

Taith Pathway 2 Project: Developing and Promoting Minority Language Education

Report on the Implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in Canada and Implications for Wales

September 2024

Wrexham County Borough Council
Education & Early Intervention

Introduction

As part of the Taith Canada project, participants explored the implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) within Canada's bilingual education system, particularly in New Brunswick. The purpose of this strand of the research was to develop a greater understanding of how the CEFR has been used to support language acquisition, curriculum development, assessment, professional learning and strategic planning. Given the ongoing discussions in Wales regarding language progression and the proposals outlined within the Welsh Language and Education legislation, the Canadian experience provided valuable insight into the practical implementation of an internationally recognised framework.

Background

New Brunswick began exploring the use of the CEFR as part of wider efforts to improve outcomes in second language acquisition and strengthen bilingualism across the province. The implementation was led through close collaboration between government, educational researchers, universities and schools. Participants met with representatives from the Second Language Research Institute of Canada (L2RIC) and other educational leaders who played a central role in embedding the framework across the education system.

The implementation of CEFR was not viewed as an isolated initiative. Instead, it formed part of a broader strategy to improve language learning, support teacher development and create a shared understanding of language progression across all educational phases.

Key Steps Taken in Canada's Implementation of CEFR

1. Establishing a Shared Vision

One of the first steps taken was the development of a clear provincial vision for language learning. Educational leaders recognised that for CEFR to be successful, it needed to be understood as a framework that supports learning rather than an assessment tool alone.

Extensive engagement took place with teachers, school leaders, researchers and policy-makers to develop a shared understanding of the purpose and benefits of the framework. Considerable time was invested in building confidence and understanding amongst all stakeholders before implementation began.

2. Investing in Professional Learning

Canada's experience demonstrated that professional learning was central to successful implementation. Teachers required significant support to understand:

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- The CEFR proficiency levels.
- How language develops over time.
- How to assess learners against progression descriptors.
- How to plan learning experiences that support movement through the proficiency levels.

Professional learning opportunities included:

- Provincial training programmes.
- School-based workshops.
- Online learning resources.
- Professional learning communities.
- Coaching and mentoring programmes.
- Ongoing support from language specialists.

Participants concluded that the scale of investment in workforce development was a major factor in the successful implementation of CEFR.

3. Developing Learner Language Portfolios

A significant feature of the Canadian model was the use of learner language portfolios. These portfolios enabled learners to:

- Monitor their own progress.
- Reflect on language learning experiences.
- Set personal language goals.
- Record achievements.
- Develop ownership of their language journey.

The use of portfolios supported learner engagement and helped make language progression more visible and meaningful.

4. Aligning Curriculum and Assessment

Implementation involved reviewing curriculum expectations to ensure alignment with CEFR descriptors and proficiency levels.

Schools were encouraged to focus less on isolated grammatical knowledge and more on what learners could actually do with language in authentic contexts.

Assessment approaches increasingly focused on:

- Communication.
- Real-world language use.
- Speaking and listening skills.
- Learner confidence.
- Practical application of language.

This represented a significant shift from traditional approaches to language learning.

5. Promoting Authentic Language Use

The Canadian model placed significant emphasis on authentic language use. Educational leaders recognised that learners progress most effectively when they use language for meaningful purposes rather than simply completing language exercises.

Schools therefore created opportunities for learners to:

- Participate in conversations.
- Work collaboratively.
- Engage in presentations.
- Complete real-world tasks.
- Use language outside the classroom.

This focus on communication reflected one of the core principles of the CEFR.

6. Establishing Consistent Language Progression

The CEFR provided a common language for discussing progression across schools and educational phases.

Teachers, school leaders and policy-makers were able to use shared descriptors to understand learner development and identify next steps. This consistency supported transitions between educational phases and provided greater clarity regarding expectations.

7. Embedding Research and Evaluation

The implementation process was supported by ongoing research and evaluation.

Universities and educational organisations worked closely with schools to:

- Monitor impact.

- Gather feedback.
- Refine resources.
- Address implementation challenges.
- Share effective practice.

This research-informed approach ensured that implementation continued to evolve in response to evidence.

Impact of CEFR Implementation in Canada

Participants learned that the introduction of the CEFR has contributed to:

- Greater consistency in language learning programmes.
- Improved learner engagement.
- Increased confidence amongst learners.
- Stronger focus on communication and authentic language use.
- Better understanding of progression.
- Enhanced professional dialogue regarding language acquisition.
- More coherent approaches to assessment and curriculum planning.

The framework has provided a shared structure that supports learners, teachers and leaders whilst maintaining flexibility for different educational contexts.

Key Lessons for Wales

The Canadian experience highlighted several important lessons that may inform future developments in Wales.

Firstly, successful implementation requires significant investment in professional learning. Teachers and leaders need time, support and training to develop confidence in using the framework effectively.

Secondly, implementation should be viewed as a long-term cultural change rather than a short-term assessment initiative. The success of CEFR in Canada was linked to a wider focus on language acquisition, communication and learner progression.

Thirdly, learner ownership is critical. The use of portfolios, self-assessment and reflection encouraged learners to become active participants in their language development.

Fourthly, alignment between curriculum, assessment and professional learning helped ensure consistency across the education system and reduced confusion amongst practitioners.

Finally, Canada demonstrated the importance of maintaining a focus on authentic language use. Learners made the greatest progress when language was used meaningfully in real-world contexts rather than simply taught as an academic subject.

Conclusion

The implementation of the CEFR in Canada provides a valuable example of how an internationally recognised language framework can support language acquisition, curriculum development and educational improvement. The success of the Canadian approach has not been driven solely by the framework itself but by the comprehensive and sustained investment in professional learning, collaboration, learner engagement and system-wide implementation.

For Wales, the findings offer important insights as policy developments continue to strengthen language progression and support the ambitions of Cymraeg 2050. The Canadian experience demonstrates that successful implementation requires a clear vision, strong leadership, workforce development and a sustained focus on authentic language use. These lessons will prove invaluable as Wales continues to strengthen Welsh language education and create pathways for increasing numbers of confident Welsh speakers.