitude survey

Below is a copy of the attitude survey used at Stage 1 of data collection. I have omitted the accompanying letter as included several references to the name of the Language Institute.

Please read the following statements. Tick the number which best represents your level of disagreement.

5 = totally agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neither agree or disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = totally disagree.

1. I study because I have an exam.

Totally disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree 4	Totally agree 5
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2. Only an exam shows what you know.

Totally disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree 4	Totally agree 5
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3. There are no alternatives to exams.

Totally disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree 4	Totally agree 5
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4. A written test shows your weak points.

Totally disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree 4	Totally agree 5
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5. It is totally useless to judge yourself.

Totally disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree 4	Totally agree 5
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6. The exam is just an intermediate step you have to do to reach your goal.

Totally disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree 4	Totally agree 5
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7. If you want to test your level of English you just have to go to London and see if your level is good or not.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

8. You can understand your level of English by watching a film and checking whether or not you understand.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

9. There are no alternatives to traditional exams.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

10. Speaking with a native-speaker of English is a way to see your weak areas.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

11. Exams are a challenge.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

12. You cannot test yourself because you are always too generous with yourself.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

13. Exams are necessary.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

14. The teacher is supposed to judge you.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

15. I cannot give myself a mark because I do not know what is the best answer.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

16. If I write or say something I think it is correct.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

17. I cannot see where my own mistakes are.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

18. Five minutes after the exam you forget everything you have studied.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

19. When things become easier you know you have made progress.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

20. Without a mark there is no motivation.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

21. Assessment is someone who tells us the path we should follow to get our goal.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

22. When you do a task you do not have a feeling of how well or badly you wrote it.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

23. In exams your mark depends on luck.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

24. You can check yourself by listening to others.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

25. Assessment has always been carried out using exams so they are the best method.

Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

Appendix 4. SPSS tables

Below are all the statements from the attitude survey with Tables to indicate the responses to each.

I study because I have an exam

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	totally disagree	5	27,8	27,8	27,8
	disagree	5	27,8	27,8	55,6
	neither agree nor disagree	5	27,8	27,8	83,3
	agree	1	5,6	5,6	88,9
	totally agree	2	11,1	11,1	100,0
	Total	18	100,0	100,0	

Only an exam shows what you know

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	totally disagree	2	11,1	11,1	11,1
	disagree	12	66,7	66,7	77,8
	neither agree nor disagree	3	16,7	16,7	94,4
	agree	1	5,6	5,6	100,0
	Total	18	100,0	100,0	

There are no alternatives to exams

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	totally disagree	1	5,6	5,9	5,9
	disagree	7	38,9	41,2	47,1
	neither agree nor disagree	5	27,8	29,4	76,5
	agree	4	22,2	23,5	100,0
	Total	17	94,4	100,0	
Missing	999	1	5,6		
Total		18	100,0		

A written test shows your weak points

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	2	11,1	11,1	11,1
	neither agree nor disagree	4	22,2	22,2	33,3
	agree	12	66,7	66,7	100,0
	Total	18	100,0	100,0	

The exam is just an intermediate step you have to do to reach your goal

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	4	22,2	22,2	22,2
	agree	12	66,7	66,7	88,9
	totally agree	2	11,1	11,1	100,0
	Total	18	100,0	100,0	

It is useless to judge yourself

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	totally disagree	3	16,7	17,6	17,6
	disagree	6	33,3	35,3	52,9
	neither agree nor disagree	3	16,7	17,6	70,6
	agree	3	16,7	17,6	88,2
	totally agree	2	11,1	11,8	100,0
	Total	17	94,4	100,0	
Missing	999	1	5,6		
Total		18	100,0		

The exam is just an intermediate step you have to do to reach your goal

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	4	22,2	22,2	22,2
	agree	12	66,7	66,7	88,9
	totally agree	2	11,1	11,1	100,0
	Total	18	100,0	100,0	

If you want to test your level of English you just have to go to London and see if your level is good

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	totally disagree	3	16,7	16,7	16,7
	disagree	4	22,2	22,2	38,9
	neither agree nor disagree	9	50,0	50,0	88,9
	agree	2	11,1	11,1	100,0
	Total	18	100,0	100,0	

You can test your level of English by watching a film and checking whether or not you understand

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	1	5,6	5,6	5,6
	neither agree nor disagree	4	22,2	22,2	27,8
	agree	13	72,2	72,2	100,0
	Total	18	100,0	100,0	

There are no alternatives to traditional exams

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	6	33,3	33,3	33,3
	neither agree nor disagree	6	33,3	33,3	66,7
	agree	6	33,3	33,3	100,0
	Total	18	100,0	100,0	

Speaking with a native speaker of English is a way to see your weak areas

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	3	16,7	16,7	16,7
	neither agree nor disagree	1	5,6	5,6	22,2
	agree	11	61,1	61,1	83,3
	totally agree	3	16,7	16,7	100,0
	Total	18	100,0	100,0	

Exams are a challenge

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	neither agree nor disagree	5	27,8	27,8	27,8
	agree	10	55,6	55,6	83,3
	totally agree	3	16,7	16,7	100,0
	Total	18	100,0	100,0	

You cannot test yourself because you are always too generous with yourself

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	11	61,1	61,1	61,1
	neither agree nor disagree	3	16,7	16,7	77,8
	agree	3	16,7	16,7	94,4
	totally agree	1	5,6	5,6	100,0
	Total	18	100,0	100,0	

Exams are necessary

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	neither agree nor disagree	7	38,9	38,9	38,9
	agree	8	44,4	44,4	83,3
	totally agree	3	16,7	16,7	100,0
	Total	18	100,0	100,0	

The teacher is supposed to judge you

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	2	11,1	11,1	11,1
	neither agree nor disagree	2	11,1	11,1	22,2
	agree	11	61,1	61,1	83,3
	totally agree	3	16,7	16,7	100,0
	Total	18	100,0	100,0	

I cannot give myself a mark because I do not know what is the best answer

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	6	33,3	33,3	33,3
	neither agree nor disagree	5	27,8	27,8	61,1
	agree	7	38,9	38,9	100,0

Total	18	100,0	100,0
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If I write or say something I think it is correct

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	2	11,1	11,1	11,1
	neither agree nor disagree	13	72,2	72,2	83,3
	agree	3	16,7	16,7	100,0
	Total	18	100,0	100,0	

