Autonomous language learning and Framework of reference for pluralistic approach FREPA descriptors: a possible match?

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The autonomy of learners in language learning, and through language learning as well as the training of teachers and the elaboration of new practices in language teacher’s education, are some of the European Center for Modern Languages (ECML) initiatives, part of long term plan, supported by the Council of Europe, “Learning through Languages”. Among the results of these projects there is a Framework of reference for pluralistic approaches (FREPA). The resources proposed by this framework fosters the continuity of interaction between different linguistic realities with the same goal: sharing knowledge discovery and respect for the culture of the other. This framework is a practical example of knowledge conceptualized and operationalized that can be integrated in a teacher preparation and professional development context.

In this presentation, we will parallel this initiative and tool with another perspective chosen by many researchers and practitioners who have integrated in their courses a learning component acquired and evaluated through experiential learning projects with community partners as a widespread way to learn in an autonomous or semi-autonomous way. Through a qualitative analysis of data gathered over 7 years with approximately 400 university students, we will look at the connection between guidelines, scopes and challenges associated with community service learning evaluation descriptors and the role of language constructs and context in language learning as presented by the FREPA and the CEFR descriptors.

This links the broader theme of assessment tasks, similar to those that examinees might encounter in real-life contexts and content, with the recognized representation and value of experiential language learning in the community, and the value of assessment based on students’ journals used as an essential reflection and evaluation component. We will discuss the challenges existing between language learning course objectives and learning outcomes and the integration of an optional or compulsory community learning experience.

Keywords: Learner’s autonomy, experiential learning, cultural descriptors.