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From Competence Curriculum Design to Assessment and Certification of Achievement: two empirical models for TEFL

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Abstract. Both the national and international literature identifies the development of design and assessment competences as a fundamental component in the professionalization of primary school teachers. This paper considers theoretical and methodological aspects of EFL curriculum design as it is addressed in Italy. Two empirical models are discussed: (i) a competence design model called the CUD Mod., based on the 'competence unit', and (ii) a model for achievement assessment and certification called ARCA. Both models were tested in action-research projects carried out in first-cycle schools in Tuscany. The contribution reflects on the experience which might also benefit other school contexts.

Keywords. instructional design, achievement assessment, TEFL, teacher's profile, competences

1. Introduction

Today in school design and learning assessment competences are key elements in a teacher's professional profile. even before being implemented, a good educational path needs to be thought out and carefully planned by reviewing the many variables (contextual, educational, organizational, emotional, relational, etc.) that accompany the teaching-learning process and the teacher-pupil educational relationship. After outlining a possible profile of a teacher's design and assessment competences, according to the national and international literature, the present chapter proposes two empirical models: 1) a competence design model called the CUD Mod., presented here as a functioning model to design the competence curriculum in primary schools and develop an EFL teacher's competences for design; 2) a methodological model for achievement assessment and certification called the ARCA Model, applicable within the Italian school system and valid for the majority of European school systems.

2. Design competences of teacher's professional profile

Improving the quality of a pupil's learning can only be pursued by investing in empowering a teacher's vocational skills[1]. In fact, the ongoing review of teachers' profes-

[1] Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the*

sional competences, are aspects that are recognized internationally by the OECD[2], UNESCO[3], the European Union[4] and other research organizations[5] as a priority not only to raise the quality of education systems in various countries but also to increase Europe's competitiveness. The quality of teaching and teacher professionalism are now recognized as strategic factors both for education and social growth policies. Moreover, within the range of competences that a teacher should manage, design plays a fundamental role in guiding instructional action in an intentional, systematic, and thoughtful way.

School design requires the activation of intellectual, operational, relational, and technical resources in order to put into effect a specific vision of the world and human beings. It always implies being referred to an objective. For this, it needs to be adapted to specific learning situations, checking to what extent it can change, and improve the existing reality. Designing means, first of all, to start from an analysis of the existing to head towards the future, towards the identification of concrete transforming paths of reality able to support a perspective oriented toward continuous improvement[6].

Within schools, two features properly characterize the design: a conceptual, creative, and constructive perspective, on the one hand, and control, guidance, monitoring, and evaluation, on the other. In the first case, through a bottom-up approach possible lines of action oriented to problem solving or need satisfaction are conceived. In the second case, the design allows the 'controllability' of the learning processes and teaching products. This increases the effectiveness and efficiency levels of instructional activities, intervening, even during construction, on the redefinition of objectives, strategies, methods, and means to achieve the final result. Design flexibility plays a very important role in the success of instructional activity[7].

In schools, there are different levels of design. We can speak of a macro design level, which involves the entire school staff of the institution, such as the planning of the edu-

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European Parliament, Improving the Quality of Teacher Education, COM (2007) 392 final, in: http://www.cdepc.it/documenti/20070803COM_2007_392.pdf (last viewed 03/07/2018).

[2] OECD, *Creating effective teaching and learning environments*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2009, in: http://www.oecd.org/education/school/43023606.pdf (05/07/2018); Id., *Teaching practices and pedagogical innovation: evidence from TALIS*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2012, in: http://www.oecd.org/education/school/TalisCeri%202012%20(tppi)--Ebook.pdf (last viewed 28/06/2018); Id., *Synergies for better learning. An international perspective on evaluation and assessment*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2013a, in: http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/education/synergies-for-better-learning-an-international-perspective-on-evaluation-and-assessment_9789264190658-en#page9 (last viewed 30/06/2018); Id., *Teacher for the 21st century. Using evaluation to improve teaching*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2013b, in: http://www.oecd.org/site/eduistp13/TS2013%20Background%20Report.pdf (last viewed 30/06/2018).

[3] UNESCO, *Unesco strategy on teachers (2012-2015)*, 2012 in: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002177/217775E.pdf (last viewed 30/06/2018); Id., *Teachers and educational quality: Monitoring Global Needs for 2015*, 2015, in: http://www.uis.unesco.org/Library/Documents/teachers06-en.pdf (last viewed 30/09/2015).

[4] Commission of the European Communities, *Europe 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, 2010, in: *http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf* (last viewed 04/07/2018); Id., *Key Data on Education in Europe 2012*, Brussels, Eurydice, 2012.

[5] RAND Education, 2015, in: http://www.rand.org/education/projects/measuring-teacher-effectiveness/value-added-modeling.html (last viewed 30/06/2018); MET Project, *Ensuring fair and reliable measures of effective teaching*, 2013, in: http://www.metproject.org/downloads/MET_Ensuring_Fair_and_Reliable_Measures_Practitioner_Brief.pdf (last viewed 30/06/2018).

[6] C. M. Reigeluth (ed.), *Instructional design theories and models: An overview of their current status*, New York, Routledge, 2013; W. J. Rothwell, H. C. Kazanas, *Mastering the instructional design process: A systematic approach*, London, UK, John Wiley & Sons, 2011.

[7] D. H. Hargreaves, D. Hopkins, (eds.), *Development planning for school improvement*, London, Cassell, 1994.

cational offer, the structure of the school's curriculum, the definition of improvement plans extended to the whole school; and of a micro level, which concerns the individual teacher or at least the teaching team, with respect to preparatory teaching works to carry out in instructional teaching modules, units, project work, etc. In both cases, design is always 'contextualized' and 'intentional'. Even when it starts just from a 'creative and undefined idea', it must later be transformed into systematic actions, behaviors that have their own significance as applicable to a real context. Design therefore cannot be a spontaneous activity, but the result of well thought-out and rational work expressed by the community of teachers[8].

Thinking of the instruction as an intentional act requires the adoption of a rigorous methodology, punctuated by phases, in order to predict beforehand the direction to follow to be able to implement it, if necessary. These phases that, in practice, are not regulated by a sequential logic, provide: 1. needs analysis, 2. goal setting, 3. general structure of the contents, 4. teaching strategies and techniques, and 5. learning assessment. To each phase of the design cycle, specific competences related to teachers' professional profile can be associated (*Table 1*). Pedagogical literature[9], the works produced by the European Union[10] and those developed by the Ministries of education in different countries around the world[11] have provided various interpretative models of a teacher's professional profile,

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[8] J. McTighe, G. Wiggins, *Understanding by design. Professional development workbook*, Alexandria (VA), Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), 2004; W. F. Pinar, *International handbook of curriculum research*, New York, Routledge, 2013.

[9] J. White (ed.), *Rethinking the school curriculum: Values, aims and purposes*, New York, Routledge, 2003; P. Perrenoud, *Développer la pratique réflexive dans le métier d'enseignant: professionnalisation et raison pédagogique*, Paris, ESF éditeur, 2010; C. Danielson, *Evaluations that help teachers learn*, in «Educational Leadership», *68*(4), 2011, pp. 35-39; C. Danielson, T. L. McGreal, *Teacher evaluation to enhance professional learning*, Princeton (NJ), Educational Testing Service, 2000; C. Kyriacou, *Essential teaching skills*, London, Stanley Thornes, 2007; V. Midoro, *A Common European Framework for Teachers' professional profile in ICT for Education*, Ortona, Menab, 2005; E. Morin, *La testa ben fatta. Rifirma dell'insegnamento e riforma delpensiero*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina, 2000; M. Cochran-Smith, K. M. Zeichner (eds.), *Studying teacher education: The report of the AERA panel on research and teacher education*, Mahwah (NJ), Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2010; T. Toch, R. Rothman, *Rush to Judgment: Teacher Evaluation in Public Education*, Washington DC, Sector, 2008; G. Bandini, A. Calvani, E. Falaschi, L. Menichetti, *The professional profile of the teacher trainees in the Course of Primary Education. The SPPPI Model*, in «Formazione Persona Lavoro», 15, 2015, pp. 89-104; C. E. Feistritzer, S. Griffin, A. Linnajarvi, *Profile of teachers in the US, 2011*, Washington, (DC), National Center for Education Information, 2011; D. Capperucci, M. Piccioli, *L'insegnante di scuola primaria. Identità, competenze e profilo professionale*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2015.

[10] Commission of the European Communities, *The Teaching Profession in Europe: Profile, Trends and Concerns, Report IV. Keeping Teaching Attractive for the 21th Century. General Lower Secondary Education*, Brussels, Eurydice, 2004; Id., *The Teaching Profession in Europe: Profile: Trends and Concerns, Report V. Reform of Teaching Professions: A Historical Survey. General Lower Secondary Education*, Brussels, Eurydice, 2005; Id., *Literature review. Teachers' core competences: requirements and development*, 2011, in: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/doc/teacher-competences_en.pdf (last viewed 30/06/2018).

