

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in Canada: A Research Agenda

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Abstract

This article proposes a research agenda for future inquiry into the use of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in the plurilingual Canadian context. Drawing on data collected from a research forum hosted by the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers in 2014, as well as a detailed analysis of Canadian empirical studies and practice-based projects to date, the authors examine three areas of emphasis related to CEFR use: (a) K-12 education, including uses with learners; (b) initial teacher education, where additional language teacher candidates are situated as both learners and future teachers; and (c) postsecondary language learning contexts. Future research directions are proposed in consideration of how policymaking, language teaching and language learning are articulated across each of these three contexts. To conclude, a call is made for ongoing conversations encouraging stakeholders to consider how they might take up pan-Canadian interests when introducing various aspects of the CEFR and its related tools.

Résumé

Cet article propose un programme de recherche en vue d'études futures sur l'utilisation du Cadre européen commun de référence (CECR) dans le contexte plurilingue canadien. S'appuyant sur des données recueillies lors d'un forum de recherche organisé par l'Association canadienne des professeurs de langues secondes en 2014, ainsi que sur une analyse détaillée d'études empiriques et basées sur la pratique canadiennes actuelles, les auteurs ont examiné trois domaines d'intérêt liés à l'utilisation du CECR : (a) l'éducation de la maternelle à la douzième année, y compris les utilisations du CECR avec les apprenants ; (b) la formation initiale à l'enseignement, où les candidats à l'enseignement d'une langue additionnelle sont à la fois des apprenants et de futurs enseignants ; et (c) les contextes d'apprentissage des langues au niveau postsecondaire. Des axes de recherche future sont proposés qui tiennent compte de la façon dont l'élaboration des politiques, l'enseignement des langues et l'apprentissage des langues sont articulés dans chacun des trois contextes. Pour conclure, un appel est lancé pour encourager l'échange entre acteurs intéressés dans l'espoir d'une prise en compte des intérêts pancanadiens lors de la mise en œuvre du CECR et des outils connexes.

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Introduction

Since the 1960s when the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism laid the foundation for Canada's *Official Languages Act* of 1969 (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2015) and Multiculturalism policy of 1971 (Government of Canada, 2012), Canada has been an officially bilingual country that formally recognizes its multilingual and multicultural composition. Consequently, a move to adopt a framework of reference for languages—including the languages of official bilingualism (English and French), of First Nations/Inuit/Metis (FN/I/M) peoples, and of all other ethnolinguistic groups residing in the country—is of pan-Canadian interest. Vandergrift (2006) recommended that the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) discuss the possible adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) developed by the Council of Europe (2001) as a tool to track learner progress and facilitate recognition of linguistic competencies across Canada and internationally. The CEFR is a framework used to describe six stages of additional-language proficiency (two at the “basic user” stage, two at the “independent user” stage, and two at the “proficient user” stage); it describes what learner-users can do in their additional languages in four modes of communication, reception, production, interaction, and mediation, each coming in the oral and in the written form. In the 2001 edition, descriptors were developed for five communicative language activities (written and oral reception, written and oral production, oral interaction) at all six stages of proficiency. Tests have been created to assess learners' competencies in different languages at each stage (e.g., the *Diplôme d'études en langue française*, DELF). A portfolio component (the *European Language Portfolio* or ELP) mediates use of the CEFR through language passports, dossiers and biographies (Council of Europe, 2011). Finally, the CEFR recommends an action-oriented approach to language teaching, namely, real-life oriented task-based activities organized around students meeting “Can Do” goals.

The language policy context into which the CEFR was introduced in Europe favoured the learning of at least two foreign languages, and official recognition of plurilingualism was written into the CEFR itself (Council of Europe, 2001). In Canada, multiculturalism has been written into policy and the country operates, by law, as officially bilingual (Department of Justice, Canada, 1982). Accordingly, the growing interest in the CEFR was in keeping with the Government of Canada's (2003) goal of doubling the proportion of high school graduates who are functionally bilingual in Canada's two official languages. A tool was needed to assess bilingual competences across contexts and to address persistent issues in teaching French as a second language (FSL²) and other languages in Canada. Meeting the Government's goal in FSL education was hard to achieve given core French (CF) students' (and their parents') disillusionment with learning French (Lapkin, Mady, & Arnott, 2009). Other issues facing FSL programs have been that of demand greater than supply of qualified teachers (e.g., Salvatori, 2009), and that of dissatisfaction with teaching conditions (Lapkin, MacFarlane, & Vandergrift, 2006). It was thought that through the CEFR, with its action-oriented approach, K-12 students might feel they were using more French and gaining more linguistic competence; it was hoped this would result in higher retention rates in FSL, and, by extension, a higher rate of

functionally (officially) bilingual graduates. Vandergrift's (2006) recommendation, combined with the issues listed above, led to the CMEC's (2010) overt endorsement of the CEFR in the Canadian context as a "well-founded" and "appropriate" (p. i) initiative.

Although originating from a project of the Council of Europe, the CEFR soon proved relatively context-independent and was introduced in countries around the world. In many instances, other frameworks already existed for assessing language proficiency or supporting curriculum development, or both. In these countries, the introduction of the CEFR acted as a catalyst for reflection on construct and compatibility with the different frameworks (e.g., Byram & Parmenter, 2012). In Canada, for example, the *Canadian Language Benchmarks* (CLB, Citizenship & Immigration Canada, 2012) and its French counterpart *les Niveaux canadiens de compétence linguistique* (NCLC) had been developed in the context of adult newcomer official language education, along with the *Échelle québécoise* in the province of Quebec (Direction des affaires publiques et des communications Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles, 2011). The revision process behind the 2012 editions of the CLB and NCLC included careful consideration of the CEFR for studying similarities and differences, as well as possible synergies. The study resulted in a report and public presentations (e.g., Bournot-Trites, Barbour, Jezak, Stewart, & Blouin Carbonneau, 2013). Importantly, the introduction of the CEFR in the Canadian context set a positive process in motion at the level of (re)conceptualization of tools and frameworks related to assessment, curriculum, and pedagogy.

