CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME YEARS 1–12

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1. Background

The social value of foreign language knowledge has dramatically changed in Hungary, as throughout Europe, over the last ten years. A working knowledge of foreign languages has become a prerequisite for jobs in many fields and the ability to speak a foreign language is increasingly essential in everyday life. In consequence there has also been an increasing focus on the teaching of foreign languages. One indication of this was the declaration of 2001 as the European Year of Languages by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, an initiative supported by the European Commission and UNESCO. In response comprehensive studies were carried out on foreign language education in European countries. Hungary's Public Foundation for the Modernization of School Education issued a major tender inviting proposals that would support the European Year of Languages. The Ministry of Education commissioned a nation-wide evaluation of language knowledge. In 2003 the Ministry developed a long-term language education strategy, the World – Language Programme (Ministry of Education, 2003/a; http://english.tpf.hu/pages/subpage/index.php?id=509&page_id=52); this analyzed the present situation, set out aims and basic principles for development and launched specific programmes.

This increased interest in language knowledge and language learning is understandable if we take into consideration how wide the gap is between the language needs and the actual language knowledge of Hungary's population.

The data from the 2001 census show that, while the proportion of speakers of foreign languages among the Hungarian population virtually stagnated between 1960 and 1990, it more than doubled in the 1990s (Halász & Lannert, 2003. p. 474) Even with that advance, the gap is still significant compared with the developed countries.

Studies also show that the majority of adults in Hungary expect public education to provide the opportunity for learning a foreign language. According to the data from a 2002 opinion poll, teaching a foreign language was ranked at the 4/5 position among 15 most important tasks for schools (OKI, 2002).

Parallel to the 1989 change to democracy and a market economy, accelerating social demand and parental pressure led to schools offering a wider range of western languages, despite the fact that often even the minimal prerequisites (e.g. appropriately qualified teachers) were not in place. "In the competition between schools, the trump cards were various forms of higher level language education (dual language programmes or student groups specializing in a foreign language), an early start to language learning, the offer of two foreign languages in the school, streaming, the promise of an opportunity to learn in the target language country through a twinned school or integrating exam preparation courses into the school timetable" (Vágó, 2003. p. 209). At the same time, there was an attempt at the national level to limit the early start programmes and reduce the introduction of a second foreign language in elementary schools, although these attempts were largely resisted at local levels. Also at this time, from 1998 onwards, foreign language education became compulsory in vocational schools in Years 9-10; from 2003, those secondary schools where there was a demand and where the conditions were in place, gradually introduced a Year of Intensive Language Learning, during which students could focus exclusively on learning a foreign language.

By 2000, English had become the leading foreign language in Hungary followed by German and French (Halász & Lannert, 2003. p. 476). Learning languages gained higher social prestige and a higher status among students. Attitudes to language learning among the young are positive. Language learning attitudes and motivation among schoolgoers were first researched in the 1993-94 school year and another representative sample was taken in 1999. On a 1-5 scale in the first of these questionnaires, a response of 3.73 was recorded for the item which asked students how successful they would be at learning a language. They were willing to devote 4.25 units of energy on learning English and somewhat less to learning German, with French and Italian taking up the next two places. The 1999 repetition of the study yielded largely the same results (Nikolov, 2003/a; Nikolov, 2003/b). The positive attitude to language learning is also reflected in students' language learning plans. In the representative study of 2000 mentioned above, the majority of respondents indicated the national Intermediate or Advanced level language examinations as their primary aim. Data from other sources indicate that the attitude of the majority of students towards language learning is more positive than their attitude to other subjects closely related to their further education plans (Csapó, 2002).

There are few specific and comparable data available on how the effectiveness of language teaching in schools has changed over time. One indication, however, is that in the academic year 1999-2000 only 21.3% of all students admitted to higher education had passed a language examination at Intermediate or Advanced level in both the written and the oral components (Nikolov, 2003/b). There have only been two recent studies aiming to assess the overall language knowledge of students learning English and German, involving all the language skills: in spring 2000 for Years 6, 8, and 10 and in 2003 with the addition of Year 12 to the sample (Csapó, 2001).

In reading and listening comprehension and in writing, the average level for learners of English is slightly higher than that for learners of German. In both languages students are stronger in their receptive skills (reading and listening), their writing skills are rather poor. Although, according to the data, the majority of students met the minimal requirements, there are significant differences: the range of achievement is wide and there are great differences for almost every variable (Ministry of Education, 2000; Csapó, 2001).

Research also shows that everyday practice in most of public education still reflects the traditional language teaching principles, in which the knowledge of the system of the language is accorded more importance than useable language skills. Both classroom observations and responses given by the students participating in the 2000 study indicate that the most frequently used classroom activities are still grammar exercises, reading aloud, translation and oral question and answer drills. The activities least frequently used are dialogues, role-plays, pairwork, groupwork and language games (Nikolov, 2003/b).