I cannot see where my own mistakes are

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	totally disagree	1	5,6	5,6	5,6
	disagree	7	38,9	38,9	44,4
	neither agree nor disagree	6	33,3	33,3	77,8
	agree	3	16,7	16,7	94,4
	totally agree	1	5,6	5,6	100,0
	Total	18	100,0	100,0	

Five minutes after the exam you forget everything you have studied

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	totally disagree	5	27,8	27,8	27,8
	disagree	7	38,9	38,9	66,7
	neither agree nor disagree	6	33,3	33,3	100,0
	Total	18	100,0	100,0	

When things become easier you know you have made progress

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	15	83,3	83,3	83,3
	totally agree	3	16,7	16,7	100,0
	Total	18	100,0	100,0	

Without a mark there is no motivation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	totally disagree	1	5,6	5,6	5,6
	disagree	5	27,8	27,8	33,3
	neither agree nor disagree	10	55,6	55,6	88,9

agree	2	11,1	11,1	100,0
Total	18	100,0	100,0	

Assessment someone who tells us path we should follow

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	disagree	3	16,7	16,7	16,7
	neither agree nor disagree	6	33,3	33,3	50,0
	agree	8	44,4	44,4	94,4
	totally agree	1	5,6	5,6	100,0
	Total	18	100,0	100,0	

When you do a task you do not have a feeling of how well or badly you wrote it

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	totally disagree	1	5,6	5,6	5,6
	disagree	5	27,8	27,8	33,3
	neither agree nor disagree	7	38,9	38,9	72,2
	agree	5	27,8	27,8	100,0
	Total	18	100,0	100,0	

In exams your mark depend on luck

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	totally disagree	2	11,1	11,1	11,1
	disagree	7	38,9	38,9	50,0
	neither agree nor disagree	9	50,0	50,0	100,0
	Total	18	100,0	100,0	

You can check yourself by listening to others

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	totally disagree	1	5,6	5,6	5,6
	neither agree nor disagree	6	33,3	33,3	38,9
	agree	11	61,1	61,1	100,0
	Total	18	100,0	100,0	

Assessment has always been carried out using exams so they are the best method

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	totally disagree	1	5,6	5,6	5,6
	disagree	2	11,1	11,1	16,7
	neither agree nor disagree	12	66,7	66,7	83,3
	agree	2	11,1	11,1	94,4
	totally agree	1	5,6	5,6	100,0
	Total	18	100,0	100,0	

Appendix 4.6 Sample essays

Two essays are included below. The originals were handwritten. In order to protect the anonymity of the participants I typed the essays.

C3.5

- 1. One of the most famous comedies written by the great Italian playwright Eduardo De Filippo has a title that goes like this: “Exams Never End”. Well, I think the old master was right; not only do the exams never end throughout your whole life, but they’re necessary too, under many aspects. Now let me try and make my point clear.**
- 2. From the very first moment in which you set foot in the world, you have to pass an exam. That’s when they start patting your back, and if you don’t start crying in a couple of seconds, then you haven’t passed the exam and you’re going to have some problems. This doesn’t mean that if you fail to pass the exam your life is finished (millions of babies failed to cry and survived happily) but only that probably you’ll have to pass other exams in the future. That’s what exams are made for: they test your skill under tight and sometimes severe conditions, and see how you manage to make it. It maybe difficult and sometimes seemingly cruel, but every time you pass an exam you fell stronger and more confident, as anyone who faces a challenge and wins can tell you.**
- 3. The important thing is that the exam must be suitable for the candidate; I mean, asking a ten-year-old school boy to explain Einstein’s theory of relativity is totally useless, like asking a politician to make plausible promises during his electoral campaign (and quite often also afterwards). Apart from these extreme cases, I think exams are one of the thrills of life, and I love them!**

C4.10

- 1. I’ll limit this discussion to my experience as both teacher and student, rather than discussing the related literature, of which I have only limited knowledge. To help set the scene. I’ll also add that I’ve been a teacher and/or a teaching assistant in classes of several disciplines within the computer science field for the last five years, so my view of the issue is somewhat biased by the type of disciplines I’m more familiar with.**
- 2. First, I’ll describe my experience of exams and evaluation from a discipline-independent point of view – that is, not specifically looking at language courses. Then, I’ll give my opinions of learning languages and evaluating proficiency in foreign languages.**
- 3. In general, exams are needed to assess progress in a generic field of study. In the university system, exams not only allow assessment of progress, but also have a role as tools of selection and certification.**
- 4. In this respect, exams do not appear to be easily replaced by other forms of evaluation. However, I’d consider different kinds of assessment systems individually, since they have different pros and cons, and some of them can approximate self-evaluation to some extent.**
- 5. Written exams – this is the traditional way, part one. Quick and cost-effective, it burdens the examiner more than the student. It is good for most technical disciplines, since it stresses reasoning and planning rather than wit or quickness of mind. It doesn’t stress interpersonal skills, which is another plus in some cases. It is also the way to go with mass exams – you simply cannot do oral**

- exams when the numbers of examinees is in the hundreds. Unfortunately, it is often easy to cheat.
6. Oral exams – This is the second part of the traditional way of performing exams, at least in Italy. It has some good points, but several weaknesses as well: it is less objective than a written test, since questions may vary widely in the level of difficulty, and it's also too slow to allow the examiner to check every single part of the subject – examiners will usually end up sampling the examinee's knowledge. It is also too slow to be applied effectively for large classes. However, it allows the examiner to get a more complete picture of the examinee, e.g. understanding the reasons for failure. It, therefore, allows the examiner to tailor the exam to each examinee, thereby helping in highlighting the strengths or weaknesses in the examinee's knowledge and understanding, as well as some general qualities such as quickness of mind, adaptability, interpersonal skills. Last but not least, it is much more difficult to cheat in an oral exam, so it is often employed just to confirm the results of a more thorough written exam.
 7. Laboratory exam – is often only relevant to technical disciplines – in computer science, it is often done with computer support, asking examinees to create a program in a realistic environment. It is an advanced version of the written exam, and has the same strengths and weaknesses. However, it allows more evaluation than theoretical knowledge, and (for what it's worth) it also allows us to check the skills of the examinee with specific tools. On the other hand, it is more costly, since it requires laboratories. A good replacement for project work in foundation courses with less than two hundred but more than fifty students.
 8. Project + presentation – one of the few ways to have people learn something while earning their marks. It's a well rounded mix of technical skills, evaluation skills and presentation skills. Good for advanced classes – where cheating would cost you too much and where the number of students is low – which allows a careful review of each project.
 9. Self-evaluation of exams is chiefly considered for two purposes: first, reducing the time required to check and mark loads of written tests; second, to provide ways for students to check their knowledge as part of the learning process. Its applicability is strongly dependent on the specific disciplines – in some cases, an automatic solution can be provided (e.g. testing the ability of primary school children to perform divisions); in other cases, it is simply impossible (e.g. problems that are not machine-solvable, such as determining whether a given computer program will correctly terminate regardless of the input). It may be possible for the examiner/teacher to provide solutions when automatic solutions are not available, but this reduces the usefulness (limited number of problems can be given).
 10. The study of foreign languages has a set of characteristics that make it quite different from most other disciplines: for one, it has immediate possibilities of self-evaluation that are usually not available for other disciplines – one can evaluate his skill in a language by his ability to understand books, articles, movies or song lyrics.
 11. In my experience, there are two very different sets of skills one can have in a foreign language, those concerning writing and comprehension of written text, and those concerning speaking and listening. I will therefore discuss them individually.
 12. Reading/Writing/Vocabulary skills – these are easier to check, both in examination and in self-evaluation: a learner clearly perceives his ability to

