



Curtin University

*8th International Conference on TESOL:
ELT IN THE 21ST CENTURY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES*

Date: **Friday, Aug 11, 2017**

Time: **14:40-15:40**

Presenter/s: **Dr. Jamie DUNLEA**

Bio:

Dr. Jamie DUNLEA is a Senior Researcher for the Language Assessment Research Group at the British Council, based in London. He works on a range of language test development and validation projects for assessment systems designed and developed by the British Council, as well as collaborating on projects with researchers and organizations internationally. Jamie joined the British Council in 2013, and was previously Chief Researcher at the Eiken Foundation of Japan, a not-for-profit organization which develops and administers EFL examinations in Japan. He has 25 years of experience working in EFL education, first as a teacher, then in test development and production and assessment research. His research interests include standard setting in relation to the CEFR and integrating the latest developments in validity theory with the experience and expertise of educational and assessment practitioners working in local contexts. Further information:

<https://www.britishcouncil.org/exam/aptis/research/assessment-group/jamie-dunlea>

Title: **Setting Standards: The Role of Assessment in Implementing the CEFR in Education Reform**

Abstract:

The CEFR has been adopted rapidly across Europe since its publication in 2001 though not always consistently or in line with the intentions of its authors. Increasingly the CEFR is also being adopted as a useful tool to set curriculum and assessment goals outside Europe, and with equal variability in the quality of its implementation. This paper will argue that the problems encountered in applying the CEFR to local contexts are often similar in and outside Europe, and that it is indeed time to consider taking the E out of the CEFR to reflect this wider applicability as a common framework. The presentation will examine some common issues that have been encountered by countries working with this common framework, and suggest that attempts to develop local variations of the CEFR are in fact in line with both the letter and the spirit of the document, in which adaptation to local contexts was always seen as a key design principle. At the same time, I will suggest that there are some common errors in implementation, particularly in the setting of targets which reduce the rich content in the CEFR to sweeping single level designations and one-size-fits-all attainment targets. Indeed, use of the CEFR in education reform policy sometimes appears as if it has been adopted as an over-simplistic panacea, something which will magically achieve standardization, improve the quality of teaching and learning, and ensure accountability. But these things can only be realized through the appropriate implementation of the CEFR. Unfortunately, that implementation often stops at the setting of assessment targets, and does not extend to truly integrating the CEFR into teaching and learning. I will suggest that a key area often overlooked in teacher training is developing the skills to investigate whether assessments are indeed targeting the aspects of the CEFR and the levels intended. To help fill this gap, I discuss the methodology employed for linking examinations to the CEFR, focusing on standard setting, and offer some local examples to demonstrate how this process offers a powerful tool for facilitating some of the intended positive outcomes noted above. This process is equally



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relevant to those developing large-scale, national assessments as it is to teachers developing practice tests and classroom assessments. Indeed one of the original goals of the CEFR authors was that the process of investigating the relationship between a test and the CEFR would foster reflection and engagement by those involved, and lead to improved professionalism and assessment literacy amongst test developers. I will suggest that a key feature of implementation thus requires sufficient training for teachers not just in building an understanding of the criterial features which characterize the different levels, but equally in the process of linking tests and assessments to the CEFR. Such training would provide a mechanism for engaging teachers more thoroughly in understanding how tests work to measure the abilities and skills that need to be taught in the classroom, and in doing so, provide a link between what is taught, how it is assessed, and the relationship of both to the standards proposed as target learning outcomes.