An interesting finding in this respect is that, according to a survey carried out in conjunction with the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study, for two thirds of Hungarian students, especially females, the use of memory-based learning strategy is above the OECD average. The use of elaboration, the strategy of connecting various things and using them in different contexts, is above the OECD average for only half the students in the survey (Golnhofer & Szekszárdi, 2003).

It has also become clear that Hungarian students excelled in competitive learning, while their preference for learning modes requiring cooperation was below the OECD average. International experience shows that learning strategies based on cooperation are not inferior in their effectiveness; thus employing both two modes would be the most beneficial (Horváth & Környei, 2003; Vári, 2003).

The majority of language teachers, from the wide choice of teaching materials available, choose those based on Communicative Language Teaching principles; teaching and learning theories that define effective learning as a purposeful, constructive, self-regulating, communal and situative processes are increasing in influence. Yet the renewing of the pedagogical culture is still a very slow process, even in foreign language teaching, which is probably the most dynamically developing area within public education (Golnhofer & Szekszárdi, 2003).

Research data show that the majority of teachers are positive in their attitude to learning and learner-centred teaching; however, in everyday practice they do not often recourse to work forms fitted to the individual characteristics of their students. Only a few use the opportunities inherent in cooperative work forms, project work or computers (Petriné Fejér, 2001; Nikolov, 2003/a).

From the above, the effectiveness of language learning seems to be largely dependent on the skills and training of the teacher. Teacher education and in-service training are factors which, if optimized, may have a positive effect on student achievements. It is immensely important that all schools, independent of location and profile, should have the same proportion of well trained and qualified teachers, as this is the only way to ensure equal opportunities for learners (Vári, 2003).

2 STRATEGY: COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT

The development programme here outlined takes into account all of the above and it aims to raise the effectiveness of foreign language learning by renewing language teaching practices in schools, through a competence-based language teaching porgramme and the gradual introduction of this into the school system. To develop foreign language communicative competence, it aims to develop a foreign language programme which is organized around topics, language functions and situations, and it takes into consideration the students' age, interests and knowledge. This will make it possible for the students to acquire the foreign language through meaningful activities and communicative tasks.

2.1 Communicative language competence

In the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2000), the document setting standards for language teaching, competences are defined as "the sum of knowledge, skills and characteristics that allow a person to perform actions" and, within this, communicative language competences are those which "empower a person to act using specifically linguistic means" (p.9.), e.g. to ask for a glass of water or to ask for directions. In language use, communicative language competences are manifested in receptive and productive language activities, orally or in writing. Communicative language competences are closely entwined with general competences (e.g. logical deduction or empathy), which are not directly related to language but which are necessary for all kinds of actions, linguistic actions included (e.g. everyday activities such as getting information).

Language use and language learning is described as follows: "language use, embracing language learning, comprises the actions performed by persons who as individuals and as social agents develop a range of communicative language competences. […] They draw on the competences at their disposal in various contexts, under various conditions and under various constraints to engage in language activities". (Council of Europe, 2000, p.9). These activities are understood as language processes to produce and/or receive texts; these texts are themed to various areas of life. During these processes, language users activate the strategies which they consider to be the most appropriate for carrying out the tasks to be performed. The experiences acquired in communication processes may reinforce or modify the competences.

Communicative language competence comprises several components: linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic. Linguistic competences include lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological and orthographic competences. The formal acquiring of these competences and the ability to use them enables a language user to form accurate and meaningful messages. Sociolinguistic competences refer to the sociocultural conditions of language use. They include the knowledge and skills which comprise the social dimension of using a language. Pragmatic competences are concerned with the mastery of and the ability to use those principles which regulate the functional use of linguistic resources. They assist the language user in creating a coherent discourse, in recognizing the communicative functions of language and in identifying various text types. The main aims of language teaching are the foundation and constant development of the students' communicative competence. In fine-tuning these aims, three aspects need to be kept in mind: first, the needs of the learners and of the society, second, the classroom tasks which are necessary for meeting these needs, third, the competences which are needed for accomplishing these tasks.

2.2 Common Reference Levels:
Global scales in the Common European Framework of Reference

The level a language learner has achieved can be assessed in the area of the four basic language skills: listening, reading, spoken and written production and also in spoken and written interaction.

For this purpose the Common European Framework (Council of Europe, 2000, p.24), offers a six-level scale system from A1 to C2.