- understand or enjoy a text, as well as the (hopefully decreasing) difficulty in composing a text – with or without support (e.g. reading with occasional help from translated text, or writing with the help of a dictionary). In examinations, these skills can be verified with the standard techniques (written exam, projects).
13. Speaking/listening skills – are more elusive – a conversation or speech usually leaves little room for “background” thought – it is often difficult to perform a rational analysis of what you are saying while you are speaking! In exams, it is quite difficult (I daresay impossible) to verify levels of skill in speaking without an oral exam , which as I said before takes longer than other forms of testing. Listening can be easier to check as dictation and listening labs can help.
 14. Evaluating progress in language study is in my opinion quite different from testing in other contexts. While opportunities for self-evaluation are more common, evaluation on the part of a teacher can be more difficult, especially on a large scale.
 15. However, what is more important in judging whether exams should be replaced with self-evaluation procedures is a combination of conditions, including:
 16. Chiefly, the purpose of the assessment: is it for the student alone? This is not always true – sometimes (actually, most of the times, in my experience) the examination also has other goals, such as certification or ranking, or simply choosing the right class for next year. Of course, when the only purpose is to have the student understand his level of progress, it is best accomplished by self-evaluation, which may give a deeper and finer-grained understanding of the progress, rather than by external examination.
 17. Ability (and motivation) of the student to assess his own progress: this is somewhat limited in younger learners, while it may be higher in people pursuing “lifelong education”. In my experience, students often have a clear idea of whether they’re getting good at something or not, but not necessarily an equally good perception of why they do/do not progress (especially in the do not case).

Appendix 4.7 Sample transcript

Provided below is an extract from a transcript of a group interview. The interview was conducted at Stage 3 of data collection. It illustrates discussion around the learning aims which focus on the 4 language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking.

FG:3.2

1. F for the first one taking part in conversations with native speakers I think I can do this quite ok but not so well I think to improve my listening but I think I'm ok well not so bad at last, no at last no least
2. E I think everything is ok for the most part I think I am not so confident to say I can do this very well but I can do it ok.
3. C I put I can do this ok for the last two topics for the first one I put I need to work on this more because in the text it says effortlessly and sometimes I miss some words or I don't know exactly how to express what I want
4. F I think it doesn't mean that you can speak as a native speaker I think we both can maintain a conversation without too much effort: I hope more than many other people at least. As for the following I put I have to work more on present ideas and viewpoints, differentiating them and speaking many ways so everyone can understand me sometimes I have the feeling that when I am speaking English someone doesn't understand me because I am not able to express myself so well that's the problem for me to find a way to change words to explain in a different
5. E Yes I agree I sometimes have problems looking for a similar word or a different way to express the same idea but I think I can express my idea maybe not so easy but maybe it is not so easy I think the problem is based on a lack on in the language but maybe the people I have met have been kind because they seem to understand what I mean.
6. C was anything bad then?
7. E I put I can't do this very well because one of the main problem I find for example practising for the exam one of the main problem I found was to get used to the accent of the speaker. For example I found quite a lot of problems with Australian speaker. I found it quite different from other accents.
8. F I had some problems with the public announcements like at railway stations. You cannot listen so good
9. Inaudible
10. C for example I find when I need to understand if I am listening to someone or if I am reading something I find it easier than if I have to express myself. I think for example that writing is more difficult than reading. For example if there is a prepared speech to read or an article. I can construct sentences but maybe they don't say exactly what I mean
11. F In reading I put I can mainly or mostly read and understand a text quite easily more easily than speaking
12. E This might seem strange but I put I can do this very well on the part can understand technical or scientific texts because in some cases it was easier to understand a technical text than one which describes a language or something like that
13. F It depends if you know the language they are describing

14. J I think it depends on the matter because if it is something you know really well then you are able to understand it really well if not then you can just get an idea of it
15. C I wasn't really thinking of languages it is just more straightforward than this or this but maybe it is in the structure of the sentence or which is more direct
16. F I think the main problem for me with a literary text for example is if the text was written some centuries ago I understood better the present text. I can understand better manuals than literary texts but they are two different things.
17. E For me I was talking with literary words or formal words so probably I found it easier
18. F Even if I read a medicine book anyway I can't understand it because I don't know anything about it not for the English. In the same way opposite on the other hand I can read a literary text because it is general so that's why I don't find so many differences between literary, manuals and formal writings because literary you can understand if it communicates if it is not Shakespeare while manuals or a particular field you can understand if you know something about it. The writing is a weak point for me mostly. Sometimes I can write a well-structured report or something like that but it takes me so long, so much time. For example, in the exam I don't know how will I do because it will be too much. I need much time to write down something
19. E but also for the structure of the text
20. F yes in general yes also to remember how I must write a particular task an article or a report and so on. So in the end, I can not so well but more than that I don't know but in the exam you don't always have the chance
21. E For me I think the kind of writing that I can do the best is the report or some kind of writing where you don't have to look for an idea or something you that I know for example something you I have studied or maybe that I have come across in research. I find that easier than to write about something I don't know even the informal ones. I think one of the areas that I need to work on is for example a letter such as the last one a letter in which I can express myself in a colloquial and humorous way. Also maybe in the reading part I cannot appreciate the stylistic figure, the idioms, the informal speech
22. F yes this type of style ironical. If you don't like it, it is hard to express yourself, in this case and in other cases
23. E Yes I also think that the rhythm and structure of the writing depends on the cultural base and maybe if you are not in touch with the reality of the writer you can't appreciate this
24. F you are right exactly
25. E so maybe if you are not British you can't appreciate that kind of humour in writing
26. F yes but if you start liking it or you start reading it at first sight you understand some features then you can read it greatly and having fun in some way and the same is for writing. While if you don't like this style, it could be ironic or humorous or something else but if you don't like it doesn't matter
27. C I think for me the biggest problem is the informal letter because I don't know many colloquial expressions for me it's not hard to write a formal letter
28. E Also apart from this course the letters I write in English are formal. They are to professors.
29. C yes me too I only write serious letters so I don't find it easy to remember informal expressions. I only use English for business and not to relax.