[11] Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche, *Formation des enseignants. Référentiel des competences professionnelles des métiers du professorat et de l'éducation*, in: http://www.education.gouv.fr/pid25535/bulletin_officiel.html?cid_bo=73066, 2013, (last viewed 30/07/2018); Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze, *Quaderno bianco sulla scuola,* Roma, 2007; Ministry of Education and Science, *The White Paper for the Reform of Education Systems*, (English Version), Madrid, 1990; Gouvernement du Québec Ministère de l'Éducation, *La formation à l'enseignement. Les orientation. Les competences professionnelles*, (2001); General Teaching Council for England, *Professional Standard for Qualified Teacher Status and Requirements for Iniatial Teachter Training*, in: http://www.tda.gov.uk, 2006 (last viewed 23/07/2018); Training and Development Agency for Schools

with each stressing the importance of design competences as a distinctive feature of a teacher's work.

For a detailed analysis of the competences related to each phase of school design, see *Table 1*.

3. EFL curriculum design in Primary School

The development of design competences is also a key activity in teaching English as a foreign language in primary school, as evidenced in the many studies conducted in Europe and other parts of the world[12].

As provided by the Italian school legislation, such design competences must respect the provisions reported in the *National Curriculum Guidelines* published by the Ministry of Education, Universities, and Research in 2012[13]. The latter represent the national curriculum that all Italian schools of the first cycle are called upon to implement and therefore are a constant reference point for instructional design.

In order to provide common guidelines to support a teacher's work, the *National Curriculum Guidelines* have clearly defined two aspects, which will be detailed in the following sections:

1. purposes and epistemological foundations of teaching English in primary school;
2. identification of specific competences, knowledge, and skills to be pursued over the five years of compulsory English language teaching in primary school.

(TDA), *Professional Standards for Teachers. Advanced Skills Teacher*, TDA, London, in: http://www.tda.gov.uk/cpd-leader/standards-qualifications/professional-standards-guidance/~/media/resources/teacher/professional-standards/advancedskills.pdf, 2007 (last viewed 29/06/2018); Id., *Professional Standards for Qualified Teacher Status and Requirement for Initial Teacher Training*, TDA, London, 2008, in: http://www.tda.gov.uk/teacher/developing-career/professional-standards-guidance.aspx. (last viewed 24/06/2018); Department for Education and Skills, *Qualifying to teach. Professional Standards for Qualified Teacher Status and Requirements for Initial Teacher Training*, London, 2002; Id., *Performance Management for Teachers and Head Teachers*, DFES, London, in: http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/10405/PM%20Guidance%20print%20final%20Nov%2006.pdf 2006, (last viewed 23/07/2018); OECD, *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers in Spain. Overview for the OECD*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2003; Unità italiana di Eurydice, *Sistemi di valutazione dell'istruzione in Europa. Alcuni paesi a confronto*, in: http://www.indire.it/lucabas/lkmw_file/eurydice///bollettino_eurydice_valutazione_2012_per_web.pdf, 2012 (last viewed 05/07/2018); US Department of Education, *World Class Standards for American Education*, PERI, Washington D.C., 1992.

[12] M. Grenfell, M. Kelly, D. Jones, *The European Language Teacher: Recent Trends and Future Developments in Teacher Education*, New York, Peter Lang Publishing, 2003; M. Kelly, M. Grenfell, R. Allan, C. Kriza, W. McEvoy, *European profile for language teacher education: A frame of reference*, European Commission, 2004.

[13] MIUR, *Indicazioni Nazionali per il curricolo della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo*, in «Annali dell'Istruzione», numero speciale, Le Monnier, 2012.

Competence areas	Competence descriptors
1. Needs analysis	1.1. Understand and recognize the roles and purposes of various national, regional, and local institutions (Ministries, local authorities, associations, cultural institutions, etc.)
	1.2. Actively participate in the construction of policies and strategies for training needs identification of school populations, context, and authorities
	1.3. Design and submit qualitative and quantitative instruments for training needs identification of the school population, context, and authorities (censuses, statistical surveys, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, etc.).
	1.4. Analyze and interpret the data of local surveys conducted by the school to collect information on the pupils' and the teachers' needs
	1.5. Participate constructively on committees and in working groups for planning training programs at a macro level (school, institutional networks, etc.) and a micro level (single class, groups of pupils, groups of families, etc.) defined in response to the training needs identified
	1.6. Communicate and document the actions taken on the basis of educational needs
	1.7. Verify and monitor, through the use of specific devices (paper, ICT, etc.) the families' and pupils' satisfaction, from the perspective of self-evaluation and school improvement
2. Goal setting	2.1. Participate in the construction of a school vision and mission through participation in school governance bodies
	2.2. Participate in building school organizational and educational policies through the participation in collegial and decision-making school bodies
	2.3. Identify and share with other teachers and the school's management priorities based on the weaknesses identified as a result of self-evaluation or external evaluation procedures
	2.4. Define the aims of the school's training offer by involving the pupils' families, training agencies, and local institutions
	2.5. Identify key competences to be promoted through the school curriculum
	2.6. Recognize connections between the competences required by the national curriculum and key competences to be promoted through the school curriculum
	2.7. Recognize competences common to the various kinds and grades of schooling to design a vertical curriculum based on education continuity
	2.8. Establish connections and links between the key competences to be promoted through the curriculum and cognitive objectives of different subjects
	2.9. Share cross-curricular contents with other teachers in order to build inter-multi-trasdisciplinary connections
	2.10. Organize different learning objectives in taxonomies in order to respect a hierarchical structure
3. Structure of contents	3.1. Recognize the elements characterizing the epistemological status of each subject
	3.2. Identify the concepts and basic contents of different subjects
	3.3. Organize and categorize the concepts and contents of different subjects in order to develop a shared hierarchical structure
	3.4. Recognize and propose multiple ways of organizing a pupil's knowledge in different subjects (sequential, hierarchical, networking, etc.)
	3.5. Identify interdisciplinary connections between the contents of different subjects
	3.6. Be aware of the prerequisites that children must have to deal with a particular content or activity
	3.7. Be able to manage knowledge contents of different subjects
	3.8. Adapt content complexity to pupils' age, as well as pupils' cognitive and socio-relational abilities

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	3.9. Be able to explain to the pupils' families the educational function of contents covered
	3.10. Adapt the objectives and teaching contents to personalized pupil learning plans, particularly for those with special needs (differently abled children, children with learning difficulties, children from other countries, refugees, etc.).
4. Teaching strategies and techniques	4.1. Use different strategies and teaching techniques (lectures, exercises, simulations, cooperative learning activities, etc.) according to the objectives and competences to be pursued
	4.2. Manage different teaching methods (transmissive, deductive, inductive, cooperative, heuristic, etc.).
	4.3. Select educational activities consistent with the methodological approaches chosen
	4.4. Manage and lead classroom activities (organization, relations, rules and instructional procedures)
	4.5. Conduct educational activities conveying to the children what the goals are and recalling prior learning and knowledge
	4.6. Manage teaching times and spaces
	4.7. Select appropriate materials and tools for educational goal achievement
	4.8. Create an engaging environment taking into account individual, cultural, social, and religious differences in the classroom
	4.9. Use clear and expressive language, modulating voice tone and rhythm
	4.10. Integrate facial expressions, gestures, and body communication with oral communication using various media
	4.11. Teach with ICT to differentiate instruction aimed at individual pupils, small groups, or large learning groups
	4.12. Calibrate alternating transmissive/informative sessions with operative/experiential activities, workshops, or writing (individually, in pairs, in small groups)
	4.13. Manage learning groups with inclusive attitudes, enabling positive and constructive interactions
	4.14. Adapt information, simplifying or changing the communication channel (with analogies, graphic tools, physical gestures, multimedia assets), specially in the presence of children with disabilities, learning difficulties, ADHD, etc.
	4.15. Constantly inform children about how they are progressing in learning (feedback), helping them to improve their performance
	4.16. Provide adequate reinforcement and encouragement
	4.17. Promote a problem solving attitude, stimulating children to work out hypotheses and solutions
	4.18. Focus on the main points of an instructional activity, recalling the main concepts
	4.19. Prevent and intervene constructively in cases of bullying, discrimination, homophobic attitudes, etc.
5. Learning assessment	5.1. Know and manage different approaches and techniques of learning and assessment
	5.2. Use different assessment tools based on multiple evaluation functions (diagnostic, formative, summative)
	5.3. Build valid and reliable learning measurement and assessment tools in relation to the objectives and competences to be developed
	5.4. Use different observation and assessment tools (standardized, authentic, etc.)
	5.5. Read and use information on the pupils' learning using national and international standardized tests (PIRLS, TIMSS, PISA, etc.).
	5.6. Use information from different types of assessment tests to design recovery and enhancement activities
	5.7. Check the consistency between objectives, assessment tools, and instructional activities

	5.8. Adopt methodological models for the pupils' achievement certification
	5.9. Inform parents of the pupils' learning processes and products
	5.10. Use tools for school self-evaluation
	5.11. Use different information sources to collect data on context, resources, processes, and products for school self-evaluation reports
	5.12. Use information from school self-evaluation reports to design future improvement plans
	5.13. Account for results achieved after the implementation of long-term improvement plans
	5.14. Revise its own teaching experience through the use of specific tools (journals, peer-review, portfolios, microteaching, video-recordings, external evaluations) to identify strengths and weaknesses
	5.15 Identify weaknesses and shortcomings in instructional design and teaching, in order to re-design education
	5.16 Have a positive attitude towards continuous improvement of professional competences, using internal/external tools, e.g., monitoring, in-service training, and self-training
	5.17. Document teaching with consistency and clarity, using appropriate tools (papers, reports, diaries, etc.).