An orientation to the CEFR in Canada is, as stated earlier, relatively recent (e.g., Piccardo, Germain-Rutherford, & Clement, 2011). Arnott (2013) published a review of Canadian empirical studies on the CEFR, and later that same year, Little and Taylor (2013), guest editors of the *Canadian Modern Language Review/Revue canadienne des langues vivantes*, gathered additional Canadian empirical research in a special issue on the topic by researchers Kristmanson, Lafargue, and Culligan (2013); Lemaire (2013); and Piccardo (2013b). In May 2014, the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT) hosted a CEFR Research Forum (referred to henceforth as the "Forum"), extending invitations to researchers with a particular interest in CEFR-related research (including those cited above) as well as other prominent Canadian researchers and stakeholders in second language (L2) education. The purpose of the Forum was to discuss existing Canadian empirical CEFR-related research and identify and examine research gaps that needed to be filled based on this research and attendees' professional experiences. Forum attendees were invited to collaborate further to co-create a research agenda based on the culmination of work undertaken at the Forum as well as a detailed analysis of existing empirical studies, to ultimately support ongoing research and a more effective pan-Canadian use³ of the CEFR.

Overview

The remainder of this article offers a brief description of the methodology used in crafting the current paper. Then, we use the Forum data as a point of departure to summarize existing research and adaptation initiatives and analyze current and potential research related to the CEFR from three perspectives: (a) the CEFR in K-12 education, including uses with learners; (b) the CEFR in teacher education, where language teacher candidates are situated as both learners and initial teacher education (ITE) candidates; and

(c) the CEFR in postsecondary language learning contexts. Our rationale for selecting these particular contexts was partly due to the structure of the Forum, but also driven by the need to identify shared interests and concerns. At the end of each section, we propose context-specific research directions for a consolidated research agenda for the CEFR in Canada. Lastly, we call for ongoing conversations and research, and encourage stakeholders to consider how they might take up pan-Canadian interests when implementing various aspects of the CEFR and its related tools.

Methodology

Forum Procedures and Resulting Data

The Forum took place in St. Catharine's, Ontario, in May 2014, with a total of 24 invited researchers from six Canadian provinces attending. Two, 1-hour long working sessions and a final debriefing session allowed participants to work in small groups to discuss existing and future research related to the CEFR in Canadian contexts. One note-taker and one facilitator were assigned to each working group and discussions were taken up collectively in the final debriefing session (i.e., facilitators presented a summary of each working group's discussions to the large group, supported by the scribed notes), forming the data set upon which this research agenda is based. The documented sessions of the Forum produced 9.5 pages of notes, addressing three main contexts of CEFR use and research in Canada: the K-12, initial teacher education, and postsecondary contexts.

Collaborative Writing

Eight of the Forum attendees volunteered to be part of the collaborative writing group for this article. The Forum notes were first compiled into a tabulated overview to inform the overall structure of this article. Authorship of three sections reflecting the three main contexts cited above was then divided among the eight authors, resulting in three writing groups, each of which addressed the CEFR in relation to policy, teachers, and learners. The Forum notes served as a starting point for the article's content, and were elaborated, woven into, and supported by existing research literature related to studies and initiatives connected with the CEFR. Given the paucity of research in this field in Canada, it was decided that mention of emerging programming, existing resources, and documented interest in the CEFR would also be included where applicable.

Summary of Research and Future Directions

The following three sections outline directions for Canadian CEFR-related research across K-12, teacher education, and post-secondary contexts, as highlighted in the Forum notes and supplemented through additional references to Canadian research, emerging programming, developed resources, and documented interest in the CEFR. We acknowledge that the future directions presented at the end of each section capture only part of what merits investigation concerning CEFR use at each level, and highlight the fact that there is much left to discover. This is particularly true given relevant projects that have been undertaken since the Forum (e.g., studies referenced in the sections that follow, as well as Piccardo & North, 2017; Piccardo, North, & Maldina, 2017). We hope this agenda

will serve as a call to action for increased research into the role of the CEFR for additional language⁴ education in Canada.

K-12 Context

In Canada, school-based K-12 curriculum is regulated at the provincial level, while individual school boards are permitted to organize their L2 programming based on the needs of the populations they serve. There is general consensus across provinces and territories that curriculum does not dictate instruction; teachers are often free to choose and develop appropriate instructional materials, activities, and strategies that enable their students to meet curriculum expectations. School boards also determine the type and frequency of professional development (PD) for teachers based on perceived need. Additionally, professional associations like CASLT play an important role in facilitating PD for practicing L2 teachers that is not linked to one provincial curriculum, but instead addresses teacher concerns common to L2 teaching nationwide.

K-12 policy. While societal multilingualism abounds, individual plurilingualism (or multilingualism at the level of the individual, Council of Europe, 2001) and plurilingual pedagogy (i.e., pedagogy that draws on learners' full linguistic repertoires) have yet to gain a strong foothold in K-12 Canadian classrooms, particularly in FSL classrooms where de facto French-only policies and practices are frequently the norm (Cummins, 2014; Piccardo & Capron Puozzo, 2015; Taylor & Cutler, 2016; Wernicke & Bournot-Trites, 2011). With regard to CEFR use and micro-level policymaking, Forum participants discussed the province-wide movement in Ontario toward offering secondary students in Grade 12 the opportunity to take the DELF test as part of their FSL learning experience, a growing trend in Alberta as well.