Sometimes I e-mail native-speakers and they could be a source of this type of expression

30. F I have been reading some texts recently, on-line, for example and I found many expressions that I really only understood after a while it was totally informal way of speaking it was fun but it was difficult because I am used like you to read formal things like scientific articles
 31. C Sometimes it can be difficult to find the correspondent in Italian because of the cultural aspect
 32. F So the more formal way of speaking is more universal
 33. T how do you make your decisions? We looked at these at the beginning of the course, we looked at them in December, we have looked at them now at the end of the course, how do you make the decision I can do this well? Or I need to work on this more?
 34. J Based on what we are feeling inside when we are speaking and writing and also the marks we are getting on the exercises
 35. F for me it is the results of some exercises especially those books (pointing to some exam practice books) and for example the listening we had the feeling that all of us in some way were good at. Instead I had a bad feeling about the writing mostly because it can be said that I never achieved. I didn't write a few of them but I didn't achieve the results so much that I achieved in other parts such as reading
 36. T and do you think that this self-assessment that we have done through the year has been helpful?
 37. E for example in the exam it is of course assessed if you know English but some particular abilities are assessed for example in the reading part when you read to scan the text for information it is of course the problem to understand the information but also the skill of looking for information which is a general skill which you might also need in Italian. I think that for example I am preparing for the exam and I am focussing first on the words, trying to understand what I need to do for the exam. So maybe this piece of paper is useful because there are specific abilities. It is not learning in a general sense
 38. F Yes these are more general, for example in the exam you have to fill in the gaps but these refer to real life. So there are different kinds of exercise
 39. T Do you think they have made the course better?
- J yeah because they have helped us to understand more things

Appendix 4.8 Sample highlighted lesson transcript

Below is an extract of the lesson transcript used for the stimulated recall interview with T1. The parts in highlighted in yellow are incidents which I wished to discuss with the teacher. She was given this before the interview and also had the opportunity to highlight any parts which she wished to discuss.

9 March 2005

8.00-9.20

8 students present

B2 level course – focussing on preparation for Cambridge ESOL First Certificate

8.00 – warming up- students arriving

8.01 – takes register

8.02 - T asks about strike – gives back homework and takes in late homework – general chit chat between teacher and students and between students

8.03 – T asks students if they are ready – they reply yes – T shows students an OHP with statements about how to read. The statements are revealed one at a time. The students call out if the statements are true or false and discuss why.

T states the reading statements: “have been prepared for your enjoyment!” The group reacts well to this theatrical and confidential expression. Teacher goes on to say that: “here are the reading strategies I promised you”

“Don’t need to understand everything to get the general meaning” students reply true and this is accepted by the teacher.

“I want to understand every word” students are not able to agree a common reply.

Teacher leaves the situation ambiguous saying that it depends on the student but if they do try to understand every word they may panic when they can’t. Some students seem upset by lack of straight and clear answer.

T presses on to next statement which is about using a dictionary. Students give an answer which is excepted by the teacher. The justification for the answer is that dictionaries are not permitted in the exam.

The next statement is concerned with only reading things you are interested in. The teacher accepts true as an answer but reminds them that sometimes you have to read things because they are useful.

T pushes on to next statement which is concerned with not reading every single word the first time you read. The negative in the statement confuses some students and they are not sure if they should reply true or false.

The teacher resolves the doubts and moves on to the next statement which states that before reading the text the students should read the questions.

The next statement is concerned with predicting the answers. The students all say false but the teacher imposes a true answer on the group. Not all students are convinced by this.

8.07 – teacher writes on the board strategies: SKIMMING, DEDUCING MEANING, READING FOR DETAIL. The T elicits how to do them and what they involve.

Skim – pick up important points really fast

Deduce – infer meaning from context

Reading for detail – look for detail not fast

T ask which comes first and gets the answer skimming. The correct answer gains the response from the T of “good children”

8.10 - T distributes hand out which students have to read and label the explanations with name of a strategy.

T conducts feedback by pointing to the sheet.

8.11 – T instructs the students to work in three teams. This reflects how the students have sat themselves at three different tables. The teams have to write the names of as many actors as possible who have played James Bond. The teacher does not monitor but the teams get on the activity anyway.

8.14 – T stops the discussion by shouting stop and leads feedback.

A student arrives late but sits down quickly and begins to work with other students. All the students seem to be happy to work with each other.

8.15 – T elicits what they know about James Bond.

8.17 – T distributes a hand out on which is written the key words from the article which they are going to read. The students have to complete the text from the key words. The students seem very unsure about how to approach the task. Many students ask for clarification. The students seem to be engaged once they have established what the task involves. Students ask for teacher's approval very frequently, after having written only one or two words.

One pair is not collaborating together. T makes the comment that they must be working by telepathy.

Some students try to change the form of the given words and they are told by the teacher to stop being creative. T interrupts students to deal with a vocabulary problem. She asks if they know what dawn means. One student supplies the answer. T gives a time limit till the end of the activity. One student (Alice) does not seem to have understood the purpose of the activity. She is treating it like a gap-fill grammar exercise. Several times the teacher reprimands her in a jokey way telling to stop focussing on grammar.

Appendix 4.9 Sample fieldnotes Session summary sheet

Below is a page of my notebook. This shows how I made notes during lesson observations. My thoughts collected and to consider the next stage of data collection. This sheet is taken from Stage 1 data collection.

Session summary sheet 2

Who was involved?

4 groups of CAE level classes wrote compositions on assessment and alternatives to exams. I, as teacher, set this homework and marked it. The students were asked to write this composition at the end of lesson where assessment and exams were discussed.

What issues were covered?