Proficient User	**C2**	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written resources, 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.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, can recognize 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 organizational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent User	**B2**	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain fir 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 viewpoints.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear, standard output in familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst traveling 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.
Basic User	**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.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of 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 that the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

3 THE GENERAL AIMS AND DEVELOPMENT GOALS OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN THE NATIONAL CORE CURRICULUM

The general aims and the minimal development requirements of foreign language teaching in Hungary have been defined, in line with the Common European Framework of Reference, by the National Core Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2003/b). The main goal is for Hungary to come into line with European countries within the shortest possible time. To this end it is important that every student leaving secondary school should be able to use a minimum of one, but preferably two, foreign languages at the level defined by the European Framework of Reference as A2-B2. A further basic goal is for every young person to maintain and further improve the language level they have achieved and to be able to learn additional foreign languages.

The National Core Curriculum 2003 thus declares that the main aim of teaching and learning foreign languages is to form and develop the students' communicative foreign language competence, specifically:

(1) by the school-leaving age, students should be able to use one or two foreign languages appropriately in personal, educational, social and professional contexts;

(2) while learning a language, students should develop and maintain a positive attitude towards language learning, towards the language they are learning, towards the people and the culture of the target language country and, in general, towards other languages and cultures;

(3) students should be able to maintain and improve their language knowledge autonomously throughout their lives, and to learn further foreign languages effectively and successfully.

The National Core Curriculum envisages a process of language learning in which the knowledge and skills acquired in other areas of the students' curricula is incorporated. Thus it links the development of communicative foreign language competences with general competences and learning skills, especially with communicative first language competences, and establishes a constant interaction between them.

The National Core Curriculum sets the minimal level to be achieved by every student in public education in two-year spans, (by the end of Years 6, 8, 10 and 12) in all the four language skills. (In locally optioned curricula, it is possible to set the requirements in one or more of these skills.)

The levels given in the National Core Curriculum are in line with the six levels defined by the European scale. The goal for the end of primary school studies (Year 8) is that every student should reach the A1 level in at least one foreign language. For Years 9-12 two alternative requirements are set, depending on what level the student aims to reach by the end of compulsory education and what type of matura examination they wish to take. If students aim to reach the B1 level by the end of Year 12, they need to be at the A2 level by the end of Year 10 (Programme a). If the aim for the end of Year 12 is the B2 level, the B1 level needs to be achieved by the end of Year 10 (Programme b). For the second foreign language by the end of Year 12 the minimal requirement is A2 (Programme c). For students aiming to reach the B1 level in their second foreign language as well, (Programme d), and wishing to take a matura examination, the school is required to offer this option.

Foreign language	Year 6	Year 8	Year 12
First foreign language (a)	A1-	A1	B1
First foreign language (b)	A1	A2	B2
Second foreign language (c)			A2
Secont foreign language (d)		A1	B1

3.1 The aim of language learning at Basic level (Years 1-6, age 6-13)

The main aims of basic level language teaching and learning in the first 6 years of elementary school can be summarized in the following:

– Language learners should develop an openness towards people speaking other languages and towards their cultures. They should maintain a positive attitude and motivation towards language learning itself, which is essential for life-long language learning.

– By the end of Year 6 (age 13) language learners should reach the A1– or the A1 level in one foreign language.

– Language learners should be familiar with and use effective language learning strategies for their development and autonomous learning.

– Language learners should be familiar with the special work forms and task types regularly used in language lesson.

– Of the basic language skills, results are primarily expected in the oral skills (listening and speaking), but students should be able to use reading and writing as a means for developing their listening and speaking skills and they should be beginning to develop writing skills in their own right.

3.2 The aim of language learning at Intermediate level (Years 7-12, age 12-19)

The aim of intermediate level language teaching and learning is in harmony with that set for the basic level; the latter is taken as a starting point and further developed from Year 7:

– The positive attitude and motivation towards language should be maintained, and, as much as possible, reinforced.

– By the end of Year 8 language learners should reach the A1 or A2 level; by the end of Year 10, the A2 or B1; and by the end of Year 12, the B1 or B2. In their second foreign language, where the basic aims are the same as those described for the first foreign language, they should reach the A2 or B1 level by the end of Year 12. (The differences between the required levels at each year are primarily due to the different language teaching contexts provided by the Core Curriculum and the curriculum of specialized language groups).

– Students should be able to perform receptive and productive language activities both orally and in writing and should aim to strike a balance between fluency and accuracy.

– Students should consider language learning not as an end in itself, but as a means of acquiring and giving information. For this reason, it is essential that there should be cross-curricular links between the content of language classes and new content should also be presented through the foreign language.

– To become autonomous language learners, by the end of Year 12 students should possess effective language learning strategies to a high level. Only in this way can they maintain and further develop their language skills and learn other languages after leaving school.

