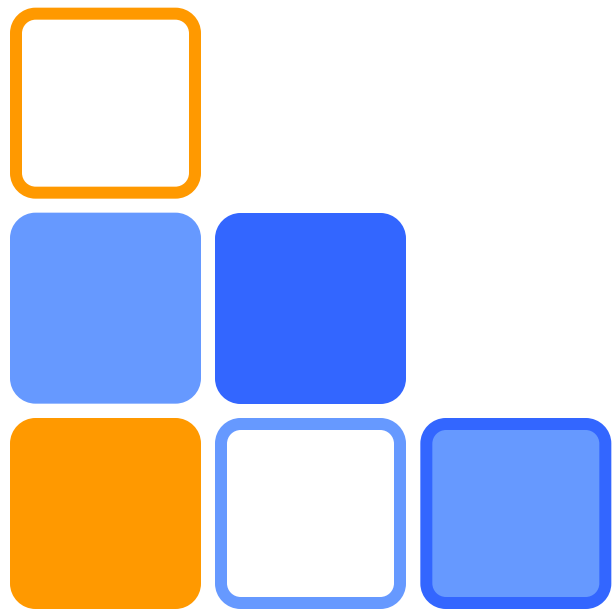# Reflecting RFCDC Descriptors in Language and Communication-related Courses of Japanese Universities

August 25, 2023
BAAL Annual Conference

Kahoko Matsumoto
(Tokai University)
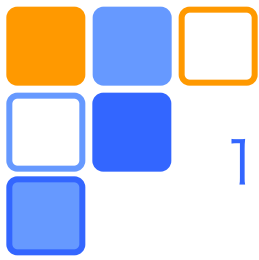Takeshi Kitazawa
(Tokyo Gakugei Univ.)

Contents

1. **Background**

2. **Our Objectives**

3. **On-going Experiments and Challenges**

4. **Future Directions**

1．Background: From Intercultural Competence to Global Citizenship

1. In the past 3 grant-in-aid projects done in 2010s, we have tried to connect intercultural awareness-raising and development of intercultural competence with language education.

2. Naturally, such attempts are closely related to global citizenship education, which we feel, is very much needed for Japanese students, so a new 3-year project to incorporate RFCDC descriptors in the university language and communication-related courses was launched in 2021.

<RFCDC>

REFERENCE FRAMEWORK OF COMPETENCES FOR DEMOCRATIC CULTURE

Volume 2 — Descriptors of competences for democratic culture

COUNCIL OF EUROPE / CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Downloadable from the Council of Europe's website:
https://coe.int/en/web/campaign-free-to-speak-safe-to- learn/ reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture

Model of Competences for Democratic Culture

Values

- Valuing human dignity and human rights
- Valuing cultural diversity
- Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law

Attitudes

- Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices
- Respect
- Civic-mindedness
- Responsibility
- Self-efficacy
- Tolerance of ambiguity

Competence

- Autonomous learning skills
- Analytical and critical thinking skills
- Skills of listening and observing
- Empathy
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills
- Co-operation skills
- Conflict-resolution skills

Skills

- Knowledge and critical understanding of the self
- Knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication
- Knowledge and critical understanding of the world: politics, law, human rights, culture, cultures, religions, history, media, economies, environment, sustainability

Knowledge and critical understanding

<RFCDC: Examples>

Values

1. Valuing human dignity and human rights

1	Argues that human rights should always be protected and respected	Basic
2	Argues that specific rights of children should be respected and protected by society	
3	Defends the view that no one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment	Intermediate
4	Argues that all public institutions should respect, protect and implement human rights	
5	Defends the view that when people are imprisoned, although they are subject to restrictions, this does not mean that they are less deserving of respect and dignity than anyone else	Advanced
6	Expresses the view that all laws should be consistent with international human rights norms and standards	