The strain imposed by exams and the stress they provoke. Exams have a strong motivational effect. Throughout our lives we are tested so we should accept it and not complain. School exams are a preparation for the real world. Exams also promote self-awareness and self-knowledge. Exams add excitement to students' lives without which they would find life and studying boring. All subjects can be assessed by exams, from poetry to engineering. So-called alternative forms of assessment such as self-assessment are only really exams in disguise. Exams are a necessary part of developing maturity. External evaluation is always more valid than self-evaluation. One proposed alternative was for students to award each other marks as they are the ones who really know the level of their classmates. Also this would have the positive effect of making students nicer to one another. Exams promote equality and democracy as family background is not important when taking an exam. Project work and other forms of assessment could mean more work than traditional exams. The power of exams lies in their reliability. Coursework rather than self-assessment was the most often proposed solution.

New Hypotheses suggested?

Students cannot conceive of any alternatives to exams.

The Italian education system has made totally exam fixated.

Exams are the best because they have lasted so long.

They are chauvinistic about their own systems and this pride does not let them consider alternatives.

The CEF didn't do any of its piloting in Italy.

If students really believe that exams are the best system who are we to tell them that self-assessment is better?

Why can't you have both? Why have students all plumped for the status quo? Why not SA during the year and an exam at the end?

Is it a case of we suffered so they should suffer too?

These are people from the top of the educational heap so perhaps it is not surprising that they are so pro-exam.

Implications for subsequent data collection

I got a good impression of students' opinions on the matter of assessment and evaluation. However, what people say and what people do aren't always the same thing. It is time to get into the classroom and see if there are any signs of autonomous behaviour.

Appendix 4.10 Example of a session summary sheet

This is an example of a date session summary sheet. I used these to capture my thoughts on the data collected and to consider the next stage of data collection. This sheet is taken from Stage 1 data collection.

Session summary sheet 2

Who was involved?

4 groups of CAE level classes wrote compositions on assessment and alternatives to exams. I, as teacher, set this homework and marked it. The students were asked to write this composition at the end of lesson where assessment and exams were discussed.

What issues were covered?

The strain imposed by exams and the stress they provoke. Exams have a strong motivational effect. Throughout our lives we are tested so we should accept it and not complain. School exams are a preparation for the real world. Exams also promote self-awareness and self-knowledge. Exams add excitement to students' lives without which they would find life and studying boring. All subjects can be assessed by exams, from poetry to engineering. So-called alternative forms of assessment such as self-assessment are only really exams in disguise. Exams are a necessary part of developing maturity. External evaluation is always more valid than self-evaluation. One proposed alternative was for students to award each other marks as they are the ones who really know the level of their classmates. Also this would have the positive effect of making students nicer to one another. Exams promote equality and democracy as family background is not important when taking an exam. Project work and other forms of assessment could mean more work than traditional exams. The power of exams lies in their reliability. Coursework rather than self-assessment was the most often proposed solution.

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These are people from the top of the educational heap so perhaps it is not surprising that they are so pro-exam.

Implications for subsequent data collection

I got a good impression of students' opinions are on the matter of assessment and evaluation. However, what people say and what people do aren't always the same thing. It is time to get into the classroom and see if there are any signs of autonomous behaviour.

Again this is an exam class, data collection needs to be spread out so that it can be verified if this support for exams is due to the fact that they have chosen to do an exam course. It would be stupid to enrol for an exam course if you really hated exams.

asking him to do this and briefly outlining the procedure. The second document is the list of codes I supplied to P. The last document is an excerpt from the transcript with both sets of coding added. There is a high degree of consistency in the coding by P and by myself.

E-mail to P

Hi P

Thank you so much for agreeing to read and code some of my data. I really appreciate it.

Here's a little background to the transcript you are going to read. My research focussed on the implementation of the CEFR at a Language Institute in Italy. I conducted group interviews with students throughout the academic the year. The transcript I'm sending you is from an interview conducted at the end of the course. The interview was unstructured. During the interview the participants refer to learning aims. Learning aims was the name give by the institute to Can-do statements. I won't go into the story of why this decision was made but the transcript should make more sense if you bear in mind that a learning aim is, in fact, a Can-do statement.

I think the best approach would be to first read through the transcript to get a feel for the topic under discussion and then to have a look at the codes. Using those codes I'd like you to read the transcript and mark any parts you feel fit particular codes. Perhaps you could put your codes in the margins of the transcript.

If anything is unclear please do not hesitate to contact me. The excerpt is a little lengthy so please do as much as you can.

I look forward to seeing if our coding matches up.

So, once again, a massive big thank you!

Best wishes,

Suran

Codes

Hi

Below is a table with a list of codes and their meanings. In an effort to make the coding process a little quicker for you I've created a label for each code. I suggest putting the labels in the margins.

Appendix 4.11 Triangulation of coding

I asked a fellow student to code some of my data. The first document is an e-mail to P asking him to do this and briefly outlining the procedure. The second document is the list of codes I supplied to P. The last document is an excerpt from the transcript with both sets of coding added. There is a high degree of consistency in the coding by P and by myself.

E-mail to P

Hi P

Thank you so much for agreeing to read and code some of my data. I really appreciate it.

Here's a little background to the transcript you are going to read. My research focussed on the implementation of the CEFR at a Language Institute in Italy. I conducted group interviews with students throughout the academic the year. The transcript I'm sending you is from an interview conducted at the end of the course. The interview was unstructured. During the interview the participants refer to learning aims. Learning aims was the name give by the institute to Can-do statements. I won't go into the story of why this decision was made but the transcript should make more sense if you bear in mind that a learning aim is, in fact, a Can-do statement.

I think the best approach would be to first read through the transcript to get a feel for the topic under discussion and then to have a look at the codes. Using those codes I'd like you to read the transcript and mark any parts you feel fit particular codes. Perhaps you could put your codes in the margins of the transcript.

If anything is unclear please do not hesitate to contact me. The excerpt is a little lengthy so please do as much as you can.

I look forward to seeing if our coding matches up.

So, once again, a massive big thank you!

Best wishes,

Susan

Codes

Hi

Below is a table with a list of codes and their meanings. In an effort to make the coding process a little quicker for you I've created a label for each code. I suggest putting the labels in the margins.