According to findings from two projects sponsored by the Ontario Ministry of Education examining this micro-level policy initiative, not only does this initiative positively influence FSL learning (Rehner, 2014a), but its potential impact on FSL teaching is also substantial (Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, 2011). For example, teachers who train to be DELF assessors develop a clearer sense of their students' capabilities in French and a personal understanding of CEFR principles to apply to their own FSL teaching and planning.

K-12 teachers. Forum participants felt that teachers should develop deep understanding of the CEFR (e.g., its components, principles, philosophies, and pedagogical approaches) before they introduce CEFR-informed learning, teaching, and assessment. It was felt that many teachers tend to overlook the framework aspect of the CEFR and are drawn to its more "concrete" aspects (e.g., language portfolios). One possible reason for this oversight may be that teachers focus on how they could use such tools to make the processes of L2 learning more transparent to K-12 learners and to facilitate the development of autonomy. Also prevalent in Forum discussions was the issue of how to maximize the effectiveness of introducing the CEFR to all types of FSL programs at the K-12 level. Some of these issues have been addressed as described below, while others require further investigation.

In a province-wide study commissioned by the Ontario Ministry of Education, CF and French immersion teachers were introduced to the CEFR and CEFR-informed activities

and resources. The goal of the research was to examine the role and feasibility of introducing and using the CEFR to improve FSL learning outcomes in the K-12 context (Faez, Majhanovich, Taylor, Smith, & Crowley, 2011; Faez, Taylor, Majhanovich, Brown, & Smith, 2011; Majhanovich, Faez, Smith, Taylor, & Vandergrift, 2010). Findings revealed FSL teachers were positive about the potential of the CEFR's action-oriented approach to promote French language use and student engagement in FSL classrooms. Introducing this approach to teachers was linked to a change in their attitudes about how to marry a focus on form with a communicative approach to teaching. According to participating teachers, CEFR-informed instruction yielded the following benefits: learner self-assessment, authentic language use in the classroom, enhanced learner autonomy, student motivation, self-confidence in oral language ability, and assessment practices focusing on "positives" and incremental gains that could be used for formative and diagnostic assessment. However, teacher participants also reported challenges while attempting to use CEFR-informed instruction. The first involved time restrictions (i.e., finding time to include it in their teaching), with the second supporting the point made by Forum participants, and echoed by Piccardo (2013b), that teachers lack a broad-enough understanding of the CEFR to introduce (aspects of) its use in their teaching and assessment practices (Mison & Jang, 2011). Piccardo (2014a) advocated for offering professional development to expand L2 teachers' conceptual understanding of the CEFR as opposed to simply presenting it as a tool or strategy for enhancing practice. The Ontario Ministry of Education funded a project that implemented this view by engaging teachers in a semester-long professional development opportunity, combining training on the concepts underpinning the CEFR and development of both conceptual and pedagogical resources.

Along these lines, work by Kristmanson, Lafargue, and Culligan (2011) highlighted the benefits teachers gain from participating in formal professional learning communities to build greater understanding of the CEFR and ELP. Their action research project, involving high school language teachers, investigated how teachers develop understanding of the CEFR and transform their new understanding into pedagogical action. Results included teachers developing philosophical stances toward the CEFR and the ELP that could guide and inform their practice, and an action plan to support their introduction of CEFR and ELP principles into their teaching while leaving room for creativity and adaptability.

Similarly, Mui (2015) studied the reflective practices of French immersion teachers working with very young learners. In this multi-phase case study, the researcher and teacher-participant embarked on a journey of reflective practice, the goal of which was to assist the teacher in making sense of how to use key principles of CEFR-informed learning and teaching in her classroom. With the support of the researcher who was a "more expert other" in terms of understanding the CEFR and ELP, the teacher-participant gained deeper understanding of their facets. The ongoing dialogue and reflections benefited both teacher and researcher.

K-12 learners. Overall, Forum participants noted the need for more studies examining K-12 student experiences of CEFR-informed pedagogy (e.g., their introduction to, understanding, and use of CEFR-informed pedagogies). Aside from recent work by Snoddon (2015) where parents of elementary school-aged children who are deaf and hard of hearing were taught American Sign Language with the help of CEFR-informed curricular modules, even fewer studies have examined parental efforts related to using the

CEFR to improve their K-12 children's first language (L1), L2, or plurilingual language development.

Forum participants involved in the Faez, Majhanovich, et al. (2011), Faez, Taylor, et al. (2011), and Majhanovich et al. (2010) studies noted that students who reported the greatest increase in French skills in the Ontario feasibility study were Grade 9 boys in CF, with teacher data confirming student self-assessments. Given that the majority of students are enrolled in CF in Ontario (90%), and the greatest attrition occurs at the end of Grade 9 (97%, Canadian Parents for French, 2008), the finding is important. Equally relevant to the discussion of the CEFR and student motivation are findings from a recent study by Rehner (2014a), revealing a link between student confidence and motivation to learn and use French as a result of taking the DELF and experiencing CEFR-informed teaching. With regard to student proficiency and confidence, following their completion of the DELF level of their choosing, Ontario Grade 12 FSL students ($n = 434$) filled out a survey measuring their confidence in the receptive and productive skills targeted by the test. Proficiency findings showed that student performance on written comprehension exceeded that of production (written and oral) as well as oral comprehension. Survey data showed students were most confident in their reading skills and least confident in their oral skills. Attempts to link proficiency and confidence revealed that connections between the two were not always uniform (e.g., higher proficiency scores did not always translate into higher confidence ratings and vice versa). In the end, Rehner (2014a) recommended that the areas of strength and those identified for improvement provide a starting point to direct future efforts to further strengthen Ontario FSL programming.