4 THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

4.1 The psychology of learning

To be able to provide a context where effective language teaching and learning can take place, the psychological background of language learning must be known and taken into consideration.

The psychological processes in (language) learning may be best described through a social-constructivist approach (Williams & Burden, 1997). This approach combines the constructivism based on the cognitive psychological views of Piaget, Donaldson and Bruckner with the Rogers' humanistic approach to the learning process and also the view of Vygotsky and Feuerstein, who looked upon learning as an interaction based on social relationships and defined learning as a dynamic and complex process embracing the student, the teacher, the task and the learning context (the classroom, the school, the cultural environment). Into this learning context, the students bring their existing knowledge, experiences and expectations, and they assimilate the new knowledge into their existing structure of knowledge in a unique and special way. The students thus take an active role in the process of learning by re-shaping meanings and solving problems, their whole personalities are also being formed and re-shaped and their general and specific competences (e.g. communicative language   competences) develop in constant interaction.

4.2 How do students learn foreign languages?

To date there is no fully-defined theory, supported by research, about how students learn foreign languages. What seems to be certain is that a great deal depends on the quality and quantity of language input. Some experts believe that if students are given plenty of comprehensible and interpretable input, through various interactions, they will automatically become able to acquire a foreign language in terms of both receptive and productive skills. According to them, the teacher's most vital role is to provide the richest possible foreign language environment for the students, who will then naturally acquire the language with no formal teaching. Others are of the opinion that, besides providing comprehensible input, an active role in communication is also necessary for the process of language learning to happen. Explicit language teaching is not necessary. Others again hold exactly the opposite view: they emphasize the importance of formal language learning and believe that if students have acquired the vocabulary and the grammatical rules, they become able to understand and use the language after due practice. Between these two extremes falls contemporary practice, in all its diversity and range.

Experience shows that students of various ages learn differently. Lower primary students and teenagers show great differences in how they learn foreign languages.

4.2.1 How do 6-13 year olds learn foreign languages?

All healthy children are able to learn their mother tongue as a natural part of their development. When children are learning a foreign language, they rely on the experience of learning their first language. This also means that the process does not require any special effort on their part; they do not need conscious and systematic learning. At this age, the prerequisites of effective language learning are meaningful language use embedded into contents that are interesting and relevant for them, a regular and frequent encounter with the foreign language and a relaxed and playful atmosphere. Consequently, language lessons should ensure that children have an enjoyable time while encountering the target language through play activities. If so, they will unconsciously acquire the language. There are teaching methods which build upon previous knowledge and the instinctive curiosity that children bring along into the classroom; these take the desire to learn into consideration and focus on complex skills development and can be successfully used with 6-13 year old beginners, while ensuring the holistic development of the children.

In seeking to find the cause for the ineffectiveness of institutionalised language learning, many have questioned the significance of early language learning despite the fact that there are a number of scientifically supported arguments for an early start, e.g. being able to master native-like pronunciation, overcoming ethnocentrism, etc. (OECD, 2002). It is a fact, however, that under classroom conditions the proportion of time invested into language learning and the results are different for elementary school students and more mature learners. The younger the learners are, the slower the progress in the formal acquiring of the language as a system; however, this "latent" period yields fruit in the long run. The basic requirement is to preserve and, if possible, strengthen the initial positive attitude towards language learning, primarily through contents which are fitted to the needs and abilities of the age group and through meaningful tasks and a variety of methods to help students maintain their motivation over the years. Bringing the starting age for language programmes forward, can only be successful if the schools launching an early start language programme are able to provide the conditions indispensable for effective work. These conditions include a language teacher who has the appropriate language competence and who is also at home in the education of the age group, a group size which allows for various cooperative work forms, and the appropriate number of regular contact lessons.

4.2.2 How do 12-19 year olds learn foreign languages?

Exploiting the language acquisition ability is the focal task for a teacher working with lower primary students: with age conscious language learning comes to the fore. For the majority of students, this change takes place around the age of 14. At that point children enter a new phase of development and arrive at the level of formal thinking. This is also true for the way they learn foreign languages, and requires a considerable investment of energy, patience, motivation and self-confidence.

5 TEACHING MATERIALS FOR COMMUNICATIVE FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT

To promote the development of foreign language competence, teaching materials have been designed for English, German and French language learners in primary and secondary schools. The starting point and the intensity of foreign language learning shows a great variety across the Hungarian school system; consequently, rather than assign materials for various years in school, age groups have been targeted and for each age group various language levels have been identified, taking into consideration the possible language level and learning pace of the students and the status of the target language being learnt (first or second foreign language). The language levels are consistent with the requirements laid down in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEF) and in the National Core Curriculum. Studies at a certain language level may take longer than one academic year (e.g. reaching the A1 level is assigned to Years 6-8 in the National Core Curriculum due to the differences in contact hours within the school programmes); thus the teaching materials differentiate between the lower and the higher end of a given level, e.g. A1 and A1+. For practical reasons, the syllabuses accompanying the materials refer to the CEF levels as a whole, e.g. to A1 or A2.