Label	Code	Meaning
GS	Goal setting	Using self-assessment to set learning goals
PLE	Previous Learning Experiences	References to previous learning experiences and how they affect attitudes to self-assessment
QD	Quality of language descriptors	Comments about the quality of the Can-do statements/learning aims
SA	Self-assessment	Examples of self-assessment
A	Attribution	Attributing reasons for successes/failures with aspects of language learning
EA	External assessment	A participant expressing the need for external assessment
NS	Native speaker	References to native speakers of English
PF	Psychological factors	Psychological or personality traits and their effects on self-assessment
BSA	Benefits of self-assessment	The benefits of self-assessment for a learner of English

Excerpt of transcript with both sets of coding

My coding	Transcript	P's coding
SA	<p>6. P from my point of view I can't pretend to understand all native speakers at native speaker speed. It's really tough and it's like when an Italian speaks really fast it's very difficult even in your own language you can't understand everything. Sometimes I can't understand when two people from the south speak very quickly I have always had some problems with for example Massimo Troisi but you know it's not really a problem</p> <p>7. E you can't understand the dialect but I think with native speakers it's not the same</p> <p>8. P but if we put apart the dialect probably I can understand quite well even if they speak very fast I can understand</p> <p>9. E but this is meant for English not Italian</p> <p>10. P yeah but</p> <p>11. Laughter</p> <p>12. P so why are we talking about Italian?</p> <p>13. Inaudible</p> <p>14. V I can't understand the different accents and when I was Cardiff I couldn't follow the accent and once I read about an Australian man and was talking and it was very clear so if someone speaks in a good English I can understand but not</p>	<p>NS</p> <p>NS</p> <p>PLE</p>

<p>EA</p> <p>NS</p> <p>QD</p> <p>A</p> <p>SA</p> <p>SA</p>	<p>all the aspects of an accent. From Wales it is another way In my experience I would say that for example while watching a movie I need some minutes at the beginning to understand the accent, I would almost say the way to speak I need to tune and then it gets quite easier. The difficult part of understanding although is the slang expressions or idiomatic forms which are of course difficult you have to know them and that of course is the difficult part</p> <p>15. V if you listen to some people in London who speaks Cockney</p> <p>16. E you can understand it but you have to learn it</p> <p>17. V English first and then the characteristics of the different accents and also for the reading the difficulty is often related to the kind of text you have to read. Contemporary plain English is not so hard to understand but if you go to a literature text it is much more difficult to understand also because the constructions of the sentence's the syntax is very different</p> <p>18. E and we are not used to reading this kind of text so I think</p> <p>19. V but I think you have more time to reflect to read again</p> <p>20. E if you show a Dante's text to a foreigner then he can't stay all day long</p> <p>21. V not all day</p> <p>22. Inaudible I am reading now The Dubliners from Joyce and it's not so easy as I thought it's more difficult than a romance</p> <p>23. E if you read Bridget Jones for example it is absolutely to read that kind of text</p> <p>24. P for example in may case I don't read poetry in Italian so I'm not able to say if I can do it or not so whenever I start to read it I will be able to say I can do it poetry is probably another step for us also to classical writers probably</p> <p>25. T yeah obviously contemporary poetry would be easier than Tennyson</p> <p>26. V it's the same if you want to read Dante you have to learn Dante so for many others and what about the writing?</p> <p>27. E I think that it is easier the formal than the informal I use these kinds of words in my job for example and not like some messages to friends for example in informal way the biggest difficulty I find is to make a difference between formal and informal writing I tend to use always the same register. For me it is much more difficult to write informal than formal</p> <p>28. P for me there is no problem to write down in a way formal or informal I mean I have done all these types of writings during the course so I think that I can do it good, I mean not excellent but good: I am not able to write down something specific type but if I have to write down something about scientific topics for example about the brain I don't use I cannot use the appropriate language I mean it's too technical for me but otherwise I think that I've got a good chance</p> <p>29. D for this we have to thank our teacher I think our teacher she</p>	<p>A</p> <p>EA</p> <p>NS</p> <p>NS</p> <p>NS</p> <p>QD?</p> <p>A</p> <p>SA</p>
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	30. P followed us well	
	31. D yes of course but this is an evaluation of myself	
EA	31. D yes it's true and not being too pressing but in the same way	A
	32. P you made us do exercises at home as well as here I mean yes	
	32. P yes to know about my real result I need to be evaluated	EA
	33. D we are here all the time honestly to improve significantly	
	33. D it's something	
	34. E it's better than nothing of course	
	35. D yes but studying some hours at home well a language is a	
	35. D language it is not a fixed it is alive and we should study	
	35. D everyday from morning to night there is a limit to studying at	
	35. D school in our country because when we go out from the	
	35. D classroom we start to talk in Italian we think in Italian we	
	35. D write if we write in Italian we watch TV in Italian and this	
	35. D doesn't help our brain to tune into the language that's why I	
	35. D think it is easier to write a formal letter or whatever a report	
	35. D because we studied the normal classical words through the	A
	35. D grammar and books and if we spoke more certainly we should	
	35. D think more of informal and colloquial language but the fact is	
	35. D if we read books or if we study a lot of grammar books we	
	35. D end up writing formally we should have more conversation	
NS	36. E with native speakers otherwise	NS
	37. D yes it is true with the native speaker because other	NS
	37. D foreigners	
SA	38. E don't know those types of expressions	
	39. D they have the same limits as we have so if we are speaking	
	39. D with Germans of French their conditions might not be better	
	39. D than ours they still speak formal	
	40. E actually German people are quite good at speaking English	
SA	41. D this is true but they still learn from books	SA
	42. E but they sound really horrible yesterday actually I was in a	
	42. E restaurant to eat lunch and it was funny just behind was a long	
	42. E table with a lot of people from different countries they were	
SA	42. E speaking English but they were all speaking their own English	SA
	42. E so the Japanese guy had his own accent and there was a	
	42. E German guy with another accent and it was strange a mixture	EA
EA	43. E the last holiday I went to Poland with people of different	
	43. E countries someone Turkish someone French and it was the	
	43. E same it was incredible the register is almost the same it's an	
	43. E average all over the world but the expressions and accents and	
	43. E inflections are very, very different	
	44. E they joked me all the time because of my Italian accent	
	44. E yeah because it is very sweet I think the Italian accent	
	45. D No I think Italian is very hard	
	46. E but everyone says it is very amusing and a German speaker?	
	47. V she should say so (indicating the teacher)	
	48. T I think the average British person would say a German	NS
	48. T speaker of English is very harsh whereas a French person or	
BSA	48. T an Italian sounds	GS
GS	49. E like music	BSA