Forum participants also noted that CEFR-informed activities focusing on “Can Do”-centred activities have the potential to provide students with attainable goals to work toward, allowing learners to use the target language and see their progress while learning it. This addresses weak points noted in CF instruction (Lapkin et al., 2009; Newman, 2017), namely that CF students neither used much French in their courses, nor made visible progress from year to year. Some student reaction to goal-based teaching has been documented, with three studies examining K-12 student experiences related to adapted ELPs: two at the high school level (Kristmanson et al., 2013; Taylor, 2012), and one involving young learners at the elementary level (Hermans-Nymark, 2014a, 2014b).

Findings from Kristmanson et al. (2013) suggested Grade 12 student experiences using a language portfolio inspired by ELP principles and guidelines were positive overall, especially in relation to being able to make choices and use authentic, meaningful material. While the self-assessment component of the study provided an opportunity for student reflection and the promotion of learner autonomy, it did not necessarily benefit all students, especially those who felt ill prepared for practices associated with the new CEFR-informed teaching approach. Similarly, after introducing the biography component of the ELP through a digital task that allowed secondary learners to draw on their plurilingual, digital competences, the results of Taylor's (2012) study showed that the high school students enjoyed the “attainable goals” aspect of the digital CEFR-informed project work, supporting observations by the Forum participants and Majhanovich et al. (2010). Still, constraints under which the teacher was working prompted her to eventually reject the plurilingual component, despite showing initial support for the task-based project. At the elementary level, findings from Hermans-Nymark (2014a, 2014b) suggested the portfolio was user friendly and liked by participating students. Teachers found it helped students reflect on and monitor their learning, served as a tool that enabled teachers to help students

self-assess, and generated reflection regarding how teachers and students can identify proficiency levels.

Conversely, student reactions to self-assessment on the CEFR scale separate from a portfolio project have not always been positive. Indeed, Faez, Majhanovich, et al. (2011), Faez, Taylor, et al. (2011), and Majhanovich et al.'s (2010) findings supported European research (e.g., Hasselgreen, 2013) noting the utility of splitting the A1 level into interim stages (e.g., A1-a and A1-b) for students enrolled in language-as-subject courses (e.g., CF), so that they could see gains in French competences. Gauthier's (2015) qualitative research on Grade 8 CF students' self-identification (as bilinguals, multilinguals, or "English users") collected data on student self-assessment of French competences using a "Can Do" scale (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training/CEDEFOP, 2013). She found the scale inadequate, concluding that A1 to A2 level students benefit more from the "CEFR experience" when presented with more detailed lists of "Can Do" statements (e.g., when teachers mediate generic lists to curriculum-specific descriptors of meaning to students).

Obtaining these types of student perspectives provides further insight into the continued PD that teachers may benefit from in terms of CEFR-informed L2 teaching, learning, and assessment, especially with regard to employing a portfolio with young learners. Combined with Mui's (2015) work with teachers of young learners, these studies revealed that the CEFR and ELP could be appropriate for young learners, if made relevant to the learners' local contexts.

Future directions. The overview of the available research discussed above as well as the Forum discussion surrounding the use of the CEFR in K-12 programs in Canada highlights the three areas outlined in Table 1 that should be addressed by future research.

Table 1
Directions for Future Research in the K-12 Context

Focus	Possible Questions
CEFR-Informed Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does a full (or partial) use of the CEFR look like in FSL, English as a second language (ESL),⁵ heritage language,⁶ and FN/I/M language programs? • What are key considerations for mediating and using the CEFR in ways that meet the needs of local L2 contexts? What elements of specific curricula need to be revised? What material and resources need to be developed?
Ongoing Teacher PD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What understanding of the CEFR is needed for the local L2 contexts? • How do teachers make sense of the CEFR? • Which models of PD provide educators with the background they need to make informed decisions about what aspects of the CEFR (and ELP) to use for whom, when, why and how? • Beyond ITE, how are language teachers who use the CEFR and related tools in existing classroom practice being supported, and what

types of professional development are or should be made available to them?

- How do L2 teachers respond to various types of PD initiatives? (i.e., changed perspectives, actions, as teachers, as language learners, etc.)
- What impact do these initiatives have on L2 teachers' developing conceptual understanding of the CEFR? How can the CEFR be introduced, other than through a portfolio?
- How can (or should) teachers be guided to buy into self-assessment, plurilingualism, and other aspects of the CEFR in ways that also promote learner buy-in?

Learner
Perspectives

- How do students experience CEFR-informed instruction?
 - Does CEFR-informed instruction make a noticeable difference in student motivation and their opportunities to learn and use the L2?
 - Are there any links between CEFR-informed instruction, student and parent satisfaction, enjoyment and motivation, and L2 program retention?
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Note. CEFR = Common European Framework of Reference; FSL = French as a second language; ESL = English as a second language; FN/I/M = First Nations/Inuit/Metis; L2 = second language; PD = professional development; ELP = European language portfolio; ITE = initial teacher education.

Teacher Education Context

Initial teacher education in the Canadian context⁷ presents a fertile and propitious ground for understanding both the uses of and tensions surrounding the CEFR, particularly as it pertains to language competencies and language portfolio use. Uniquely situated as both learners and teacher candidates, ITE candidates find themselves to be both potential consumers and future advocates of the CEFR and its associated tools.

Initial teacher education policy. In Canadian additional language ITE programs, faculties of education are expected to abide by macro-level policies and guidelines put forth by provincial Ministries of Education and teacher certification boards (e.g., length of program, number of credit hours devoted to practicum experiences, required courses). Still, faculties of education remain the principal micro-policymakers of ITE, designing their programs, language proficiency requirements, and curricula as they see fit, and in view of their context and grade level/content areas of expertise.