Table 1 – *Design competences of teacher's professional profile*

3.1 TEFL purposes and epistemological foundations

As for the cultural framework of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), some general guiding criteria to guarantee the unity and equity of the education system as well as to support teachers' work are identified in the *National Curriculum Guidelines*. In addition to the mother language, the *National Curriculum Guidelines* assign two specific purposes to English learning: emphasizing the formative value of teaching English in primary schools

1. the development of multilingual and multicultural competences within a complex, multi-ethnic and globalized society;
2. the acquisition of the first tools for practice an active citizenship in the context of where a pupil lives and even beyond the borders of the national territory.

According to the achievement of the objectives mentioned above, some guiding criteria gathered from the *National Curriculum Guidelines* are proposed here.

1. Competences in foreign languages and European citizenship. Thanks to the meeting with other European languages, a pupil can expand awareness of European citizenship. Consequently possessing a diversified repertoire of linguistic and cultural resources becomes a tool for interacting with others, even when 'the other' belongs to very distant cultural and geographical contexts. In fact, by studying different languages, a pupil learns to recognize the existence of different linguistic and cultural systems and experiences the variety of means that every language has to think, speak, communicate, and convey emotions[14].

[14] L. Sercu, *The foreign language and intercultural competence teacher: The acquisition of a new professional identity*, in «Intercultural education», *17*(1), 2006, pp. 55-72; C. Garrido, I. Álvarez, *Language teacher education for intercultural understanding*, in: «European Journal of Teacher Education», *29*(2), 2006, pp. 163-179.

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2. Horizontality and verticality of teaching and learning EFL. To make sure that learning becomes a highly educational activity, to the extent it contributes to person's growth and development considering the local and global context in which the pupil is entered, it is necessary that teaching EFL is not an episodic, fragmented event, disconnected from the rest of the curriculum. However, it is essential that it be designed by identifying horizontal connections with other subjects and developing the vertical progression of knowledge and competences needed to pass from one order of schooling to another. The horizontality and verticality of the English curriculum must also be read in the perspective of building a synergistic connection between the formal learning, that a pupil acquires in school and non-formal and informal learning, with which s/he comes in contact in everyday life. As regards the English language, this transversal dimension, which links the life contexts and a child's learning, is very strong. In fact, the daily interactions, with linguistic expressions, terms, phrases, and idioms in English, conveyed mostly by mass media and the internet, are absolutely familiar, even unconsciously, because they already belong to its linguistic heritage. All this does not represent a *linguistic shock* for the child, i.e., a refusal of everything that he does not understand fully *of* and *about* the new language. The habit of using words borrowed from other languages assumes an absolute naturalness and spontaneity, so they are not perceived as 'strange' because they are related to the common lexicon used in activities, situations, and forms of interaction that are constantly present in everyday life[15].

3. Interdisciplinary connections and 'new humanism'. It is important to provide common design spaces between English and other subjects[16], implementing the concept of a 'new humanism' present in the *National Curriculum Guidelines*. It means that school is called to make pupil able to recognize the relationships between his personal microcosm and the macrocosm of humanity and the planet, because what happens in the world affects everyone's life and, at the same time, every person is responsible for the future of humanity[17]. To educate children to this awareness and responsibility, it is necessary to have a large store of knowledge, which, however, does not coincide with the accumulation of lots of information in many areas. Rather it requires full mastery of individual subjects and, simultaneously, the ability to process multiple connections at an interdisciplinary level. Common curriculum design can become an area of intervention aimed not only at language development but also at cognitive development and the construction of transversal competences such *bridging*, as Feuerstain[18] says. In this sense, it stimulates the reticular thought development through which the child uses knowledge learned in different contexts and subjects to structure and solve problems. It no longer operates within single subjects but in a broader perspective of learning to learn.

4. Build relationships between the mother language and EFL. Referring to the relationship between English and the mother language, special care must be given (from the

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[15] B. Tomlinson, *Materials development in language teaching*, Cambridge (UK), Cambridge University Press, 2011.

[16] P. Gibbons, *Scaffolding language, scaffolding learning: Teaching second language learners in the mainstream classroom*, Portsmouth (NH), Heinemann, 2002.

[17] MIUR, *Indicazioni Nazionali per il curricolo della scuola dell'infanzia e del primo ciclo*, cit., p. 11.

[18] R. Feuerstein, M. B. Hoffman, *Teacher's guides to the Feuerstein instrumental enrichment Drogram*, Washington, DC, Curriculum Development Associates Inc., 1988.

early grades) to phonological peculiarities and pronunciation differences, so as not to generate difficulties in understanding and speaking. In this regard, it is appropriate for the teacher to stimulate the child's ability to take control of multiple pronunciation and intonation patterns to activate as naturally as possible a multilingual system[19].

5. Methodologies for teaching EFL: the use of a communicative approach. From a methodological point of view, a communicative approach to language learning has to be encouraged, considering the different coding systems of phonemes into graphemes existing between English and Italian. The use of spoken language has to be introduced by the teacher systematically, proceeding gradually according to the complexity of the language structures presented. On the other hand, speaking English has to become a natural activity for the child, preferably integrated with the use of creative and interactive games that can be supported by other non-verbal languages (music, movement, images, etc.) to promote participation and involvement in cooperative learning activities[20]. At a primary school level, a grammatical approach to learning English is not recommended. In addition to compromising a child's learning motivation, it may generate confusion between different grammatical and syntactical systems[21]. In fact, the *National Curriculum Guidelines* consider grammar knowledge to be a task reserved for lower secondary school where pupils can gradually recognize, rework, and internalize the modes of communication and rules of a foreign language as they are able to understand much more easily the way of the new language functions. It is important instead to promote a gradual integration of the elements of the new language into the native language system (or any other language spoken by the pupil) expanding implicitly the ability to manage various language components (phonetic, phonological, syntactic and semantic aspects)[22].

6. Gradual development of writing competences. Special attention has to be paid to writing, correlated to the increasing importance given to oral language,. This should be presented gradually and preferably from the third grade onwards. Initially, writing will be limited to keywords to be included in conceptual maps and diagrams, simple expressions related to a child's experiences culminating with brief descriptions and presentations at the end of the fifth grade. Among the multiple language competences to be pursued, writing definitely has the lowest priority in primary school, also in consideration of any specific learning difficulties (e.g.,dyslexia, dysgraphia, dysorthography) that usually emerge in this type of school and that, in some way, may also be increased in the mother tongue by an approach to English that is too centered on writing[23].

7. Teaching EFL, ICT and international learning experiences. Right from primary school, it is recommended teaching methodologies be accompanied by the active and

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[19] M. Celce-Murcia, L. McIntosh, *Teaching English as a second or foreign language*, Boston (MA), Heinle & Heinle, 1991; E. Guerin, *Developing Phonological Awareness for English Language Learning in Infant and Primary School*, in D. Capperucci, E. Guerin (eds.), *Innovative European Approaches for In-service and Pre-service English Language Teachers in Primary Education*, Pisa, ETS, 2017, pp. 301-333.

[20] J. K. Shin, *Ten helpful ideas for teaching English to young learners*, in «English Teaching Forum», *44*(2), 2006, pp. 2-13.

[21] A. L. Herrell, M. L. Jordan, *50 strategies for teaching English language learners*, Boston, Pearson, 2015.

[22] P. H. Hiep, *Communicative language teaching: Unity within diversity*, in «ELT Journal», *61*(3), 2007, pp. 193-201.

[23] A. Applebee, *Alternative models of writing development*, in «Perspectives on writing research, theory, and practice», 2000, pp. 90-110.