	50. T yeah	
	51. E everyone says that I'm not the only one Germans, Polish it is all very hard	
	52. D English is a sweet accent so when they speak German it is strange I find that in Norway and Sweden they speak very, very well	
GS BSA	53. E: because they have TV programmes in English	A
	54. V but their language is very near	
	55. E no that's not true they learn when they are children	A
GS BSA	56. D Turkish people speak English well and Greek, Turkish because they have the aitch but we don't we say 'usband and they say husband and also the Greeks they have many sounds and letters and this helps their pronunciation	A BSA GS
	57. P Yeah I hear what you say and I think that broadcasting in English is very important yesterday night I finally found the way to enter the PC and the radio Thank God! So from tomorrow I'm going to listen to it	A
	58. E from your computer to the radio	
	59. P yeah from my computer to the radio	
PLE	60. E why didn't you use the audio of your computer	PLE
	61. P the audio is better on my radio	
	62. T we gave you these at the beginning of the course and we checked them in December and now at the end of the course we are checking again, do you think it is useful?	
SA	63. E I think that I have to work on everything	SA
	64. D I believe that very well I can do nothing	
	65. E very well I know nothing, too much	
SA	66. D There is nothing that we can do very well or we shouldn't be here we should be at Proficiency level so let's put ourselves at least in the middle (there were 3 columns on the form) but according to our level we can go higher than in our assessment	SA SA PP
SA	O: Higher we can always go higher I think the question is if we can appreciate a difference between the start of the course and now and I think there has been a good improvement	SA SA
EA	67. D of course but even if we do only she (indicating the teacher) can say if it is true	EA
	68. E but you have to say if you think I have improved or not	
PP	69. D certainly but after only one year not even certainly it not always at all	PP
	70. E I don't think it is so but I am hoping so I don't think it is obvious at all	
	71. E but I think studying English at least 3 hours a week is better than staying at home and doing nothing anyway you improve that's why even if you don't work very hard you improve a little bit not a wide improvement but a little bit	A
	72. D we must have improved	
BSA GS	73. P I think that this grid is useful and yes because it lets us evaluate ourselves and then we have the possibility to point out which are the next focus the next objectives that we can	QD GS BSA

	reach, achieve so it is a good means to realise what is good or not good I mean I have to speak for myself of course I can't remember the first one but maybe that is because I started the course late	
	74. D yes we did it right at the beginning, the first or second lesson	
GS BSA	75. I think that it is a really good instrument if you want to focus on the weak points because as Diana said before you can always improve I think that also a native speaker could also better his language but in our case we can improve everywhere of course but we can point out the topics on which we have worked more to bring them to a better level than the average level among all the seven points	QD NS A BSA GS
GS BSA	76. T did your ever look at them at home or did you use them when I brought them to the lesson?	
	77. E the first one	
	78. V yes not very much but the first one yes	
	79. P yes, maybe	
	80. Laughter	
PLE	81. D actually it's a sort of self-evaluation which I am not used to at all at school	PLE
	82. V yes we are not used to	
PLE	83. D at school still there isn't this kind of evaluation and certainly I have under evaluated myself because it is so strange. Self-evaluation didn't exist in my education because the self-evaluation was always thinking that we were the last and so this is still fixed in our brains	PLE PF
	84. E yes	
PLE	85. D there is no evaluation because of humility actually it's not very good but that was the style	PF PLE PF
	86. V in our school system we have the teachers on a very high level and you are some kind of worm	
	87. E that's true but now you know if you are good in doing something or not so for example I can't play volleyball and if I try I know I am not able and I know I swim well so nobody can tell me you are good in swimming and not in volleyball, I know it	SA
PF	88. D this is true but it is a way of thinking we I mean I speak for myself haven't been placed in this situation of self-evaluation I mean I don't even know the name I never think of evaluating myself and whenever I am going to think of that I am never going to do	PF
	89. are you sure about this? I don't believe it	
	90. E I don't believe it too	
	91. O: you are always evaluating yourself, everything you are doing the whole day	
	92. E in your life	
	93. O: it is impossible what you are saying	
	94. D well no	
	95. V: you are being asked to think what you mean and to say yes	

<p>PF</p> <p>Appendix 4</p> <p>PF</p> <p>This is the o</p> <p>Dear Participant,</p> <p>I am writing to thank you for agreeing to participated in this research project which is being carried out at xxxxxx under the supervision of the University of Bristol Graduate School of Education. Your participation in the research will involve you the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being audio-recorded during a lesson, • being audio-recorded during an interview, • producing one piece of written work • opportunities to comment and feedback on my data analysis <p>I would like to ask for your consent formally, and specifically in terms of the subsequent data use, as recommended by ethical guidelines for the conduct of research. All data collected for this research will be anonymised and used solely for this research. Your data will be protected and respected, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.</p> <p>I would be very grateful if you could tick and sign the consent clause below, and if you do sign it, to indicate in the second box, the manner in which you would like your contribution to be acknowledged in the research report and any publications based on this</p>	<p>I can do it or not it's quiet an easy task</p> <p>96. D yes of course if I am asked questions like this I try my best to understand to evaluate I am not totally out of this world but it is not of our way of thinking</p> <p>97. E it is not of our way of saying which is a different thing so you do it everyday but you don't say to anyone</p> <p>98. D no it is not easy to explain not being part of our make up</p> <p>99. V: as I said before it is something that works inside you</p>	<p>PF</p> <p>PF</p> <p>PF</p> <p>PF</p>
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Use of audio-recorded data from lessons and interviews	✓ Yes	Signature	Date
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Appendix 4.12 Consent form

This is the consent form I used with all participants.

Dear Participant,

I am writing to thank you for agreeing to participated in this research project which is being carried out at xxxxxxxx under the supervision of the University of Bristol Graduate School of Education. Your participation in the research will involve you the following activities:

- being audio-recorded during a lesson;
- being audio-recorded during an interview;
- producing one piece of written work
- opportunities to comment and feedback on my data analysis.

I would like to ask for your consent formally, and specifically in terms of the subsequent data use, as recommended by ethical guidelines for the conduct of research. All data collected for this research will be anonymised and used solely for this research. Your data will be protected and respected, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

I would be very grateful if you could tick and sign the consent clause below, and if you do sign it, to indicate in the second box, the manner in which you would like your contribution to be acknowledged in the research report and any publications based on this.