A noteworthy example of micro-policymaking where the CEFR appears to be having an impact is in assessing language teacher proficiency, particularly for FSL teachers. Forum attendees discussed ways in which they were considering possible alignment of in-house French language proficiency tests with the CEFR levels. However, the movement from consideration to practical action was found to vary across institutions. Some spoke of DELF certification as being accepted as suitable evidence of candidates' French proficiency levels for meeting entrance requirements (predominantly at the B2 level for consecutive programs), resulting in their exemption from in-house tests entirely; others noted hesitation to adopt the CEFR into their existing policies—particularly for concurrent

programs—as the procedures and tools they had adopted for assessing language teacher proficiency, including various in-house, faculty-developed tests, were judged to be working well.

While Canadian researchers have generally called for a shared understanding of effective ITE practices and a common terminology to describe FSL teacher qualifications for the purposes of consistency and mobility across provinces (Salvatori & MacFarlane, 2009), research related to the CEFR in this area has been scarce. Despite indications of the provision of CEFR-related PD opportunities across the country (e.g., CASLT, 2014), equally absent from the Canadian research literature is an analysis of the presence of the CEFR in micro-policy initiatives across faculties of education regarding ITE for English as a second language (ESL), heritage language, and FN/I/M language teachers.

Initial teacher education candidates as teachers. During discussions of how the CEFR is implicated in the delivery of teacher education programs, Forum participants portrayed the ELP as having “more airtime than the CEFR” in its entirety. Participants of the Forum reasoned that the portfolio is perceived as more accessible, due mainly to its practicality; at the same time, they stressed the risks associated with overlooking the CEFR and concentrating exclusively on the portfolio. Along the same line, an anecdotal perspective has been adopted when it comes to reflection on introducing the CEFR in ITE programs. Not only did participants at the Forum report that integration of an explicit and in-depth study of the CEFR (i.e., its philosophy and pedagogical concepts) had hardly ever been observed in ITE programs, they also generally reported that the main contact of teacher candidates with CEFR-related tools has been a teacher’s portfolio focusing on linguistic rather than pedagogical competencies. While the linguistic component is still a valuable experience for ITE candidates, existing publications (and lack thereof) on the subject show an overall inconsistent and non-systematic approach to integrating the CEFR into ITE programs beyond this portfolio.

Apart from institutional (Arnott, 2013), or introductory (e.g., CMEC, 2010; Le Thiec Routureau, 2011; Piccardo, 2010) publications related to the adoption of the CEFR, the bulk of the reflection related to uses of the CEFR in Canadian ITE contexts has focused on portfolios in terms of their creation, introduction, and use (e.g. Gagné & Thomas, 2011; Lemaire, 2013; Turnbull, 2011), with some exploration in the area of proficiency levels and certifications (Dicks & Culligan, 2010; Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, 2011; Rehner, 2014a; Tang, 2010). While the focus on linguistic progression supported by a portfolio is not a negative thing per se, what is problematic is the idea of perceiving this as a way of directly accessing the CEFR. Even though the portfolio represents a tool for bringing the CEFR principles closer to the classroom reality, any introduction of it, when devoid of a solid grasp of the CEFR philosophy, can diminish its potential impact on pedagogical practices (Piccardo 2011). Given the three dimensions at the core of the CEFR (learning, teaching, and assessing), the central one (i.e., teaching) appears to be penalized and a real risk exists of perpetuating the conflation of language proficiency and pedagogical competence.

Although concrete examples of integrating the CEFR and its related tools in ITE remain scarce, the focus of practice and future research should not be limited to ITE, particularly in light of noteworthy instances where CEFR-related professional development initiatives targeting in-service teachers could be used in ITE (e.g., Curriculum Services Canada, 2015; Piccardo, 2014a, 2014b). Although no study is available related to the

impact of this type of education on either preservice or in-service teachers, it is worth noting one ongoing relevant 3-year international collaborative project (Piccardo, 2016), which focuses on linguistic and cultural awareness. Its goal is to design an online environment aimed at promoting a new view of language learning and fostering plurilingualism in the North American context. The final product, inspired by the ELP (in what concerns autonomy, reflection, and metacognition) includes official, heritage and FN/I/M languages and adopts plurilingualism as its theoretical framework while fusing western and indigenous epistemologies.

Initial teacher education candidates as learners. To date, the majority of uptake of the CEFR and language portfolios (both the ELP and customized versions) in Canadian ITE happens in additional-language teacher education contexts. Among the topics of discussion during the Forum were the potential uses of the CEFR and even the development of tools related to the CEFR that could address these contexts. More specifically, many Forum participants worked or conducted research in the context of French ITE programs (French immersion, Intensive French, or CF) where the ongoing demand for French language teachers throughout much of Canada is evident (Pan, 2014; Veilleux & Bournot-Trites, 2005). The overwhelming majority of ITE candidates in these programs are both French-language learners and French-language teacher candidates; they are therefore engaged in learning to be language teachers while simultaneously improving or extending their own language learning. Forum participants felt the CEFR could prove useful in both instances.

Early work using language portfolios in French minority language ITE contexts was conducted by Laplante and Christiansen (2001) in the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina, and taken up in various forms in other Western Canadian contexts (cf. Mandin, 2010). More recently, the ELP and ELP-inspired activities have been used as tools in ITE language learning, with the Université de Saint-Boniface and the University of New Brunswick's faculties of education cited during the Forum as two ITE contexts using language portfolio activities associated with the CEFR for raising ITE candidates' language, pedagogical, and cross-cultural competencies. In addition, some research has been disseminated related to ways in which the CEFR and the ELP are being taken up at other Canadian faculties of education (cf. Arnott & Vignola, under review, 2015, for an example from the University of Ottawa; Ragoonaden, 2011, for an example from the University of British Columbia Okanagan). In the case of Arnott and Vignola (2015), following suggestions from their ITE candidates who completed a language portfolio as part of a course targeting their language development, the University of Ottawa is planning a dual approach to a CEFR portfolio in their program, with one dimension focusing on ITE candidates' language learning and the other focusing on how to implement the portfolio into their developing L2 pedagogy and prospective L2 teaching contexts. Apart from this example, uses of the portfolio in Canadian ITE research to date seem to reflect a vision of teacher candidates primarily as learners, rather than as teachers. In line with statements made in the K-12 section, ITE candidates' roles—language learner and language teacher—would benefit from being considered separately, both in practice and in research.

