Learning Oriented Asessment and intercultural competence

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ALTE Conference

Paris 2014

Write a caption that describes what you have drawn and why.

In the speaking test

100
CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH
CENTENARY 1913–2013

A Grand Unifying Theory for language education

Today's aim: to pull together three strands of work on frameworks for assessment and education:

1. The construction of an inclusive framework for language education, of which the CEFR is just one element (Krakow 2011)

2. The theorisation of Learning Oriented Assessment (LOA) as a framework for linking all levels of assessment into a coherent, ecological system

3. Locating intercultural competence within the CEFR's conception of "action-oriented" communicative language pedagogy.

Extending the CEFR (Krakow 2011)

Formal language education requires a comprehensive framework encompassing languages across the curriculum. The CEFR is a component within such a framework.

This is important for exam providers who wish to ensure positive impact for their assessments within a school context.

"Language teaching in schools must go beyond the communication competences specified on the various levels of the CEFR" *(Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education; CoE 2010)*

LOA: macro and micro levels
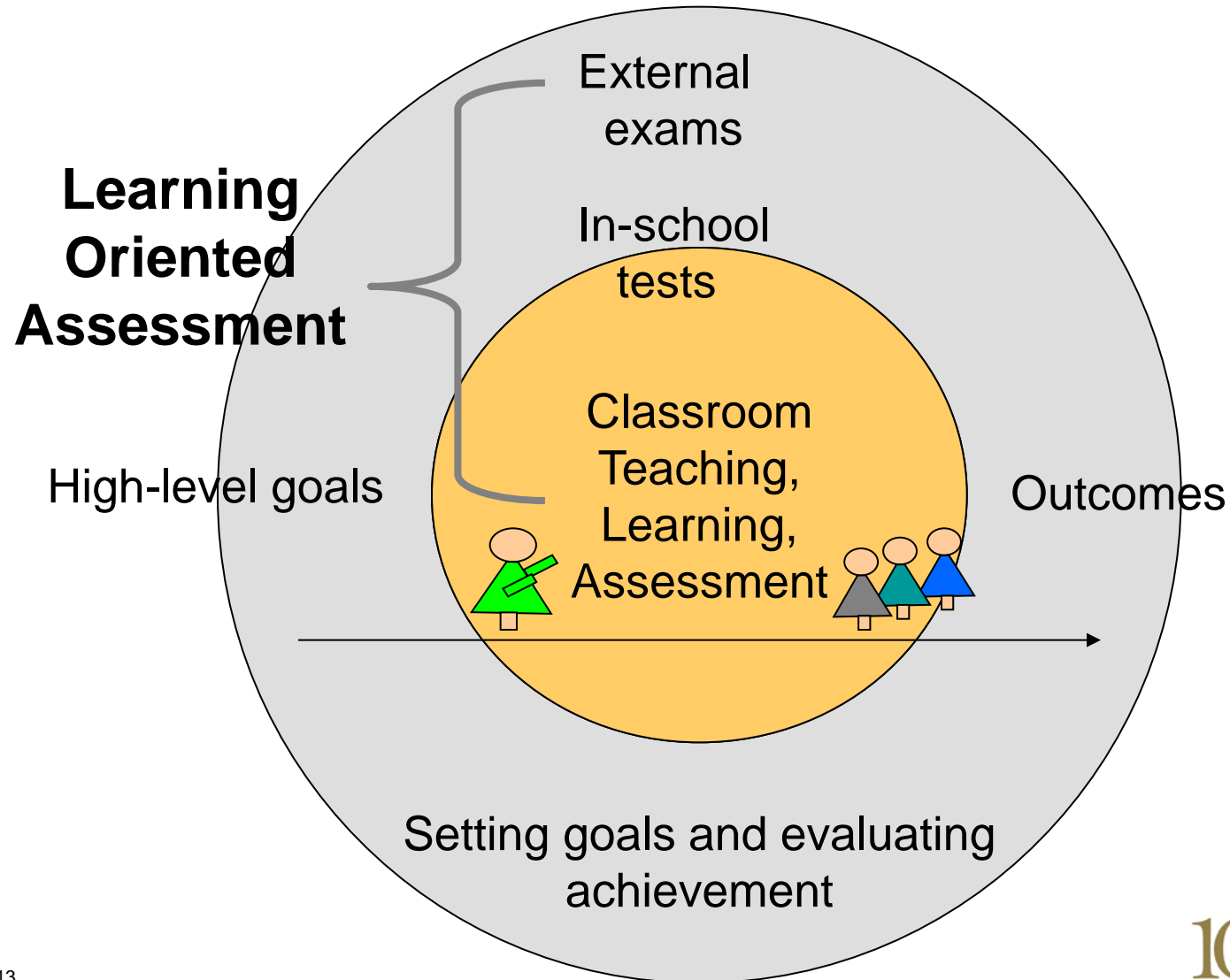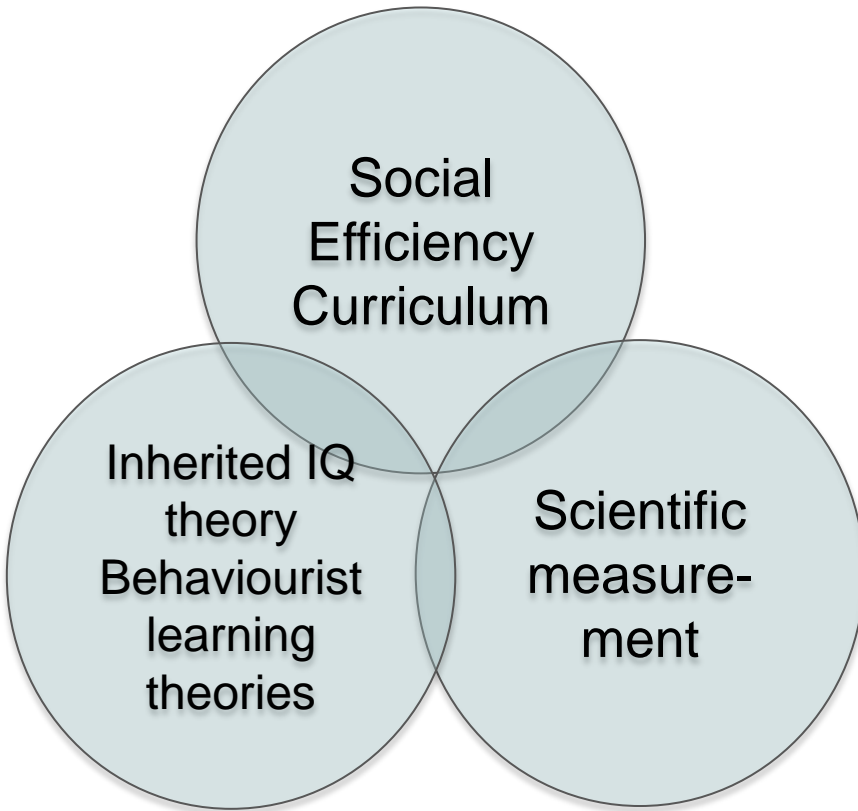
The problem with exams

Formative assessment, classroom assessment – many movements are defined in reaction to the perceived negative impact of large-scale exams on learning.