A feature of the materials development project is the language programme for lower primary beginner language learners. The English and German materials designed for 6-9 year olds aim to make up for a weakness in Hungarian public education. There are few teaching materials and detailed teacher's guides for those language teachers working with the youngest ages at schools which take into account the learners' age-specific features and which offer effective language teaching methodologies and techniques. The new materials offer a versatile, multi-level programme for the special needs of lower primary students at beginner level, while taking into consideration their cognitive and first-language development. Three stages have been identified for this target group:

1. the learner is not ready for the introduction of reading and writing in the foreign language (A1-);
2. the learner is ready to start reading and writing in the foreign language (A1-);
3. the learner already reads and writes in the foreign language (A1).

Within the foreign language competence development programme, supplementary materials have been designed for the following age groups and language levels:

Year	Year 1–6			Year 7–12		
Age group	Age 6–8	Age 9–10	Age 10–13	Age 12–15	Age 14–17	Age 16–19
Language level	From A1– to A1+			From A1 to B2+		
A1– The learner is not ready for the introduction of reading and writing in the foreign language						
A1– The learner is ready to start reading and writing in the foreign language						
A1 The learner already reads and writes in the foreign language						
A1+						
A2						
A2+						
B1						
B1+						
B2						
B2+						

The supplementary materials aiming to develop communicative foreign language competences can be flexibly integrated into the local curriculums and can be used with any coursebook. They cover up to 50% of the teaching hours during the years when foreign language learning is compulsory and cover all the lessons for the 6-9 years olds when language learning is optional. In German and English the materials are available for all the 12 years in public education, in French they are available only for secondary education (Year 9-12).

FOREIGN LANGUAGE						
Years	Years 1–6			Years 7–12		
Age group	Age 6–8	Age 9–10	Age 10–13	Age 12–15	Age 14–17	Age 16–19
English	100%		50%	50%	50%	50%
German	100%		50%	50%	50%	50%
French	–			–	50%	50%

Where there is 100% coverage, the materials comprise a new system of teaching aids. For the 50% coverage, the teaching aids aim to help the incorporation of certain new teaching methods into the language teaching process. Here teachers can continue using their tried and tested coursebooks, and supplement or exchange parts of these with the newly developed teaching materials.

Developing foreign language competences also involves materials design for teaching Hungarian as a foreign language, which differs from the above both in its aims and in its content; this part of the project wishes to provide a new, so far neglected component for public education. Taking into consideration the growing needs for developing communicative competence for migrant or disadvantaged students, or those with a non-Hungarian first language, beginner packages have been designed for students at various starting points in public education. The materials offer 100% coverage to provide the students with a learning tool and help them integrate into everyday life. Learners of Hungarian who are past the beginner stage can use supplementary material packages supporting various subject areas in Years 1-7.

HUNGARIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE					
Years	Years 1–6			Years 7–12	
Age group	Age 6–8	Age 8–10	Age 10–11	Age 13–14	Age 14–15
Beginner level	100%	–	100%	–	100%
Higher levels	Supple-mentary supporting packages	Supple-mentary supporting packages	Supple-mentary supporting packages	Supple-mentary supporting packages	–

5.1 Target groups

These competence-based language teaching materials aiming to develop communicative foreign language competence are targeted to primary and secondary school students and their language teachers. They have been created within the 3.1.1 Human Resources Operational Programme of Hungary's National Development Plan in 2004-2007. The key figures in the project are language teachers, who work with the teaching materials and introduce them in the educational system. A well trained and motivated language teacher is a prerequisite of successful language learning. Teachers unsure of their language knowledge and lacking a thorough up-to-date methodology background may cause irreparable harm for the student at any stage of learning. With this in mind, organizing in-service teacher training events, monitoring the implementation of the materials and establishing a mentoring system were of prime importance for the materials development project.

5.2 Relationship between programme development and the National Core Curriculum

The objectives of the materials development project are fully in line with the aims and development requirements of the National Core Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2003/b) and with various European documents, primarily the Common European Framework of Reference: the primary aim is to lay the foundations of and develop foreign language communicative competence. The requirements are specified in the National Core Curriculum for the exit-points of the three stages in Hungarian public education at the end of Years 6, 8, and 12; the materials development project offers such specifications for elementary and secondary levels, for Years 1-6 and 7-12.