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participatory use of ICT (computers, tablets, white interactive boards, interactive tables, educational software, etc.) that, in many cases, are often used by children at home. These can be useful to expand the space and time for learning, creating contact opportunities even outside of school, and promote informal social interactions between individuals, school groups and local communities[24]. In this regard, it is very important for the school to participate in European projects such as Comuenius, Erasmus+, E-twinning, etc. that may facilitate the exchange and interaction with schools and pupils from other countries, joining activities and partnerships where English is used as a lingua franca, a language for communicating with everybody. Doing so, pupils can move step by step from an interaction centered essentially on their own needs to a communication oriented towards other stakeholders, peers, and adults, experiencing cultural differences and similarities, personal habits, and traditions of other countries as well as beginning to develop an intercultural sensitivity[25].

8. Reflection on language and self-assessment of EFL learning. Only in rare cases, and especially with pupils who have a high level of competence, or in cases where the children themselves highlight specific linguistic aspects regarding language conventions and linguistic rules, syntactic structures, similarities and differences between Italian and English will the teacher deal cautiously and gradually with simple aspects of linguistic reflection[26] (Byram, 2008). Such activities, in a certain way, may also be used to enhance the ability of self-assessment and awareness of how pupils learn, na ability that is important to develop in all pupils beginning in primary school[27].

3.2 EFL curriculum organization

According to the guiding criteria mentioned in the previous section, EFL curriculum design must be focused on the achievement of specific results broken down in terms of knowledge, abilities, and competences. In line with the structure of the *National Curriculum Guidelines*[28], the competences to be pursued are reported primarily in the *Student Profile (PS)* and then in the *Outcomes for Competence Development (OCD)*; knowledge and abilities of each subject instead are expressed by *Learning Objectives (LO)*.

The *Student Profile* describes, in basic form, the general competences related to all teaching subjects as well as to those linked to citizenship education that a pupil should possess at the end of the first cycle of education, which, in the Italian school system, ends with the lower secondary school (at the age of 14). Recently, the Ministry of Education

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[24] K. E. Holbert, G. G. Karady, *Strategies, challenges and prospects for active learning in the computer-based classroom*, in «Education, IEEE Transactions on», *52*(1), 2009, pp. 31-38; S. Mumtaz, *Factors affecting teachers' use of information and communications technology: a review of the literature*, in «Journal of information technology for teacher education», *9*(3), 2000, pp. 319-342.

[25] C. Lankshear, M. Knobel, *New technologies in early childhood literacy research: A review of research*, in «Journal of Early Childhood Literacy», *3*(1), 2003, pp. 59-82.

[26] M. Byram, *From foreign language education to education for intercultural citizenship: Essays and reflections,* in «Multilingual Matters», Vol. 17, 2008.

[27] D. Little, *The Common European Framework and the European Language Portfolio: Involving learners and their judgements in the assessment process*, in «Language Testing», *22*(3), 2005, pp. 321-336; Y. G. Butler, J. Lee, *The effects of self-assessment among young learners of English*, in «*Language Testing*, *27*(1), 2010, pp. 5-31.

[28] MIUR, op. cit.

Act no. 742/2017 regarding the certification of achievements has provided an intermediate level of the *student profile* competences at the end of primary school, thus highlighting the extent to which those competences have to be developed into an eight-year period of education (*Table 2*).

Type of school	***Student profile*** **competence indicators**
Primary school	The pupil is able to express himself in English at an elementary level and to communicate in a fundamental way in simple everyday situations.
Lower secondary school	Meeting people of different nationalities, the pupil is able to express himself in English at an elementary level and to communicate in a fundamental way in simple everyday situations, using a second European language. S/he uses English language to work with information and communication technologies.

Table 2 – *Student profile competence indicators related to EFL teaching*

The *Outcomes for Competence Development* are prescriptive and common to all private and state schools in the Italian education system. They are provided at the end of the fifth grade of primary school and constitute unavoidable references for teachers, insofar they indicate the cultural and educational paths to be followed and help to finalize instructional action towards a pupil's integral development. In the first cycle schools (primary and lower secondary schools) the *outcomes* represent criteria for assessing the expected competences. In addition, schools must work to ensure that every pupil can achieve them so as to guarantee the unity of the national system and quality of service. They correspond to the A1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL) (*Table 3*).

The pupil comprehends oral and written messages related to familiar areas.
The pupil describes orally and in written form aspects of life, the context where he lives, matters related to immediate needs.
The pupil plays an active role in group games, communicates in an understandable way, even using pre-structured phrases and sentences, in simple and routine information exchanges.
The pupil performs tasks following the instructions given by the teacher in a foreign language, ask questions and ask for explanations.
The pupil identifies some cultural elements and understands relationships between linguistic forms and foreign language uses.

Table 3 – *Outcomes for competence development at the end of primary school*

The *Learning Objectives* represent the functional knowledge and abilities to achieve the *Outcomes for Competence Development*. They are not prescriptive, so those proposed in the *National Curriculum Guidelines* can be taken as they are or adapted by each school according to its own specific instructional offer and its pupils' needs. They are provided at the end of third and fifth grade of primary school (*Table 4*)[29].

[29] D. Capperucci, C. Cartei, *Curricolo e intercultura. Problemi, metodi e strumenti*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2010.

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Learning objectives at the end of third grade	
Listening (oral comprehension)	Understand words, commands, expressions and everyday phrases, spoken clearly and slowly referring to the pupil, his classmates, and the family.
Speaking (oral production and interaction)	Produce meaningful sentences concerning objects, places, people, and known situations.
	Interact with a classmate to introduce himself and/or play, using structured phrases and sentences appropriate to the situation.
Reading (written comprehension)	Understand postcards, cards, and short messages, preferably accompanied by visual or sound recordings, understanding words and phrases already known at an oral level.
Writing (written production)	Write words and simple phrases related to everyday classroom activities and personal group interests.
Learning objectives at the end of fifth grade	
Listening (oral comprehension)	Understand short dialogues, instructions, everyday phrases, and sentences when pronounced clearly and identify the general theme of conversation on familiar topics.
	Understand short multimedia texts by identifying keywords and the general meaning.
Speaking (oral production and interaction)	Describe people, places, and familiar objects using common words and phrases already encountered in listening and/or reading activities.
	Report simple information related to the personal sphere, integrating the meaning of what is said with mime and gestures.
	Interact in an understandable way with a classmate or an adult who is familiar, using phrases and sentences appropriate to the situation.
Reading (written comprehension)	Read and understand short, simple texts, preferably accompanied by visual aids, taking their overall meaning and identify words and familiar phrases.
Writing (written production)	Write in an understandable way short and simple messages to introduce himself, to wish, thank or invite someone, to ask or give information, etc.
Reflection on the language and learning	Analyse pairs of similar words for sound and understand their meaning.
	Analyse words and expressions in their context of use and grasp the relations among the different meanings.
	Analyse the sentence structure, putting language constructs and communicative intentions into relation.
	Recognize what has been learned and what has still to be learned.

Table 4 – *Learning objectives at the end of the third and fifth grades of a primary school*

4. The Competence Unit Design Model (CUD Mod.)

As evidenced in previous pages, competence curriculum construction in the Italian school system is based on the achievement of the *Outcomes for Competence Development*, that have to represent a constant point of reference for a teacher's work. The unity and progression of the curriculum depends on the degree of consistency, reciprocity, and gradualness of these 'Outcomes', which, on the one hand, characterize the pupils' instructional path, and on the other, orient the teachers' design towards the specific learning standards to be reached. In this sense, the 'Outcomes' can be read as an analytical framework of competences to be promoted. Their achievement is entrusted to the daily work that teachers do with their pupils, which requires design tools oriented toward iskilled and specific interventions, according to the general training plan defined by the school.

The next section presents an instructional design model, called the Competence Unit Design Model (CUD Mod.), aimed at competence development and centered on a specific tool called a 'competence unit'. three action-research projects are presented here, which were carried out with in-service teachers and students of the Degree Course in Primary Education at the University of Florence, where the model was tested.

4.1 Designing for Competence Units

'Competence units' represent units of work centered on a unitary instructional path, concluded itself, but, at the same time, are open to subsequent developments. It is aimed at a competence acquisition that can be recognized and certified.

The same expression, 'competence units', says that a competence cannot be acquired once and for all, to the extent that it always provides possible margins for improvement. Each competence is both an end-product referring to a specific class or age group. However, it is also a starting point for subsequent acquisitions of greater difficulty. The 'unit' concept is connected to an idea of 'competence', considered as a complex tool that requires a constructive path to be acquired gradually with all the necessary adjustments and modifications. Competence is characterized in terms of meaningful, authentic, and progressive learning, which is always situated, because it is the result of the interaction existing between an individual's capacities and the resources of the context[30]. Competence can therefore be seen as a long-term achievement that requires different and growing levels of mastery, reachable through specific work units that have their own autonomy, sequentiality, and interconnectivity[31].

At the end of a competence unit, at least in the school context, it is hardly able to certify the achievement of a competence as a whole,. Instead, it is possible to certify a significant part of it, one of its components, a particular aspect that guarantees the degree developed of the competence to which it refers. Structuring a teacher's instructional design for competence units facilitates the transition between the different stages of the school system through the construction of a vertical, progressive, and unified curriculum. In this sense, the curriculum becomes the means through which experience educational continuity and competences become something that may be capitalized and used in many contexts and situations.