<RFCDC: Examples>

Attitudes

4. Openness to cultural otherness

21	Shows interest in learning about people's beliefs, values, traditions and world views	Basic
22	Expresses interest in travelling to other countries	
23	Expresses curiosity about other beliefs and interpretations and other cultural orientations and affiliations	Intermediate
24	Expresses an appreciation of the opportunity to have experiences of other cultures	
25	Seeks and welcomes opportunities for encountering people with different values, customs and behaviours	Advanced
26	Seeks contact with other people in order to learn about their culture	

<RFCDC: Examples>

Skills

10. Autonomous learning skills

58	Shows ability to identify resources for learning (e.g. people, books, internet)	Basic
59	Seeks clarification of new information from other people when needed	
60	Can learn about new topics with minimal supervision	Intermediate
61	Can assess the quality of his/her own work	
62	Can select the most reliable sources of information or advice from the range available	Advanced
63	Shows ability to monitor, define, prioritise and complete tasks without direct oversight	

<RFCDC: Examples>

Knowledge and critical understanding

18. Knowledge and critical understanding of the self

106	Can describe his/her own motivations	Basic
107	Can describe the ways in which his/her thoughts and emotions influence his/her behaviour	
108	Can reflect critically on his/her own values and beliefs	Intermediate
109	Can reflect critically on himself/herself from a number of different perspectives	
110	Can reflect critically on his/her own prejudices and stereotypes and what lies behind them	Advanced
111	Can reflect critically on his/her own emotions and feelings in a wide range of situations	

2. Our Objectives

1) To do a teacher survey on 135 major descriptors in terms of:
   - necessity for our students
   - validity in the present curricula
   - practical doability
   while introducing RFCDC to university teachers and asking those who we interviewed to try using some descriptors.
2) To create various instructional models for teachers to refer to, after sufficient piloting and trial effort
   (clear objectives from RFCDC→curriculum development→consistent evaluation)

1) 12-cooperator Focus Group incl. 3 project members discussed which descriptors can be incorporated into different-type courses, reflecting feedback from interviews. → Then, 12 cooperators applied them in their classes and created various instructional models in 2021&2022. → 8 required courses, 11 ESP/CLIL/EMI types of courses and 6 communication -related applied linguistic courses.

2) Cooperators' approaches and involvement levels were different, so we have started periodic meetings to share feedback and discuss the use of the reflection tool for teachers.
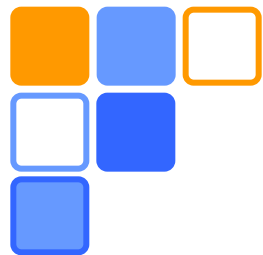
Though different teachers teach different levels/types of courses, we generally expected:

- Basic descriptors to be used for required language courses
- Intermediate descriptors to be used for EAP/ESP/CLIL/EMI types of courses
- Advanced descriptors to be used for various communication-related applied linguistic courses and other liberal arts subjects

Tentative teacher survey results

The online questionnaire results of 172 higher education teachers: Those who checked "strongly agree" or "agree" in 5-point Likert Scale (Averaged for 44-46 items for each level)

- necessity for our students
    Basic: 89%, Intermediate 88%, Advanced 93%
- validity in the present curricula
    Basic: 43%, Intermediate 57%, Advanced 67%
- practical doability
    Basic: 27%, Intermediate 48%, Advanced 65%

⟨Overall Tendencies⟩

● The class evaluation of all 2022 fall-semester classes has improved compared to the counterparts of the previous semesters in 2021, though not all of them with significant difference.

● The pre- and post-questionnaires for students with 5-point Likert scale (5. Can do well, 4. Can do often, 3. Cannot decide, 2. Cannot do so well, 1. Cannot do at all) conducted in 8 classes showed students' reporting improved competence (0.2 to 1.2 in the averaged points for different descriptors used in different classes).

<Piloting in 8 Required Courses>

●Values: Contents to learn the benefits of cultural diversity were expanded/added (Values-2).