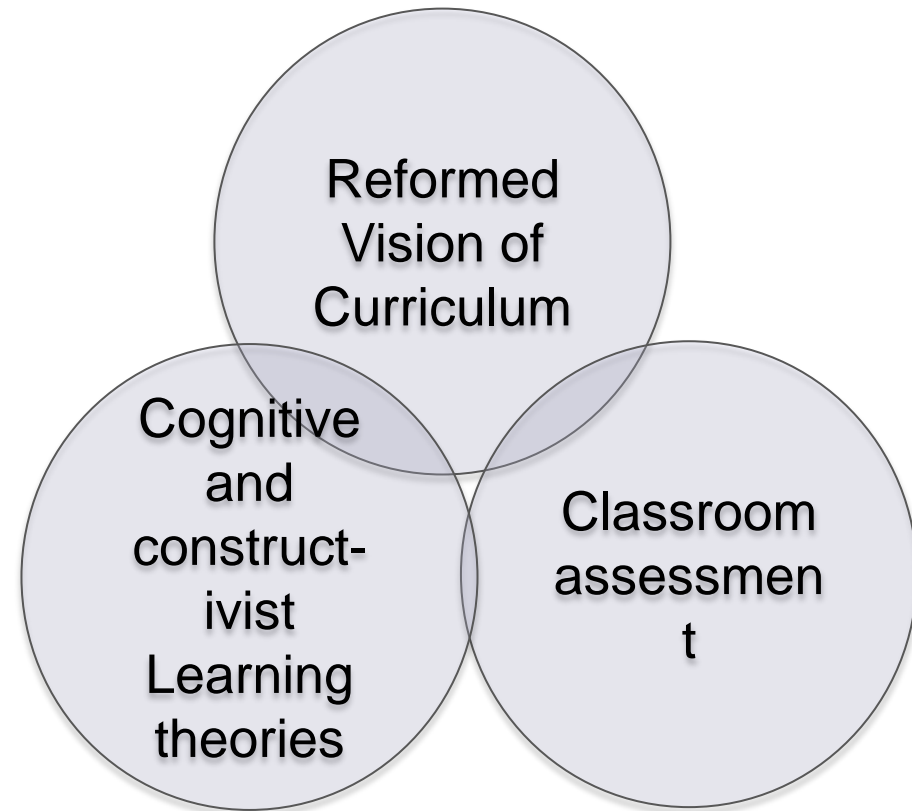Shepard (2000) finds large-scale assessment to be out of touch with current educational beliefs and practices.

"The best way to understand dissonant current practices … is to realize that instruction (at least in its ideal form) is drawn from the emergent paradigm while testing is held over from the past."

An emergent paradigm Shepard 2000

Social Efficiency Curriculum

Inherited IQ theory Behaviourist learning theories

Scientific measure-ment

Reformed Vision of Curriculum

Cognitive and construct-ivist Learning theories

Classroom assessment

20th century dominant paradigm

Emergent paradigm

Constructivism

Cognitive (Piaget)