Competence units present some unique characteristics, which can be summarized as follows:

1. *Systematicity.* Sharing the same instructional design model and common planning tools for all school classes (see *Table 5*).

2. *Self-consistency.* Each unit anticipates the achievement of specific competences (related to citizenship or to school subjects) that can be used in educational, professional, and social contexts.

3. *Modularity.* Each competence unit can be joined to others with which to share logical, experiential, operational, and content connections. In this sense, a competence unit can also be read as part of a wider instructional path, which accounts for the competence progression and the need to proceed gradually.

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[30] J. S. Brown, A. Collins, P. Duguid, *Situated cognition and the culture of learning*, in H. McLellan (ed.), *Situated learning perspectives*, Englewood Cliffs (NJ), Educational Technology Publications, 1996.

[31] M. Pellerey, *Le competenze. Il ruolo delle competenze nei processi educativi scolastici e formativi*, Napoli, Tecnodid 2010; G. Le Boterf, *Construire les competences individuelles et collectives*, Paris, Éditions d'Organisation, 2000.

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4. *Authenticity.* To assess competence, authentic tasks (or reality tasks applied to a situation) able to verify whether and to what extent pupil can mobilize its knowledge and problem solving skills are preferred to be used.

5. *Interdisciplinarity.* Competence units can encourage interdisciplinary teaching, even though they also pay attention to the promotion of knowledge and skills related to specific subjects. The interdisciplinary approach begins by sharing a common project/problem and promoting interaction between different kinds of knowledge and involving the pupils from the perspective of research and discovery.

6. *Personalization.* Competence units are work units used for learning personalization to the extent that they can provide differentiated instructional interventions and activities for each individual pupil, small groups, and the whole class.

7. *Significance.* Competence units must focus on achieving significant learning. Learning is significant not only when it can be employed more or less widely, but because the child feels it is important for him personally. It is the result of participation and commitment, of being active in searching for answers, or problem solving. It is this personal connotation that makes learning lasting and meaningful over time. Ausubel[32] (1963). In fact, says that we can recognize significant learning when the new content becomes part of the knowledge already possessed by the individual, enlarging his learning.

8. *Metacognition.* Thanks to competence units, pupils strengthen their self-reflexivity concerning the cognitive and learning processes ordinarily used and developing greater awareness as regards the way of their mind functions. All this gradually allows children to understand and self-guide their own learning processes, recognizing strengths and weaknesses, and empowering the competence of learning to learn.

9. *Transferability.* The acquired and certified competences can be used within the school system for further studies and outside of school in vocational education courses or the labor market. They represent a pre-condition for more complex and articulated learning and qualifications.

10. *Capitalization.* This latter criterion refers to the ability of a competence unit to determine, at the end of some purposely designed instructional activities, what the learning outputs are, once certified, can be optimized and recognized in multiple contexts: school, university, training, work, and daily life experiences.

Designing competence units, like any other designing action, is a rational act aimed at achieving specific objectives. Moreover, it is a process that can be articulated into different phases. We can, in fact, provide a pre-active, active, and post-active phase, referring, respectively, to the activities that teachers should put into practice before, during, and after any instructional intervention.

Pre-active phase. This step precedes the execution of instructional interventions and refers to two main design processes: 1. recognition of the competence to be developed and the definition of different levels of mastery in relation to which the identified competence has to be verified; 2. planning of the path to be followed, which is braodly defined at this stage. At this phase, teachers are committed to: a) the definition of competence descriptors, in selecting learning objectives (knowledge and abilities) and in choosing

[32] D. G. Ausubel, *Cognitive Structure and the Facilitation of Meaningful Verbal Learning1*, in «*Journal of teacher education*», *14*(2), 1963, pp. 217-222.

assessment tests and evaluation criteria; and b) in construction of tools able to detect a pupil's incoming knowledge and competences as well as their needs, interests, and motivation to learn, the identification of authentic tasks, and the choice of content[33].

Active phase. It starts with the use of the tools for recognizing incoming knowledge developed in the previous phase. It is characterized by instructional mediation that takes place at several levels: 1. between the previously defined core competence curriculum and its adherence to a pupil's needs; 2. between the initial learning path designed by the teacher and the interest manifested by the pupils. The concrete completion of a competence unit actually starts from this point forward. In fact, it has to deal with the plurality of situations and subjects that are present in a school. A competence unit does not entail recourse to a specific methodology, but requires the use of multiple techniques and teaching strategies depending on the competence to be promoted[34].

Post-active phase. It is characterized by being a reflexive moment, following the instructional intervention and implementation of the competence unit, which involves both pupil and teacher. As for the pupil, he is invited – under teacher's guidance – to do a sort of flashback on the work done and the steps that have led to its completion, with the aim of identifying possible strengths and weaknesses. This can be accomplished by helping a pupil ask what kind of knowledge he believes himself able to manage now and how it might be used to solve tasks, what are the methods of knowledge organization that he habitually uses (conceptual maps, summaries, diagrams, schemes, notes, charts, etc.), and recall the use of various self-assessment systems (rubrics, diaries, portfolios, etc.). As for the teacher, after the implementation of a competence unit, he can critically evaluate the instructional effectiveness of what has been done, by verifying the relevance of the identified competence and its articulation in descriptors and mastery levels, the degree of homogeneity and integration between competences and learning objectives, and the adequacy of the tasks, time, space, tools, and assessment tools[35].

This cyclical review process on which the design of the competence unit is based provides constant re-examination from the perspective of continuous improvement and of raising the quality of interventions aimed at competence acquisition.

4.2. Testing the CUD Model in teaching EFL

The Competence Unit Design Model (CUD Mod.) presented in the following pages was originally tested in a pilot project conducted by the University of Florence and the Regional School Office of Tuscany, in 2010-2012, as a result of the Training Programme for National Guidelines Experimentation (2007), promoted by the Ministry of Education. Thanks to the pilot project, 40 school networks were set up in Tuscany. These networks were made up of Tuscan schools from the first cycle of schooling, corresponding to almost all the primary and lower secondary schools in the region.

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[33] D. Capperucci, *Strumenti per la costruzione del curricolo*, in «Studi sulla Formazione» 19(2), 2016, pp. 143-170.
[34] A. Lopes, R. Ruiz-Cecilia (eds.), *New Trends in Foreign Language Teaching: Methods, Evaluation and Innovation*, Newcastle upon Tyne (UK), Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018.
[35] D. Tsagari (ed.), *Classroom-based Assessment in L2 Contexts*, Newcastle upon Tyne (UK), Cambridge Scholars Press, 2016; D. Tsagari, J. Banerjee (eds.), *Handbook of Second Language Assessment*, Berlin & New York, Muton De Gruyter, 2016.

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The goal of the project was to build and validate, working together with the schools, a common methodological model for competence curriculum design that focused on a shared tool such as the competence unit. To achieve this purpose, 54 workshops, coordinated by a tutor, were launched with the commitment to construct vertical curriculum segments on all subjects, including also EFL. According to proposals from the majority of schools, particular attention was given to 'bridge-years' that, in the Italian school system, are: 1. the last grade of kindergarten (5 years old)/first grade of primary school (6 years old); 2. the last grade of primary school (11 years old)/the first grade of lower secondary school (14 years old). Each laboratory was attended by at least 9 teachers, with the duration of the action-research activities being 20 hours.

The competence unit model developed thanks to the pilot project, with some little changes, were further applied to other two projects. An early project was carried out in a collaboration between the University of Florence and the Regional School Office of Tuscany, in the years 2012-2014, to disseminate the new 2012 edition of the *National Curriculum Guidelines*. A sample of 35 Tuscan schools and about 1,510 in-service teachers was chosen to take part. A second project was carried out within the Degree Course in Primary Education of Florence, for the workshops in experimental pedagogy and theories and the methods of school design and evaluation. It was attended by approximately 750 students from 2013 to 2015.

Below in *Table 5*, for example, the final version of the design model adopted in the last two projects is shown. In this case, it refers to an EFL competence unit in primary school.

Competence Unit Title: *Hill's home!!*

School	….
Type of School	Primary school
Grade	Grade 5
Needs analysis	*Needs detected:* strengthen oral communicative competence related to everyday situations through linguistic forms which present simple lexical and syntactical structures. *Prerequisites:* use of simple present, knowledge of basic vocabulary related to family, house, and main everyday life actions.