A basic consideration in designing materials for Years 1-6 is how to make them adaptable to the variety of language programmes existing in the school system. Although the National Core Curriculum assigns the compulsory starting point of learning a foreign language for Year 4, an earlier start is supported when certain conditions are fulfilled. Experience shows that schools often take this opportunity. In the academic year 2002-2003 about 30% of students in Years 1-3 and 50% of students in Year 3 had already started their foreign language studies (Ministry of Education, 2003/c).

In developing teaching materials for 6-12 year olds, the wide practice of teaching foreign languages before Year 4 has been taken into consideration. This practice is in harmony with the Ministry's World Language Programme (Ministry of Education, 2003/a), within which recommendations were provided and a programme was worked out for the foreign language studies of 6-9 year olds in 2004. In developing materials for secondary level, another aspect of the Ministry's World Language Programme has also been considered, the needs and opportunities of the Year of Intensive Language Learning scheme (http://english.tpf.hu/pages/subpage/index.php?id=509&page_id=52).

5.3 Relationship with other competences

Within the materials development project, several links can be established between communicative foreign language competence and other competence areas.

Developing foreign language competence development is enmeshed and is in constant interplay with developing a range of other competences. Among these, the integrated development of foreign language and first language communicative competence is of prime importance. There are several links both in the area of receptive and productive skills through which this integration can be carried out (e.g. through similar development aims or through linking another subject area to text comprehension and text production within the Hungarian as a foreign language programme).

There are opportunities for integrating foreign language competence development with social, life skills and environmental competences. In teaching foreign languages the teacher can use various techniques and cooperative work forms which develop social competence. Life skills and environmental competences can be integrated through linguistic contents in the language teaching materials.

5.4 Basic methodology principles in competence development

Before giving a detailed account of the foreign language programme itself, in the following we present the basic methodology principles that underlie the foreign language communicative competence development project.

Foreign language education since the 1980s has been driven by the communicative approach. In the centre of the teaching-learning process is the student, who performs communicative actions by using the foreign language to fulfill their needs. With the spread of the communicative approach, traditional language teaching methodologies aiming to teach the language as a system have gradually been replace by learner and activity-centred methods; these, in turn, have brought about changes in the roles of the teacher and student and changes in the quality and quantity of classroom language.

The central feature of the language teaching-learning process is the task. According to the Common European Framework of Reference "tasks are a feature of everyday life in the personal, public, educational or occupational domains. Task accomplishment by an individual involves the strategic activation of specific competences in order to carry out a set of purposeful actions in a particular domain with a clearly defined goal and a specific outcome. Tasks can be extremely varied in nature, and may involve language activities to a greater or a lesser extent. [...] Communication is an integral part of tasks where participants engage in interaction, production, reception or mediation, or a combination of two or more of these. [...] Communicative tasks, whether reflecting 'real life' use or essentially 'pedagogic' in nature, are communicative to the extent that they require learners co comprehend, negotiate and express meaning to achieve a communicative goal. The emphasis in a communicative task is on successful task completion and consequently the primary focus is on meaning as learners realize their communicative intentions. However, in the case of tasks designed for language learning or language teaching purposes, performance is concerned both with meaning and with the way meanings are comprehended, expressed and negotiated. A changing balance needs to be established between attention to meaning and form, fluency and accuracy, in the overall selection and sequencing of tasks so both task performance and language learning progress can be facilitated and appropriately acknowledged" (Council of Europe, 2002. pp.157-8).

Variety in the organization of classroom activities and tasks provides the students with the opportunity for working in groups, pairs or individually. Changing the organisation of classwork can be motivating for students and allows both student and teacher to try themselves in new roles. The teacher stands is not the sole owner and mediator of knowledge for students but an organizer, a monitor or a facilitator during certain activities. An effective technique in communicative language teaching is project work, within which students use the foreign language as a means in order to reach a common goal and cooperate to create a joint product. Project work, at the same time, contributes to student autonomy – which is an indispensable prerequisite for life-long learning.

It is the teachers' responsibility to choose the most appropriate methods for reaching their aims. A well-prepared teacher is aware that methods depend on the age of the students. For the youngest learners, methods which exploit song, rhymes and stories in the target language are immensely important because through these the students experience the language as a means of communication. In this age group the emphasis is on oral skills, although spoken production can only be expected within limits. For 10-12 year olds, understanding spoken language is still an important aim but for them developing speaking skills comes to the fore and gradually more emphasis is put on reading and writing skills. This age group can already engage in activities around certain topics whose content links with another subject area. For 12-14 year olds, integrating the four basic language skills becomes important, which can be provided through motivating contents, life-like situations and stimulating language games. Cross-curricular contents also offer opportunities for this age group to extend or further develop their knowledge about various topics through the target language or to open up issues related to the target language culture. For foreign language teaching in secondary school, methods which promote autonomous learning become more important than ever before.