●Attitudes: Active, group activities were added for students with different backgrounds and personalities to learn to work together to solve cultural conflicts and social problems. (Attitudes-4,5,7 & 9)

●Skills: Assignments related to the above group activities were given, together with homework for each student to reflect upon their contribution and how they can improve their involvement next time. (Skills-10,11,14 & 15)

⟨Piloting in 8 Required Courses⟩

- Knowledge and Critical Understanding:
  The general English textbooks used for 4 different required courses, if put together, give basic knowledge of most of the areas (understanding of the world, politics, law, human rights, culture(s), religion, history, media, economies, environment and sustainability), so teachers chose a couple of them for expansion by asking questions to stimulate critical thinking and, in the 2nd-year courses, making students do their own research and produce a reaction paper. (K-18,19 & 20)

⟨Challenges with Required Courses⟩
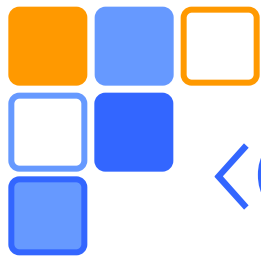
- Because of the limitation on the content and teaching materials as well as the different degrees of standardization exerted, coverage of chosen descriptors has become rather shallow and sporadic, and it was difficult to establish continuity among activities planned and inserted.

- Most foreign or mixed-roots students are placed in the advanced-level classes, so lower-level classes are homogenous, which makes interactive activities less stimulating and engaging.

〈Piloting in 11 ESP/CLIL Courses〉

● Piloting in 11 ESP/CLIL/EMI courses for International Studies, Western Civilization and Information Science Departments was easier due to the flexibility allowed to each teacher in selecting themes and teaching contents.

● In these courses, the following contents (mostly derived from SDGs) were covered, with various kinds of active, real-life based group works. →Thus, many descriptors in all the 4 RFCDC's sections (Values, Attitudes, Skills and Knowledge and Critical Understanding) could be brought into.

＜ESP/CLIL/EIM Courses for International Studies, Western Civilization and Information Science Departments.＞

1) <u>Sustainability Issues </u>(population explosion, environmental conservation, future human-technology relationship, increasing gap bet. the rich and the poor, etc.)
2) <u>Cultural diversity Issues </u>(stereotypes and biases, negative effects of internet-based information, efforts to build a society with people of diverse backgrounds coexisting, etc.)
3) <u>The present world affairs </u>(political, societal, religious problems, media literacy, etc.)

〈Challenges〉
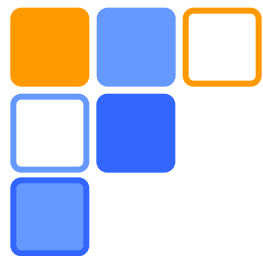
●Choosing the English materials that fit the levels of different classes was difficult, esp. when classes were mixed-level ones.

●Students' focus was often more on English learning than thinking about issues critically. Also, Japanese students often struggle with productive skills, which makes discussion/ cooperative activities a bit stiff and ineffective.

⟨Piloting in 7 Applied Linguistics Courses⟩

1. Language and Culture, and Sociolinguistics: It was a lot easier to incorporate many descriptors of knowledge and critical thinking, dealing with cultural/societal issues and their inter-relatedness, with active group discussion on real-life based problems.
2. Communication Theories: The teacher tried to create group/individual assignments in which students apply theories to actual situations and acted out the roles in them.

〈Challenges〉
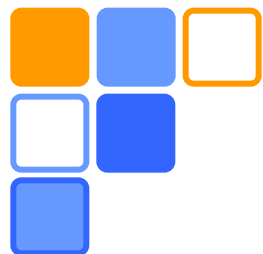
● While teachers could cover various descriptors in 4 sections, the content was sometimes limited to the issues centering around the relationship among language, culture and society at the abstract level.

● Like the cases of ESP/CIIL courses, students with low-level English proficiency had difficulty understanding when the provided material was in English and expressing themselves in cooperative activities.