Competence indicator taken from the *Student Profile (SP)* *(at the end of the fifth grade of Primary school, as anticipated by the Ministry of Education)*	The pupil is able to express himself in English at an elementary level and to communicate in a fundamental way in simple everyday situations.
Outcome for Competence Development (OCD) *(taken from the National Guidance, 2012)*	The pupil has an active role in group games, communicates in an understandable way, even using pre-structured phrases and sentences, in simple and routine exchanges of information.
Subject	English

LO	Contents	Activities	Methods	Tools	Time	LO Assessment	OCD Assessment
Understand short dialogues, instructions, everyday phrases and sentences when pronounced clearly and identify the general theme of a discussion of familiar topics	*Welcome Hill's home: everyday life of an English family*	Warm-up activities, conducted by the teacher, using basic vocabulary related to: greetings, the house, family, pets, and parts of the day	Transmissive/ Deductive	Flashcards, audio recordings, drawings, text book, school materials	30 min.	TPR activities relevant to everyday actions previously dealt with in listening activities	Preparation of authentic tasks: 1) Role-play in which pupils simulate a meeting between the Hill and Rossi families. 2) Dialogue analysis among the various characters played by pupils. Identification through grids for systematic observation of a piece of information and consistency ; b. quality of interaction; c. activities selected by pupils; d. vocabulary.
		Listening to simple words pronounced by the teacher and their association with drawings or flash cards made available by the teacher and/or present in the classroom			30 min.	Correspondence tests between the everyday actions addressed and their representation through drawings, flash cards, etc.	
		Listening and miming of actions related to daily life proposed by the teacher			30 min.	Miming games related to everyday life situations and actions from previously listenings	
		Audio listening played by the teacher in which the Hill family is presented during an ordinary day	Transmissive/ Deductive	Audio recording	30 min.	Graphic representation of the characters and actions presented through audio recordings	
		Listening to simple dialogues between members of the Hill family played by the teacher		Audio recording	30 min.	Dialogue comprehension questionnaire with T/F and multiple choice answers	

		Collective reconstruction of the Hill family's typical day through graphic sequences combined with short narrative descriptions.	Experiential/ Inductive	Drawings and school materials	3 hrs	Reconstruction of a short story by sequences and identification of correspondences between each sequence and its written description	3) Matching activity between the parts of the day and the Hill family's activities (as presented in the videos and audio recordings, etc.); construction and play of simple dialogues between two or three characters.
Understand short multimedia texts by identifying keywords and the general sense		Video watching in which the Hill family's habits are compared with those of the Rossi family living in Florence Revision of vocabulary and linguistic expressions presented in the video	Transmissive/Deductive	Video recording	2 hrs	Video watching and submission of a questionnaire on the video's contents with T/F and multiple choice answers olus charts to fill in	
		Construction of a double-entry table that compares similar and different habits referring to the two families	Experiential/Inductive	School materials	1 hour		
		Graphic representation of the information contained in the double-entry table			1 hour		4) Give some scenes of the Hill family's everyday life, build simple descriptions and oral conversations
Describe people, places and familiar objects using common words		Presentation proposed by the teacher of a predetermined model for characters' description	Transmissive/Deductive	Material provided by the teacher	30 min.	Oral description in small groups of a character chosen by the pupil	

		Do pair exercises using the model provided by the teacher aimed at describing the Hill family's characters, highlighting both physical and personality traits	Cooperative learning		1 hour	Oral description tests referring to people, places and familiar objects starting from watching videos, drawings, flash cards, etc.	5) Use of puppets made by the children to represent short scenes of a play related to the meeting between the Hill and Rossi families
		Guessing Game 1: one pupil describes one of the Hill family's members, using gestures and other media (drawings, objects, etc.) for the class-mate to guess Guessing Game 2: give only an oral description of one Hill's family character		School materials, flash cards, drawings, guessing games	2 hrs	Answers to oral questions asked by the teacher involving the use of vocabulary addressed in previous educational activities	
		Collective oral description of the Hill family's home through flash cards and drawings	Experiential/by discovery	School materials, flash cards, drawings, material provided by the teacher	30 min.		
		Description of the main similarities and differences between the Hill's and the Rossi's family habits			1 hour		

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Report simple information related to the personal sphere, integrating the meaning of what is said with mime and gestures.		Recalling greeting forms and imitation by the teacher of actions related to everyday life (wake up, have breakfast, go to school/work, ride a bike, play computer/video games, use tablet, read, cooking, sleep, etc.) Pupils mime the actions presented by the teacher	Transmissive/Deductive/ Experiential	Mime games	1 hour	Filling-in exercises, grids regarding the content addressed in previous activities Correction exercises related to incorrect or missing information concerning the contents addressed in previous activities	
		Role-play in which pupils mime one of the Hill family's members in turn and reproduce the actions and personal qualities heard into the presentation	Cooperative learning	Audio recordings Role play	2 hrs		
		Collective conversation in which the teacher asks questions about the Hill family's habits		Questions Action images	30 min.		
Interact in an understandable way with a classmate or an adult who is familiar, using phrases and sentences appropriate to the situation		Dialogue simulation between the parents and children of the Hill family regarding a specific ordinary activity (lunch, going to school, back from work, visiting friends, watching TV, sport, etc.)	Cooperative learning	Simulation games	1 hour	Observation grids prepared by the teacher on the linguistic interactions which take place during the group work Simple dialogues in pairs	
		Group game under teacher's supervision: one group asks questions and the other responds according to the clues provided		Group games	1 hour		

		Group design of wall drawings about the Hill family and creation of a puppet for each character		School materials, cloth	2 hrs		

Interdisciplinary links with other subjects *of the National Curriculum Guidelines, 2012*	- Italian - Art - Music

Links with the basic competences provided at the end of compulsory education	- Use of a foreign language for functional and communicative purposes.

Links with the key competences for citizenship provided at the end of compulsory education	- Communicating - Cooperating and participating - Being independent and responsible - Acquiring and interpreting information

Table 5 – *CUD Mod. grid referring to an EFL competence unit in a primary school*

Beyond the numerous competence units produced, which represent the most significant result of the projects mentioned above, the action-research carried out reached the objective of keeping up the discussion on curriculum construction among teachers and increasing the good practices exchange among practitioners, because (even) from these things related to instructional methodologies depend on school quality of education and pupils' learning success.

5. From EFL curriculum development to assessment and certification of achievement

Parallel to the development of the European and national policies on foreign language learning and teaching, pedagogical reflection on these themes has devoted increasing attention to curriculum issues as well as to effectively assessing and certifying foreign language learning[36]. This requires a specific expertise upstream in teachers in the area of assessment, which must be treated carefully and with methodological rigour. This section focuses specifically on EFL-teacher development in the assessment and certification of competences[37].

One common characteristic of the latest educational system reforms in the majority of European countries has been the attempt to redefine the purpose of education in

[36] J. C. Richards, T. S. Rodgers, *Approaches and methods in language teaching*, Cambridge (UK), Cambridge University Press, 2014.

[37] M. Kelly, M. Grenfell, R. Allan, C. Kriza, W. McEvoy, *European profile for language teacher education: A frame of reference*, cit.; M. E. Gredler, *Classroom Assessment and Learning*, Reading (MA), Longman, 1999.

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the perspective of competences. The initial input that led to the passage from 'fundamental knowledge' to the development of key disciplinary and citizenship competences was introduced first with the 2000 Lisbon Strategy and more recently with the Europe 2020 strategy[38]. Both of these measures recognize the centrality of the 'competence construct' as an element of innovation in education which can combat school dropout rates and develop higher levels of competitiveness, employability, and social inclusion within the member countries. This 'turn' from knowledge to competences marks a very delicate transition for a school system, since it sets new purposes for education moving from the knowledge that everyone must solidly possess to the capacity to apply the acquired knowledge and skills to problem-solving in known and unknown situations. Competences were a sort of 'tsunami', at least for Italy, given the 'disruptive' way they entered the school system, without adequate teacher preparation to deal with such a radical change.

From the instructional design point of view, competences require rewriting the established practices, which have focused on content transmission. In terms of learning assessment, the change appears even greater, putting forth new questions on the methodologies and tools to be used in the assessment of results and the certification of achievement.

Today's attention on competences has developed over time so as to offer a more complete definition of what was initially provided by behaviourist theories. In the case of behaviourism, competence is associated with the concept of performance. Based on the paradigm of technical rationality, competence is simplified into a series of empirically observable and measurable performances, whose sum demonstrates the mastery level achieved by the individual. Subsequently, thanks to the contribution of cognitivist and constructivist learning theories, thought on competences has shifted towards less reductionist approaches that consider the totality of the person and the intersection of multiple planes such as the cognitive, socio-emotional, and relational domains[39].

Even Perrenoud[40] claims that competence is something more than just a pattern of action, which cannot be reduced to the simple repetition of previously acquired patterns. Indeed, it orchestrates a set of different components. A pattern consists in the underlying action or the single operation, while a competence implements schemes of perception, thinking, evaluation, and action that underlie the inferences, anticipations, transpositions, generalizations, estimation of the probability, the start of a diagnostic search from a set of clues, the search for information of a different nature, and the construction of a decision.