In the broader Canadian context, it is also important to recognize and study language learners and language teaching beyond the context of official language learning (English and French). Consequently, ITE initiatives and research should include both heritage and FN/I/M language learners, recognizing that such discussions require particular

attention be paid to the unique contexts relevant to a given linguistic and cultural group, that specificities of FN/I/M language learning and revitalization should be stressed, and that a distinction be respected between the rights and needs of FN/I/M language learners and all other language learners (St. Denis, 2011). Extending invitations to FN/I/M educational communities to engage with the CEFR ought to be accompanied by recognition of the colonial subtexts influencing FN/I/M language learning and revitalization. Indeed, any suggestion that the CEFR be proposed as a tool for language learning, and potentially language assessment, in FN/I/M language learning contexts must be accompanied by an understanding of the ongoing colonial legacies of oppression, including language assimilation associated with Canadian colonial governance and residential schooling (cf. *Statement of Reconciliation*, Government of Canada, 1998; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). In view of these multiple understandings, ITE candidates should be encouraged to view language and language learning from a more flexible and interconnected perspective, in line with plurilingualism (Coste, Moore, & Zarate, 1997; Council of Europe, 2001; Piccardo, 2013a, 2014b) and plurilingual competencies (Lefranc, 2008), both for themselves as language learners and teacher candidates, and for their future students.

Future directions. In Table 2, we propose three priority areas that need to be addressed by future research, taking into account the research and Forum data reviewed in this section and keeping in mind both the institutional autonomy of faculties of education and the cited conceptual and practical obstacles regarding CEFR use in ITE contexts.

Table 2
Directions for Future Research in the Initial Teacher Education Context

Focus	Possible Questions
Policy Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What CEFR-informed macro- and micro-level policies are currently in operation in FSL, ESL, heritage language and FN/I/M language ITE programs within and across the Canadian provinces? • To what extent is the CEFR being considered in ongoing micro-policy development concerning language teacher proficiency in Canadian faculties of education?
CEFR-Informed ITE Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways is the CEFR being introduced in ITE contexts? Which aspects of the CEFR are receiving attention (e.g., the assessment-related dimension, such as descriptors of language competence and scales; or the pedagogical dimension, with a focus on the action-oriented approach and/or plurilingualism)? • How are ITE candidates specializing in language teaching making sense of the CEFR? • How can the portfolio be used in ITE contexts to target candidates' language learning as well as their pedagogical development (i.e., learning how to teach with the portfolio)? • How can future research directions ensure an honouring of FN/I/M peoples as distinct in language and culture, and consider ways in

which CEFR initiatives might offer positive contributions to the ongoing conceptualizing and understandings of FN/I/M languages throughout Canada (Ball, 2009; Duff & Li, 2009)?

- In what ways might heritage language and Francophone ITE programs in official language minority communities (OLMC/CLOSM) take up CEFR use as both a tool for language development and maintenance in minority contexts, and as a tool for language teaching?
- Supervision of L2 Teacher Candidates
- How prepared are associate/cooperating teachers to model the CEFR and ELP use during practicum experiences?
 - What impact do in-service PD initiatives have on L2 teachers' ability to mentor future L2 teachers on CEFR use?
 - Are associate/cooperating teachers and teacher educators working together in taking up the CEFR? If so, in what way(s)?
-

Note. CEFR = Common European Framework of Reference; FSL = French as a second language; ESL = English as a second language; FN/I/M = First Nations/Inuit/Metis; L2 = second language; PD = professional development; ELP = European language portfolio; ITE = initial teacher education.

Postsecondary Context

Unlike the K-12 level, the decision to implement the CEFR at the postsecondary level does not normally fall under provincial jurisdiction. In Canada, universities and community colleges are governed under separate provincial authorities that set larger postsecondary policy directions (e.g., Ministry of Advanced Education in British Columbia, Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities in Ontario, Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour in New-Brunswick). Therefore, academically oriented decisions would normally reside with individual departments or faculty members.

Despite this reality, postsecondary institutions are linked informally through non-binding organizations at the governmental, inter-institutional, professional, and research levels. For instance, the CMEC acts on policy issues at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels. In 2008, the Council accepted the recommendations of the Advisory Committee of Deputy Ministers of Education, and officially proposed the use of the CEFR in Canada (CMEC, 2010). Meanwhile, some provinces have course transfer councils (e.g., British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer, BCCAT, in British Columbia; Articulation, Transfer and Admissions Committee, ATAC, in Alberta; and Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer, ONTAC, in Ontario) that connect postsecondary institutions by way of articulation committees and provide an opportunity to share content and resources related to teaching approaches, innovations, and initiatives at the postsecondary level. Finally, professional organizations such as CASLT and research-based associations such as the Canadian Association of Applied Linguistics (CAAL) provide venues for individual, language-teaching faculty members at the postsecondary level to share expertise and ideas, and exchange information related to the teaching and learning of languages.

Postsecondary policy. Forum discussions at the postsecondary level focused most prominently on policymaking, and to a lesser extent on how the CEFR at this level has been

taken up by instructors and students. In the absence of a provincial jurisdiction governing academically oriented decisions, knowledge about the CEFR and the application of that knowledge to language programming has so far occurred only selectively and to varying extents, often through language teacher associations. The Canadian Association of University Teachers of German (CAUTG), for example, recommended in 2012 that German departments align their language programs with the CEFR to facilitate student mobility and ensure appropriate course placement of incoming postsecondary students, citing the framework's competencies scale and international acceptance beyond Europe as especially valuable (cefrscola, 2012).