<My small, but successful attempt>

I opted to teach 2 general, required liberal arts courses last year (International Understanding and Intercultural Communication)

- Intentionally chose controversial/sensitive topics→received various, active responses from students.
- Attenuated my attitudes/approaches based on students' reflective comments.
- Students have become more and more expressive and involved after reading my feedback and having free, open discussions in class.

s
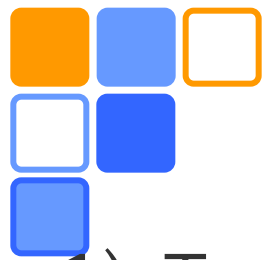
General Problems Reported

1) Teachers sometimes lead/control the classes too much; we teachers should learn to make our classes more student-centered to nurture student autonomy, responsible attitude and self-efficacy (=important RFCDC descriptors).

2) The selection of input materials should also be careful. Some domestic media materials depict the same world issue differently from more objective original source reports.→For advanced students, the comparison may work.
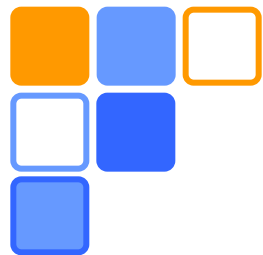
3) Most collaborators feel that the expressions in RFCDC descriptors are sometimes too strong and require assertiveness. They feel that to be able to form and express one's own opinions based on critical understanding of subject matters is culturally a big step for not outspoken Japanese students.

(continued)
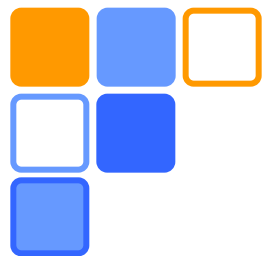
(Continued) The action for justice, such as initiating movements, and resorting to courts/laws is a bit far-reaching to our students (even to educated adults). So, it has

been hard to create activities in which students are naturally encouraged to take actions.

4. Future Directions

1. Reflecting the summary results (of necessity, validity and doability) and the analysis of actual experiments, we will create various instructional models for different courses with the RFCDC descriptors referred to clearly noted.

   The experiments will be replicated by more teachers of different universities, and based on their feedback, the models will be added, modified and adjusted.
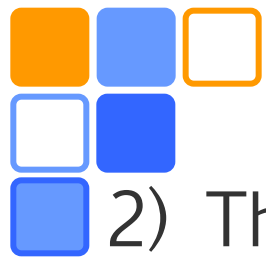
2）The curriculums of language and communication-related courses in different departments will be created and proposed, where the RFCDC descriptors will be incorporated accumulatively in an integrated manner (from basic to advanced levels), reflecting the needs of each department. →As the first step, we are creating several exemplary trajectory models of students' progress for different majors.

Sample Curriculum Map with RFCDC Descriptors

	Values 1	Values 2	Values 3	Attitudes 4	Attitudes 5	Attitudes 6	Attitudes 7	Attitudes 8	→
Freshman Seminar		7-8	12-13	21-22	27-28	33-34	39-40	44-45	
Required English Courses	1-4	7-9		21-22	27-28	33-34	39-40	44-45	
ESP Courses	3-6	9-11	13-13	23-24	29-30	35-36	41-42	46-47	
Language-related Electives	5-6	10-11	15-17	23-24	29-30	35-36	41-42	46-47	
CLIL/EMI Courses	5-6	10-11	15-17	25-26	31-32	37-38	41-43	46-47	
Various Departmental Seminars			15-17	25-26	32-32	37-38	43	48-49	
↓									
Graduation Theses Seminars			15-17	25-26	31-32	37-38	43	48-49	
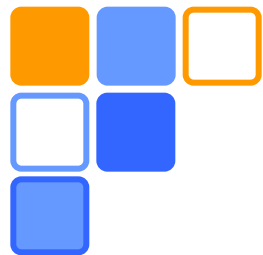
Thank you for listening!

Email: mkahoko@tsc.u-tokai.ac.jp