Intellectual,
Understanding,
Componential,
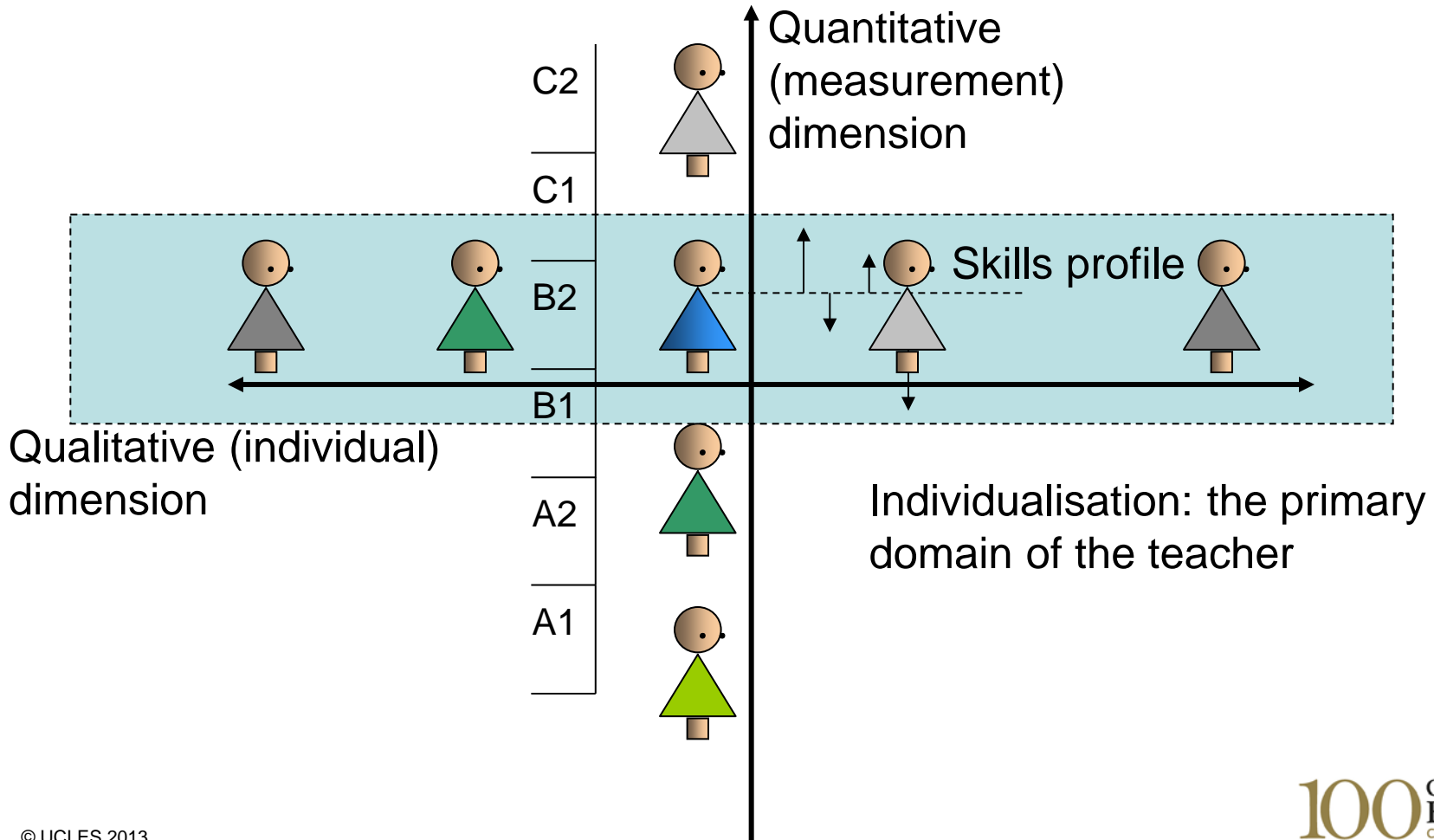e.g. maths & science

Social (Vygotsky)

Interactional,
Performance,
Holistic,
e.g. language

Shepard 2000: *"A singularly important idea in this new paradigm is that both development and learning are primarily social processes."*

LOA's complementary approach: Quantitative and qualitative dimensions

Quantitative (measurement) dimension

C2
C1
B2
B1
A2
A1

Skills profile

Qualitative (individual) dimension

Individualisation: the primary domain of the teacher

The ESLC results showed a wide range of outcomes: some successful systems, but a number of poorly performing ones.

The questionnaire findings suggested a simple success recipe :

- *A language is learned better where motivation is high, where learners perceive it to be useful, and where it is indeed used outside school, for example in communicating over the internet, for watching TV, or travelling on holiday. Also, the more teachers and students use the language in class, the better it is learned.*

This ideal situation is approximated only in some countries, and mainly for English.

Countries endorse the CEFR's *action-oriented* model; but many cannot apply it successfully.