Use of audio-recorded data from lessons and interviews.	√= Yes	Signature	Date
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I agree to the use of the audio-recorded data, from lessons and interviews, being used as part of academic papers presented at conferences or seminars by the researcher, and in a manner which represents fairly and respectfully my contributions to lessons and interviews.			
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Acknowledgement of contribution to project – please select either A or B	√ = yes	Signature	Date
A: I would like acknowledgement and thanks expressed generically, i.e. to the students and staff at xxxxxxxx			
B: I would like acknowledgement and thanks expressed to mention me specifically, i.e. to the students and staff at the xxxxxxxx, which includes [my name]			

If you have any queries about the project or this consent form, please get in touch

(susan.sheehan@xxxxxxx.it).

Best wishes

Susan Sheehan

Appendix 5 Lesson notes

This is a transcript of T3's lesson.

1. CAE 7 students present
2. 8.02 Teacher distributes the key for the homework and the answers to a Use of English paper which the students have completed. Some students arrive late
3. 8.04 Teacher introduces me to the group. She then explains the contents of the photocopies and asks for compositions but none are given. The teacher sets a final deadline for the late compositions.
4. 8.05 The teacher sits down and introduces the topic of bad manners which is a new topic. She explains there is one thing which she finds to be really bad manners in Italy and the students try to guess what it is. They guess using mobile phones and not queuing. The teacher states that she now jumps the queue in England. She gives a clue that it occurs in restaurants. There are more guesses concerning shouting and bringing kids to restaurants. The teacher explains that the problem is the way the waiters take away the plate immediately after the customer has finished eating. She is a slow eater so she always left alone at the table being the only person with a plate in front of her. One student says that she has the same problem. Another student states that she can't understand the problem. She points out that even if all the plates are left on the table there is still only one person eating at the table. The teacher finishes the discussion by announcing that the lesson's topic is bad manners. She tells the students to write down some examples of bad manners.
5. 8.10 Students discuss their choices and the teacher completes the register. Then the teacher monitors and supplies some vocabulary to one table. She then puts the tape into the machine.
6. 8.14 The teacher stops the discussion and leads feedback. Ideas such as kids in restaurants and queuing are offered. The teacher ends the discussion by commenting that mobile phone etiquette needs to be established.
7. 8.16 Teacher tells the students to open their books at page 124. On that page there are examples of etiquette in Britain. She tells them to read them and then discuss questions 1, 2 and 3 on the same page. The students begin reading. The room falls into total silence. The teacher completes the back of the register.
8. 8.20 Students at one table start talking. At the other table they are still reading.
9. 8.21 The second table begins speaking. All students speak with a very quiet voice.
10. 8.23 The teacher comes over and tells me the atmosphere is very quiet and that this is not normal. She asks for some suggestions on how to conduct error correction. She goes over to one table and joins in the discussion. She moves to the other table and corrects 1 error but lets another 2 go. One table breaks into Italian to resolve a vocabulary problem.
11. 8.29 The teacher sits down on chair at the front of the classroom. She always sits there when she addresses the whole group. One of the groups ask for a translation of prongs into Italian. The teacher directs the question to the other table and one of the students answers the question.
12. 8.30 The teacher leads feedback and the students state which sentences they disagree with.

13. 8.33 The teacher holds up some photocopies and tells students that they contain a list of Italian etiquette. She asks the students to highlight any they feel are not accurate. She explains that this is like a task in the exam.
14. 8.35 The students begin reading. One student asks if they can write on the photocopy. One student volunteers that her aunt taught her lots of these things. The teacher replies that lots of people in England have problems eating spaghetti and that some people even cut it up. The students laugh and one student remarks that it reminds her of the scene in "Lily and the Tramp" where the two dogs eat pasta. The teacher is sitting on the chair re-reading the list. One student checks a word in a minute bilingual dictionary. This is not seen by the teacher.
15. 8.40 The teacher tells me that she wanted to use the statements as a gap-fill and feels the exercise is too similar to that of the book.
16. 8.41 One group of students begin speaking. The teacher goes to the table and repeats the instructions. The teacher sits down and doesn't monitor. Both tables do the task.
17. 8.44 The teacher goes to one table because a student has asked if it is possible to eat in England without having both hands on the table. She states that in England it isn't a rule and that in Italy they want to see each other's hands because they don't trust one another.
18. 8.46 The teacher gives a time limit of two minutes to find a point they disagree with.
19. 8.47 The teacher leads feedback. The students give the opinion that all the statements are true to some extent. One student states that certain flowers have a particular meaning so care should be taken when giving a bouquet. The teacher asks me if any flowers have a special meaning in England.
20. 8.49 The teacher rounds up the discussion by saying that the rules seem to have been written by someone who doesn't completely understand the culture. She then asks another student her opinion which seems strange as the discussion was over.
21. 8.51 The teacher states they are going to follow the theme by doing an exam style listening. The teacher reads out the instructions and gives the students a strategy about how to complete the task. The students read the questions. There is complete silence in the room.
22. 8.53 The teacher sets the tape running without giving any warning but the students do not seem to be perturbed by this. The students complete the task and do seem to be stressed by it.
23. 9.00 When the listening is finished the teacher writes the correct answers on the board. This is all done in silence. One student points out that one of the answers is wrong. The teacher checks the answer and confirms that the answer on the board was wrong and corrects it. The teacher asks for a total out of ten from each student. The teacher asks if they understand why the answers were wrong. One student asks for further clarification of one answer.
24. 9.02 The teacher asks students to discuss what would be good manners from a list printed in the book. The teacher alters the pairs on one table. The teacher monitors and corrects some errors. She always does this giving a corrected version rather than by any other method. The students correct their answers by using a key in the back of the book.
25. 9.07 The teacher writes a sentence on the board.

26. 9.09 The teacher says OK but this does not stop the groups talking. They carry on comparing their answers with those in the book. The early finishers now wait in silence.
 27. 9.12 The teacher announces that the next task is an exam style reading about the importance of international business etiquette. She draws their attention to the question on the board. The students read the first paragraph of the text to answer the question. The teacher explains the task in relation to the exam. She tell them to read the text and insert the missing paragraphs.
 28. 9.13 The students read and the teacher sits down. She reads her copy of the text in order to check that the answers in the textbook are correct. The students concentrate on the task.
 29. 9.16 The teacher gives the students a deadline of two minutes to finish.
 30. 9.18 The teacher tells the students to stop and to check their answers against those written on the board. One student complains that she never understand where the spaces are. This shows she doesn't understand the task. The teacher checks how many correct answers each student got. One student asks what is the best strategy to use when doing this type of task. The teacher states that after Easter they will be doing more exercises in exam type conditions.
- 9.20 The teacher rounds up the lesson giving homework. The choice of exercises was based on areas which proved to be problematic in a recently held mock exam