There are several ways of learning a foreign language outside the classroom as well. The Internet, foreign language TV channels, books and magazines offer good opportunities for using the language in

communicative situations. A language learner, while functioning successfully in life-like situations, uses the foreign language as a means to achieve a goal. The sense of success in such situations strengthens self confidence and motivates for further learning.

5.5 Foreign language programme

In designing teaching materials for communicative foreign language competence, the main aim is to provide learners with functional language knowledge. The materials must be capable of being used effectively with students coming from different language learning backgrounds, from different school contexts and from learning groups with varied motivation levels. Teaching materials are organised into self-contained modules; this gives them the versatility needed in integrating them into the syllabus. A single module contains tasks around a topic for five teaching hours. The choice of module is the teacher's responsibility; the choice depends on the skills and competences to be developed, on the needs of the students and on the possible links with the teaching context. A module is suitable for supplementing or substituting a section in the standard coursebook, for introducing or deepening a topic area or for a focused development of certain language subskills.

5.5.1 Foreign language competence development at two levels

There are various types of teaching materials for foreign language communicative competence development for both primary (Years 1-6) and secondary (Years 7-12) levels.

Year 1–6			
Age group	Age 6–8	Age 9–10	Age 10–13
Language level	From A1- to A1+		
A1– **The learner is not ready for the introduction of reading and writing in the foreign language**	Introducing English Story- or topic-based materials Topics and activities		
A1– **The learner is ready to start reading and writing in the foreign language**		Introducing English Story- or topic-based materials Topics and activities	Modules: Story-time Creative Communication Projects in the language lesson
A1 **The learner already reads and writes in the foreign language**			Modules: Story-time Creative Communication Projects in the language lesson
A1+			Modules: Story-time Creative Communication Projects in the language lesson

Year 7–12			
Age group	Age 12–15	Age 14–17	Age 16–19
Language level	From A1 to B2+		
A1	Modules: Creative Communication Projects in the language lesson Using the Internet in the language lesson	Modules: Creative Communication Projects in the language lesson Using the Internet in the language lesson	
A1+	Modules: Creative Communication Projects in the language lesson Using the Internet in the language lesson	Modules: Creative Communication Projects in the language lesson Using the Internet in the language lesson	
A2	Modules: Creative Communication Projects in the language lesson Using the Internet in the language lesson	Modules: Creative Communication Projects in the language lesson Using the Internet in the language lesson	
A2+		Modules: Creative Communication Projects in the language lesson Using the Internet in the language lesson	Modules: Creative Communication Projects in the language lesson Using the Internet in the language lesson
B1		Modules: Creative Communication Projects in the language lesson Using the Internet in the language lesson	Modules: Creative Communication Projects in the language lesson Using the Internet in the language lesson
B1+			Modules: Creative Communication Projects in the language lesson Using the Internet in the language lesson
B2			Modules: Creative Communication Projects in the language lesson Using the Internet in the language lesson
B2+			Modules: Creative Communication Projects in the language lesson Using the Internet in the language lesson

5.5.2 *Foreign language competence development in four languages*

The National Core Curriculum sets out the framework of development tasks for modern foreign languages; to this is added the Hungarian as a Foreign Language project, aiming to assist the integration of young immigrants. In total, the foreign language competence development project offers alternative teaching materials for three languages foreign to Hungarians (i.e. English, German and French) and for Hungarian as a foreign language. As to distribution of languages: in primary schools, it should be noted that 96% of students learn English or German; in secondary education this figure is even higher at 98%. Thus all the other languages make up the remaining 4 or 2 per cent (Ministry of Education, 2003/c). This is important information for the materials development project.

For English and German, teaching materials have been developed for all the 12 years of public education, for French they have been created for secondary school level. For secondary students' level (age 14-19), the consideration was always taken as to whether the language is the first or the second foreign language being learned. Within the development project Hungarian as a foreign language has been treated as a separate unit, with a unique development connectional framework. Certain phases of the development project have been planned in unison (e.g. conceptual framework) and written in the target languages, in Hungarian, English, German and French. Module descriptions have been written in the target language.

5.5.3 *Developing foreign language communicative competence through alternative teaching materials*

For developing foreign language communicative competence, supplementary materials have been created which cover part of the school syllabus. This allows teachers to experiment with small units and build them into their syllabuses. In the first three years of education, with the lower number of contact lessons, it is possible to use the alternative materials as the core material.