Engagement with the CEFR is particularly evident in FSL immersion as well as non-immersion programs at the postsecondary level, specifically as it relates to recently adopted teaching methodology, language qualifications for exchange programs, and degree completion requirements. Glendon College, the bilingual campus of York University, Ontario, has implemented the CEFR-informed action-oriented approach in its recently created Language Training Centre for Studies in French for FSL students in other disciplines, as a way to maximize students' development in the language. Similarly, Campus Saint-Jean at the University of Alberta has adopted a CEFR task-based approach in courses specifically aimed at students in nursing and science programs. While all undergraduate students must complete a B2 level French language course as part of their graduation requirements at Campus Saint-Jean, FSL teacher candidates are also required to successfully obtain a B2 level on the DELF exam as part of their teaching degree (Cenerelli, Lemaire, & Mougeon, 2016). Meanwhile, French programs in the Department of Language Studies at the University of Toronto Mississauga are in the process of reorienting their pedagogy, curriculum, materials, and assessment to the CEFR (K. Rehner, personal communication, May 24, 2015). Simon Fraser University has piloted the use of the *Diplôme approfondi de langue française* (DALF, C1) in its French Cohort Program in the Faculty of Arts, although at this point there is no explicit orientation to the CEFR in French language programming at the university (Cenerelli et al., 2016). A B2 level of French is required for admission into that university's Dual Professional Development Program for teacher candidates, a master's level program that includes a component of study abroad in France. Aside from French, CEFR-informed language certifications in German and Spanish, for example, are overseen across Canada by the *Goethe Institut* and the *Instituto Cervantes* respectively, or administered locally by university departments or language centres (e.g., the French Centre at the University of Calgary, the Department of Hispanic and Italian Studies at the University of Victoria).

While there is typically little contact among postsecondary institutions when it comes to policymaking, in British Columbia information about the CEFR has been disseminated to language instructors at various institutions through the Standard Committee on Language Articulation (SCOLA), the province's language articulation committee that is governed by the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer. The committee's annual meetings have led to the establishment of an inter-institutional CEFR Working Group for the introduction and use of the CEFR in postsecondary language programs in British Columbia. While membership in articulation committees is optional and SCOLA holds no authority over its member institutions, the committee has provided a useful platform, by way of presentations and workshops (e.g., Rojas-Primus & Jones, 2012; Wernicke & Jones, 2012), to contribute to instructors' knowledge about the CEFR and encourage more in-depth consideration of how it might be integrated into the learning, teaching, and

assessment of a particular language at the postsecondary level. A survey conducted with SCOLA members in 2014 found that efforts to adopt elements of the CEFR into postsecondary language programs in British Columbia are inconsistent, not only across institutions but across language departments and programs within institutions (Wernicke, 2014b). The CEFR is currently being drawn on by individual instructors only, based on their interests, needs, and level of familiarity with the framework. While some instructors use or develop materials and resources that incorporate elements of the CEFR (e.g., “Can Do” statements, descriptors, an emphasis on task-based teaching) CEFR-oriented resources remain limited or are not sought out. Gaining a better understanding of the framework was reported as a major challenge because instructors often work in isolation without any institutional or even departmental support. Precisely how and to what extent these instructors are implementing the CEFR is discussed in the following section.

Postsecondary language teachers. Unlike at the K-12 level, where research (though limited) does exist, almost no inquiry has been conducted into language instructors’ CEFR-related teaching practices at the postsecondary level. Forum discussions demonstrated that interest in the CEFR at the university level was sporadic and directly dependent on individual instructors. This aligns with findings from the above-cited British Columbia survey study on language instructors’ orientation to the CEFR at 10 different postsecondary institutions across the province. The online survey conducted by Wernicke (2014b) investigated which language programs or courses in each language department were CEFR-oriented; how this orientation was reflected in curriculum and course content in terms of learning, teaching, and assessment; and whether an increase in CEFR-informed language programming was anticipated in the future. Although mostly instructors of French, German, and Spanish reported uptake of the CEFR, Japanese and Chinese language instructors also noted making use of the global and “Can Do” descriptors. Instructors reported that, while occasionally collaborating with colleagues, they tend to work independently to incorporate a CEFR-oriented approach into their courses. The extent of such revisions for specific language courses or programs involves the following: increased emphasis on a learner-centered approach; a focus on learner-directed objectives; autonomous learning and self-assessment; a combination of communicative and task-based teaching (e.g., Wernicke, 2014a); and the use of “Can Do” descriptors, portfolios, and CEFR-aligned textbooks. Several CEFR-informed textbooks are in the process of being adapted to the North American context and may soon begin to have an effect on the level of uptake of CEFR principles in the postsecondary classroom (e.g., Girardet et al., 2014). Based on this survey, there are at present few courses geared specifically to external language certification, one exception being Simon Fraser University, which has offered a third-year German course that prepares students for the *Zertifikat Deutsch*, Level B1.

Postsecondary learners. As became evident at the Forum, to date, the CEFR has been used in Canada mainly to document students’ communicative competence through self-assessments and to improve language learning, particularly through the use of a language portfolio. A research project led by Rehner (2014b) assessed the sociolinguistic competence of 56 FSL students registered in two Ontario universities. One of the goals of the study was to discover how the students’ self-reported sociolinguistic skills relate to the descriptors in the sociolinguistic illustrative scale provided by the CEFR for this particular dimension of communicative competence. Data were gathered through interviews in French

and English as well as through surveys. By comparing the learners' self-assessed sociolinguistic abilities with the CEFR scale, Rehner (2014b) found that the learners, overall, had a fairly accurate sense of their own sociolinguistic abilities and limitations in their additional language.