To evaluate such a rich and multifaceted form of learning, we should also rethink the assessment methods and tools designed to measure knowledge. Indeed, they do not always seem to be reliable or adequate for detecting situated behaviours that go beyond the memory of notional information. Hence, the need to develop new theoretical and epistemological assessment models, based on the evidence of empirical research and which can also contribute to developing new interpretive criteria and tools to be used in teaching.

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[38] F. H. Soriano, F. Mulatero, *Knowledge policy in the EU: From the Lisbon strategy to Europe 2020*, in «Journal of the Knowledge Economy» *1*(4), 2010, pp. 289-302.

[39] D. A. Schön, *Educating the reflective practitioner*, San Francisco (CA), Jossey-Bass, 1987.

[40] P. Perrenoud, *Dix nouvelles compétences pour enseigner*, Paris, ESF éditeur, 1999; Id., *Développer la pratique réflexive dans le métier d'enseignant: professionnalisation et raison pédagogique*, cit.

6. Authentic assessment and certification of achievement

The theoretical model that inspired this research is authentic assessment, which, as written by McClelland, Glaser and Resnick[41], aims to develop multidimensional assessment methods that are able to overcome the rigidity that is sometimes attributed to assessment through testing. In this case, the task of assessment is not so much to measure learning as to provide information on the processes that generate learning and how the acquired knowledge is put into practice through effective behaviours transferrable both inside and outside the school. Authentic assessment focuses on how the student increases personal learning by actively operating in different situations, rather than on limiting assessment to the standardisation of results. In this sense, even in a school context, a new way of thinking about assessment can be promoted by referring to direct forms of performance assessment. Authentic assessment does not assume any predictive or projective function, but evaluates the action produced directly in the field for what it is. Therefore, learning is seen as a product of contextualised knowledge, transferable to similar situations of use (*near transfer*)[42]. In this sense, authentic assessment is perceived as a form of assessment *for* learning[43].

According to this theoretical perspective[44], authentic assessment is, first of all, based on real tasks and not on evidence which have a predictive value. Second, it requires judgment and innovation, as it leads to the solution of problems that may have more than one right answer or multiple solutions. Third, it asks the student to participate in the construction of knowledge by identifying, recognizing, and processing the main structures of the school-subjects. Fourth, it requires the effective use of a *repertoire* of knowledge and functional skills to deal with complex tasks and not merely to show the degree and extent of knowledge, skills, and competences acquired, but to highlight the plasticity, integration, connectivity of different kinds of knowledge and the surrounding reality. Fifth, it gives an opportunity to select, repeat, and test patterns of action, check resources, get feedback, and improve performance by increasing levels of *mastery* (performance-feedback-revision-performance).

Hart[45] adds that the performance provided by the individual is authentic when connected to challenging tasks, applied to real contexts of action in which the pupil can interact. The 'authentic tasks' stimulate the child's internal (cognitive and non-cognitive) skill development as well as validate the knowledge acquired at school that (s)he has learned at school or elsewhere. To solve a task in real settings, pupils do not need for all the knowledge related to the problem to be addressed, since much of that knowledge is acquired through the manipulation of the problem-situation, the use of available tools, and the student's explorations. All this highlights the individual's ability to activate inve-

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[41] D. C. McClelland, *The knowledge testing-educational complex strikes back*, in «American Psychologist» *49*(1), 1994, pp. 66-69; R. Glaser, L. B. Resnick (eds.), *Knowing, learning and instruction: Essays in honor of Robert Glaser*, Hillsdale (NJ), Erlbaum, 1989.

[42] B. R. Worthen, W. R. Borg, K. White, *Measurement and evaluation in the schools*, Reading (MA), Longman Publishing Group, 1993.

[43] C. I. Chase, *Contemporary Assessment for Educators*, Reading (MA), Longman Publishing Group, 1999.

[44] R. J. Stiggins, *Student-centred classroom assessment*, New York, Macmillan, 1994; G. P. Wiggins, *Assessing student performance: Exploring the purpose and limits of testing*, San Francisco (CA), Jossey-Bass, 1993.

[45] D. Hart, *Authentic assessment. A Handbook for Educators*, Menlo Park (CA), Addison-Wesley, 1994.

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stigative processes in which (s)he is required to structure problem-solving and build itineraries (as a result of the teacher's guidance), through which to verify (or not) knowledge and know-how effectiveness.

Authentic assessment aims to provide feedback on the products and processes of learning. In this way, it allows information related to the capacity of critical thinking, problem-solving, metacognition, working efficiency, and reasoning to be collected[46]. To do this, 'authentic tasks' or 'real tasks' are used. An authentic task requires the use of internal capabilities and knowledge, skills, and competences that students have learned at school or in other non-formal/informal educational contexts. Authentic assessment is, therefore, founded on the belief that academic achievement is not reached by the accumulation of knowledge. Rather, it is based on the ability to generalize, model, identify relationships, and transfer the acquired knowledge to real contexts. Thus, the assessment and certification of achievement are closely related to highlighting how a student's knowledge has generated competences that can be used effectively in multiple contexts and learning situations[47].

In an article published in the journal *Educational Leadership*, Newmann and Wehlage[48] underline the importance of authentic tasks used both for teaching and for assessment. These tasks must be used consistently and effectively, and should be understood as both learning activities and tools that can guarantee the competences acquired by the pupil. Hence, they claim that a task is authentic and increases a pupil's learning if it meets three conditions. First, it allows the construction of new meanings and the expansion of knowledge. Second, it uses a heuristic approach that seeks to implement a pupil's learning. Third, it points to the development of intellectual and operational products that have value and meaning beyond academic success.

Hipps, Reckase, Sackett, Borneman, and Connelly[49] address the question of the significance of authentic assessment by linking the latter also to psychometric issues. On this front, the underlying assumptions of the classical assessment theory are based on the criteria of the evaluation's validity, reliability, and objectivity. The above-mentioned authors argue that these criteria are difficult to apply in the case of authentic assessment. It is therefore necessary to rethink them, replacing them with others, such as the significance of the accrued learning, context, and effectiveness of behaviour, transferability, adaptability, '*transformativity*', competence mastery degree of skills, and cognitive complexity.

In accordance with the epistemological and methodological issues mentioned above, the research question of this study, therefore, is how to develop methodological models

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[46] R. E. Blum, J. A. Arter (eds.), *A handbook for student performance assessment in an era of restructuring* Alexandria (VA), Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1996.

[47] L. Darling-Hammond, *Performance assessment and educational equity*, in «Harvard Educational Review» *64*(1), 1994, pp. 5-31.

[48] F. M. Newmann, G. G. Wehlage, *Five standards of authentic instruction*, «Educational Leadership», *50*(7), 1993, pp. 8-12.

[49] J. A. Hipps, *Trustworthiness and Authenticity: Alternate Ways To Judge Authentic Assessments,* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta (GA), April 12-16, 1993; M. D. Reckase, *Statistical Test Specifications for Performance Assessments: Is This an Oxymoron?*, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council on Measurement in Education, Chicago (IL), March 25-27, 1997; P. R. Sackett, M. J. Borneman, B. S. Connelly, *High stakes testing in education and employment: Evaluating common criticisms regarding validity and fairness*, in «*American Psychologist*», 63(4), 2008, pp. 215-227.

that can support teachers of English in the certification of achievement reached by learners, so that they can be recognised in subsequent grades of schooling and in the world of professions.

7. The ARCA Model: research context, methodology, and results

Recently, the Italian Ministry of Education has developed a national experimental document on achievement certification that is to be gradually extended to all primary and lower secondary schools[50]. The ministerial act states that the achievement certificate is to be issued by the school at the end of the fifth grade of primary school and at the end of the third grade of lower secondary school. It is delivered to the student's family as well as to the subsequent chosen level of schooling or vocational training centre. In this way, the act seeks to underline the ongoing process and the single nature of the first cycle of education, and assign to the achievement certification the following functions: 1. promoting the continuity between different levels of schooling and the vertical nature of the curriculum; and 2. supporting student efforts towards attaining school or vocational qualifications.

The achievements to be certified are those described in the student profile of the national core curriculum[51]. For EFL, they are reported in *Table 2*. Each competence indicator in the student profile must be certified using a scale articulated into four levels of mastery (*A*-Excellent; *B*-Intermediate; *C*-Elementary; *D*-Pre-Elementary). For each of these levels, there is a general description of the expected performances.

The *student profile* indicators are very broad. They are general references that cover quite a broad range of knowledge. The indicators referring to English, for example, succinctly sum up all the different competences that a pupil should possess at the end of the primary and the lower secondary school. The global assessment of these competences demands paying close attention to the performance that pupils are able to employ in the various sub-competences (or skills) that constitute broader language competences in English. Therefore, it is very important to design the teaching process by keeping in mind the specific English language competences to be developed. In line with the structure of the *National Curriculum Guidelines*[52], the EFL competences to be pursued are represented by the *Outcomes for Competence Development* (*OCD)* (*Table 3*).