In the project the following types of materials have been designed:

Story-time
These teaching materials aim to lay the foundations of the communicative competence for 10-13 year old language learners, primarily in the area of speaking skills, based on the children's literature (rhymes, songs, stories, graded readers, audiovisual aids, etc.) of the target language culture. Establishing the situation similar to that of the first language environment (e.g. shared reading of stories) may enhance the language learning process and boost motivation for language learning. While learning songs and rhymes, children gradually join in the singing, chanting, story telling or acing out the stories; in doing so, they acquire the linguistic elements of the text. Experiential learning offers a variety of potentials for complex language development. The teaching materials contain chunks of language from specific authentic sources and materials, which engage the students in the learning process and promote the language to be used as a means. With the growing age of the target group, developing reading and writing skills gradually get into the spectrum.

Creative Communication
The aim of the teaching materials here is to develop the speaking skills in language learners. Competence development takes place through age-specific and challenging contents, activities and tasks.

These teaching materials aim to establish down the basis and develop the foreign language competences of 6-13 year old beginner students through activities which link with a specific topic area, and which are close to the everyday activities of the age group and build on life-like foreign language communication. Skills development centres on reading and listening skills, vocabulary development and speaking skills. The modules offer motivating activities for the exploitation of a topic area.

For the 12-19 year old group, the teaching materials continue to focus on speech production and the development of speaking skills and offer activities; language games and situational games provide learners with the experience of communal activities and games rather than that of learning. The aim is to separate language use from the concept of learning, to break out of the school context and to create situations where languages are use as a means.

Projects in the language lessons

The aim of the teaching materials is twofold: to develop language competences through thematic tasks which strengthen cross-curricular links and, secondly, to enhance students' cooperative and autonomous learning skills. During the project, students work cooperatively to achieve a common goal or to create a joint product. While working, the joint development of cooperative work forms and learner autonomy is the aim. Depending on the task, parts of the project can be worked on outside the classroom as well. The development project can contribute to greater student autonomy, an essential basis for life-long learning and for maintaining motivation.

Using the Internet in the language lessons

The aim of the teaching materials is to exploit the possibilities offered by the Internet for language classes in the areas of searching for and processing information, creative writing and digital communication studies. The modules offer activities which would be impossible, or much less attractive, to exploit without the Internet. These activities are built on one another both technically and language-wise; they become more complex and demand more sophisticated use of the language and of the computer. Some alternative technical facilities are taken into account, but the materials designers started out from the premise that language education is carried out in smaller groups in a classroom where audio or information technology can be used, with every student sitting at a separate terminal, if the task type so requires.

5.6 Elements of the foreign language programme

5.6.1 Educational framework

The educational framework describes the detailed methodological approach used in the foreign language teaching materials and the development objectives in the project. Its aim is to support teachers by giving an overview of the programme. The present Conceptual Framework describes the target users, the groups and the schools, the methodological principles employed, the pedagogical and psychological principles involved in the course of choosing and arranging the materials; the conceptual framework also makes it clear the guiding principles behind the planning of student activities and the opportunities in the programme for differentiation.

5.6.2 Programme curriculum

The programme curriculum contains the general development objectives, gives a detailed account of the development objectives in the subject area broken down to age groups and language levels, gives examples of possible classroom activities and clarifies principles of evaluation.

The curriculum contains important methodological principles which make up a specific part of language education for the given age group.

5.6.3 Module descriptions

Module descriptions make up the bulk of the foreign language programme. They give a detailed account of what goes on in specific phases of the language learning process. They give recommendations about procedures for covering specific topics, about the activities students engage in, the suggested teaching materials, methodological elements, evaluation procedures and backup systems supporting the teacher's work.

5.6.4 Teaching materials

Foreign language education shows a favourable picture in terms of the up-to-date teaching aids used in the profession. A number of high-quality coursebook families are available for teachers. The present project aims to provide creative materials supplementary to the existing teaching materials. Of the available teaching materials, the poorest choice can be found in the materials for the youngest learners. For this age group the project produced a variety of alternative teaching materials (picture cards, posters, board games, work sheets, listening materials, texts, etc.).

5.6.5 Evaluation system

The teaching materials contain all the tools which assist in making the requirements of the programme clear for the users. These also make it possible to show the progress of individual students and make it possible to assess their achievements. They allow a realistic picture at the end of a module about the progress the students make. The evaluation system includes a worksheet for the students, designed to make self-evaluation possible.

5.6.6 In-service training

In-service teacher training events are integral to the programme; they assist the teachers in preparing for the successful implementation of the teaching materials. Also available within this scheme are self-study materials, professional meetings linking to the programme, which promote peer help and learning from fellow professionals and activity-based preparation within creative workshops.

5.6.7 Mentor system

This component contains all the tools and services (e.g. the mentor system) which back up the teachers taking part in the programme.

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