Concerning improving language learning, Lyster (2007) found that students who come from a Canadian French immersion program and choose to continue studying the language at the postsecondary level often need to be supported in order to overcome a plateau level of communication characterized by fossilized linguistic errors. A number of researchers from universities across Canada are exploring various approaches, most of them not directly or explicitly CEFR-related, to help such students overcome this challenge (Beaulieu & Gosselin, 2011; Mandin, 2010; Péguret, 2014; Skogen, 2006). Similarly, Baranowski (2015) conducted a study at the Université de St-Boniface, Manitoba, using elements of the CEFR-informed Canadian Language Portfolio for Teachers (Turnbull, 2011) in a remedial language class focusing on grammar for Francophone, Allophone, and Anglophone students. The portfolio asked the students to analyze their own strengths, weaknesses, and goals for their language learning. Qualitative interviews with participants provided preliminary findings that suggested that use of the language portfolio helped students take ownership of their language learning.

Future directions. The above overview of CEFR use at the postsecondary level in Canada clearly points to how the lack of a coordinated direction or formal body to regulate such an initiative at the pan-Canadian level has, thus far, hindered its broader adoption. In thinking about how the CEFR could be drawn upon to inform multiple aspects of language education at the postsecondary level, Table 3 highlights three important areas that should be addressed by future research.

Table 3

Directions for Future Research in the Postsecondary Context

Focus	Possible Questions
Transition to Postsecondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can the CEFR be used to help support language learners as they transition from high school to university language classes/programs? • How can use of the CEFR improve the intake and placement of students at the postsecondary level?
CEFR-Informed Teaching Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which Canadian postsecondary institutions correlate their language course levels to the CEFR levels? For which languages? And how comprehensive is this correlation process? • How can knowledge about the CEFR be more effectively disseminated among postsecondary language instructors, administrators, and executive committees? What kind of training would be appropriate for these instructors? • How do postsecondary instructors recognize and take into account the plurilingual aspect of the CEFR?
Language Testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can the CEFR be used to follow students' progress throughout their postsecondary years? For example, do students who take the

DELF/DALF exam in the context of their secondary school studies, and who successfully attain the level at which they tested, require a remedial course as they enter postsecondary studies? Does success on the DELF correlate with success at the postsecondary level?

- What role is there for the CEFR to inform formal and/or informal assessment practices in language courses/programs at this level?
 - How is task-based or action-oriented teaching reflected in assessment practices at this level and vice versa?
-

Note. CEFR = Common European Framework of Reference; DELF = *Diplôme d'études en langue française*; DALF = *Diplôme approfondi de langue française*.

Conclusion

Considering collectively the specific calls for future CEFR-informed research at the K-12 (Table 1), initial teacher education (Table 2), and postsecondary levels (Table 3), the following overarching questions emerge concerning research directions for future inquiry into CEFR use in the Canadian context. Each of the following avenues for future study addresses, in different ways, the more general question: What does full (or partial) use of the CEFR look like in the Canadian context?

- What policies currently exist or might need to be created in order to support CEFR use within and across the provinces at all three levels of education for a variety of languages (e.g., macro- and micro-level policies)?
- What professional development opportunities are currently being offered, and what further types of scaffolding are needed to support language teachers (preservice and in-service) and instructors in their present/future efforts to implement the CEFR in their local contexts (e.g., what is the focus of such opportunities, how is the content delivered, how do teachers and instructors react to it, what impact does it have on their mindsets and beliefs, and how does it impact on classroom practice and/or program design)?
- How is the CEFR currently being used, and how might it be used to greater advantage in order to enhance language learning at each of the levels addressed in this article (e.g., revision of specific curricula, calibration of course content and expectations, development of suitable materials, enrichment of assessment and evaluation practices, inclusion of language and pedagogical dimensions, student transition to higher levels of education, and improvement of student intake and placement)?
- How do students experience CEFR-informed instruction, and what types of impact does it have (e.g., connections to: student motivation and engagement, opportunities to learn and use the language, levels of student and parent satisfaction, and levels of retention in specific programs)?

The use of the CEFR in the Canadian context, then, clearly requires the engagement of multiple stakeholders at various levels, including policy, professional development,

pedagogy, and learning. With this in mind, we call for ongoing conversations encouraging stakeholders to consider how they might take up pan-Canadian interests with respect to various aspects of the CEFR and its related tools. Documentation of this ongoing process should in turn provide direction for research in each of these vital areas.

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Notes

¹Stephanie Arnott was the first author and the project lead, with remaining authors listed alphabetically to reflect equal contributions.

²In this article, the acronym *FSL* is used to refer to all French as an additional language situations/programs in Canada.

³In this article, we employ the terms *CEFR use* or *use of the CEFR* throughout the manuscript, as opposed to *implementation*, *adaptation*, or *application*, as per the rationale of Jones and Saville (2009) who said: “People speak of applying the CEFR to some context, as a hammer gets applied to a nail. We should speak rather of referring a context to the CEFR” (p. 55).

⁴In this article, the term *additional language* is meant to refer collectively to official languages (English, French), heritage languages, and Indigenous languages in Canada.

⁵In this article, the acronym *ESL* is used to refer to all English as an additional language situations/programs in Canada.

⁶In this article, the term *heritage languages* is used to refer to immigrants’ first languages that have non-official status in Canada (i.e., languages other than English or French). For a summary of heritage language programs across Canada, see Babae (2014).

⁷Three types of ITE program formats are offered across Canada: (a) direct entry (4 years), (b) concurrent—Humanities or Sciences/Education (4-5 years), and (c) consecutive—after degree (1-2 years) programs. The type of program (or, in some cases, programs) offered is determined by individual postsecondary institutions, in accordance with provincial regulations, rather than by any national, governing body.

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