The most critical aspect that schools face in applying the national certification document is in clarifying the extent to which the competences promoted by all curriculum subjects *(OCD)* contribute to the achievement of the student competence profile *(SP).* The ARCA Model was created to respond to this need as identified by schools.

From the methodological point of view, an action-research project was started and was carried out by researchers and EFL teachers. The ARCA Model was designed and tested by the University of Florence together with a sample of 25 Tuscan schools involved in the pilot project funded by the Regional School Office. In this pilot project, 25 teachers were involved as group-coordinators as well as 275 EFL teachers. A total of 26

[50] See Act no. 3, February, 13, 2015 and Act no. 742, October, 3, 2017.
[51] MIUR, op. cit.
[52] *Ibid*.

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action-research groups were set up with the aim of building the appropriate assessment rubrics for all the EFL competences in the national core curriculum.

The action-research work was articulated in four stages: 1. joint-work between university researchers and 25 group-coordinators to design a methodological model capable of supporting EFL teacher activities aimed at achievement certification; 2. meetings with teachers to familiarize them with the model developed; 3. revision of the final preliminary version of the model taking into consideration teacher recommendations; and 4. testing of the final model through the construction of rubrics.

Assessment rubrics were used as tools to accompany teachers towards achievement certification since it is possible use them to describe the appropriate mastery levels to be certified. As indicated by several authors[53], rather than attribute a score or a final mark, the function of the rubrics is to describe through specific indicators and descriptors of competence what students are able to do in performing tasks. Goodrich[54] defines rubrics as a measuring tool that lists the criteria for analysing the work in its most significant aspects. It clearly expresses the quality levels for each criterion considered useful, starting from the minimum accepted levels. In our case, we used "analytic rubrics"[55]. The following steps were considered in their construction:

Phase 1. Selection of a competence belonging to one of the curriculum subjects for the first cycle (referring to the primary school or secondary school level);

Phase 2. Description of the competence selected in components, sub-competences, or indicators (necessary for complex competences, referred to as 'molecular', as opposed to 'atomic' competences which constitute those with a single competence);

Phase 3. Construction of an assessment rubric for each of the components, sub-competences, or indicators related to the selected competence (the mastery descriptors related to each component are necessary because a pupil can develop said components, sub-competences, or indicators based on different degrees of proficiency);

Phase 4. Matching of each mastery descriptor to the corresponding certification level. In this case, we applied the four levels of certification provided by the national document (*A*-Excellent; *B*-Intermediate; *C*-Elementary; *D*-Pre-Elementary).

Here is an example of an EFL assessment rubric designed using the ARCA Model (*Table 6*)[56].

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[53] C. Danielson, P. Hansen, *A collection of performance tasks and rubrics*, Larchmont (NY), Eye On Education, 1999; J. McTighe, G. Wiggins, *Understanding by design. Professional development workbook* Alexandria (VA), ASCD Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2004.

[54] H. Goodrich, *Understanding rubrics*, in «Educational Leadership», *54*(4), 1996, pp. 14-17.

[55] D. Allen, K. Tanner, *Rubrics: tools for making learning goals and evaluation criteria explicit for both teachers and learners*, in «CBE-Life Sciences Education», *5*(3), 2006, pp. 197-203.

[56] The ARCA Model rubrics have been integrated in the CUD Mod. design grid (see *Table 5*).

EFL competence		
The pupil describes orally and in written form aspects of life, the context in which he lives, and matters related to immediate needs.		
Competence levels	**Mastery descriptors**	**Certification Levels**
Level 1	With the help of teachers, s/he uses and writes single words or very short pre-structured phrases and sentences concerning themselves and their family. With the help of images and flashcards, s/he describes where s/he lives, their school and the people with whom s/he is more familiar.	***D* – Pre-Elementary** With the help of teachers, the pupil is able to solve simple tasks in familiar situations.
Level 2	S/he uses and writes simple phrases and sentences concerning themselves, their family, other people, and home. S/he integrates different sources of information to describe everyday actions and situations. S/he is able to imagine, write, and talk about things not yet experienced, using sentences with a simple syntactic and lexical structure (subject, verb, object).	***C* – *Elementary*** The pupil is able to solve simple problems in new situations. S/he demonstrates that s/he has acquired fundamental knowledge and skills. S/he is able to apply basic rules and procedures.
Level 3	S/he can use and write a series of phrases and sentences to describe themselves, their family, other people and the context in which s/he lives. S/he integrates different sources of information and media used at home or at school. S/he is able to imagine, write, and talk about things not yet experienced, using sentences with a simple syntactic and lexical structure. When s/he talks about familiar things s/he is aware of what s/he says.	***B* – *Intermediate*** The pupil is able to solve tasks and problems in new situations. S/he is aware of the decisions to be taken. S/he is able to use knowledge and skills.
Level 4	S/he can use and write a series of phrases and sentences to describe themselves, their family, other people and the context in which s/he lives. S/he integrates different sources of information and media used at home or at school. S/he is able to imagine, write, and talk about things not yet experienced, using sentences with a simple syntactic and lexical structure. When s/he talks about familiar things s/he is aware of what s/he is saying. S/he is able to communicate immediate needs and what s/he likes or dislikes.	***A* – *Advanced*** The pupil is able to solve complex tasks and problems. S/he demonstrates an appropriated use of knowledge and skills. S/he exhibits and justifies their opinions and is responsible and aware when making decisions.

Table 6 – *Example of an assessment rubric according to the ARCA Model*

The most significant result of the present action-research is the ARCA Model aimed at the certification of school achievements. The strength of this research experience may be interpreted both in terms of process and product. As regards the research process, it has emphasised the importance of the participatory approach adopted as a result of the direct involvement of EFL teachers. With reference to the product, it has led to the construction of specific descriptors, articulated on four levels of mastery, which are able to describe the quality of a student's performances in EFL. In accordance with the research methodology adopted in the design phase, rubrics were used because of the suitability of these tools to describe different levels of mastery.

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The action-research has led to the identification of some guidelines for EFL achievement certifications. Specific procedural criteria have been defined to support the teachers' work: 1. linking the EFL competence indicators of the student profile and the EFL competences developed by the national curriculum; 2. articulation of the selected EFL competences in specific components (or sub-competences, or indicators); 3. description of the EFL competences (or their components) throughout the four mastery levels as a result of the construction of rubrics; and 4. matching each mastery level descriptor to the corresponding certification level (stated by the Ministry). This methodology has led to the description of all the EFL competences provided by the national core curriculum and has promoted, among the teachers in the sample, a more conscious and transparent use of the achievement certification.

8. Conclusions

The quality and effectiveness of school curriculum are measured starting from the learning outcomes achieved by pupils. This requires a high degree of specialization in the use of design and assessment competences that must belong to the professional profile of every teacher. As we have seen in the previous pages, curriculum design provides a close relation between subject knowledge, basic competences, and key competences for citizenship as well as the ability to use different teaching strategies and assessment tools to make learning meaningful and ascertain both the processes and products.

It is important that teachers be aware of the existing multiple design and assessment models, developed either from educational research and practical knowledge matured within classrooms. In this paper, we have put forward the CUD Model and the ARCA Model aimed at competence development, being aware that, in the international literature, many other models are equally effective. The action-research projects carried out with in-service teachers and teacher trainees have shown that competence unit devices and rubrics have proved to be useful tools for thinking about teaching practice and strategies implemented by teachers as well as for experimenting with new design and assessment methodologies.

In fact, to change school curriculum and increase a teacher's design and assessment competences, it is not enough to introduce new legislation if we do not systematically check the direct impact that the introduction of new *National Guidelines*, for example, has on the design practice and te adoption of new teaching and assessment models. Innovation in education today requires overcoming the frontal and mono-directional nature of traditional teacher-pupil communication where someone talks and others listen. The integration of multiple teaching methods should be considered, where the teacher acts as a guide for exploring new cognitive situations (ES = 0.6 according Hattie[57]), experimenting with teaching approaches centered on reciprocal teaching (ES = 0.7), peer tutoring (ES = 0.5), participation in authentic tasks with immediate feedbacks (ES = 0.6), demonstrations (ES = 0.7), activity or project work designed in terms of formative

[57] J. Hattie, *Visible Learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*, London & New York, Routledge, 2009; Id., *Visible Learning for teachers. Maximizing impact on learning*, London & New York, Routledge, 2012.

assessment (ES = 0.9), etc. All 'good teaching' should embrace these distinctive features, but even more so in primary school EFL where active and participatory approaches play a fundamental role. This is crucial in nurturing the pupils' interest and motivation, and fostering a sense of fun towards a second language. This is particularly so in our age when informal FL learning situations are part of a child's everyday life, and schools are just one of many learning contexts. A good instructional design and formative assessment can contribute to making this integration between the English learned at school and its use in real-life contexts even more natural and effective.

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