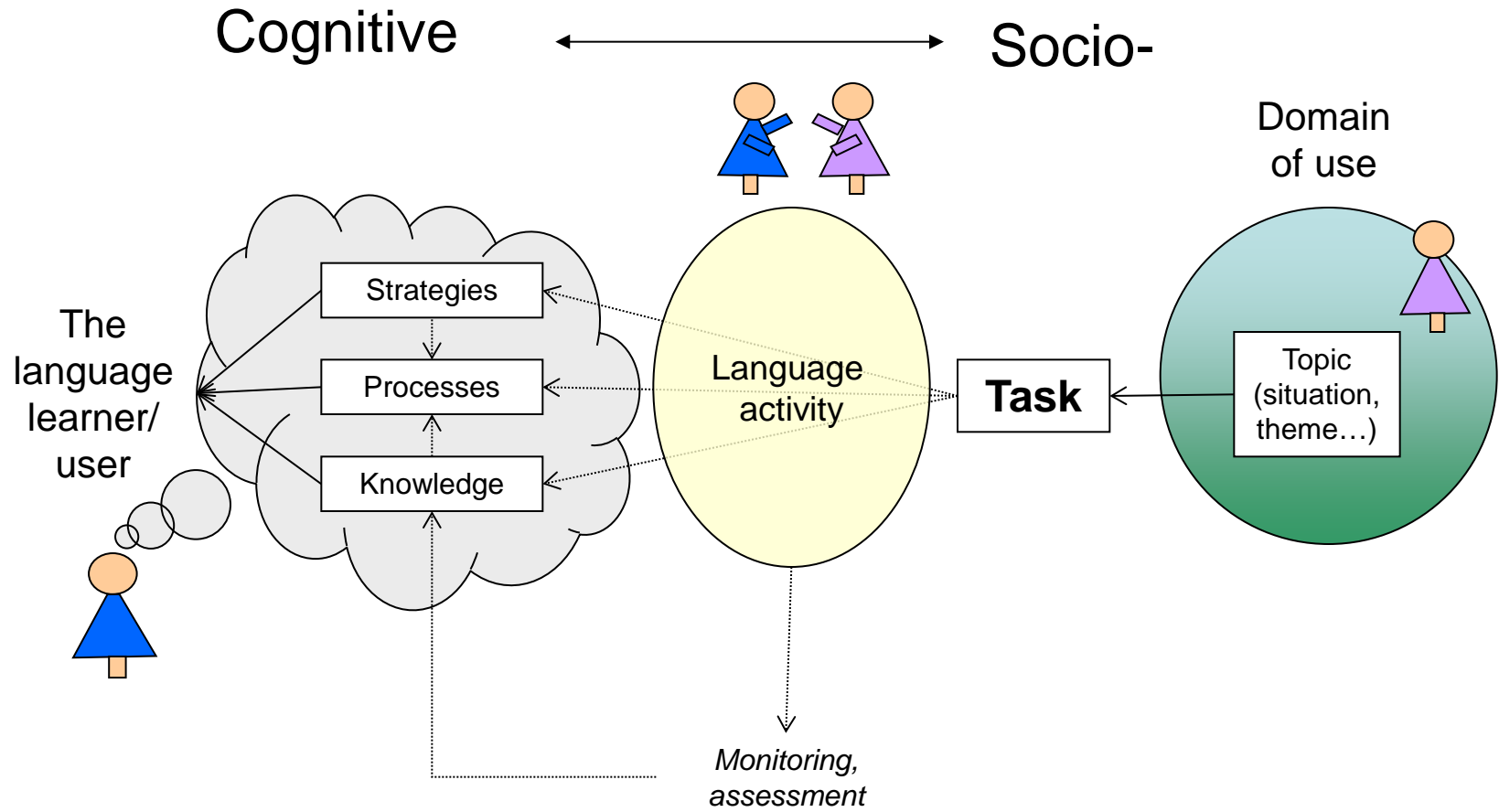Let's examine it from a social-constructivist perspective.

The CEFR's action-oriented model

A socio-cognitive model:

"…the actions performed by persons who as individuals and as social agents develop a range of **competences**, both **general** and in particular **communicative language competences**. They draw on the competences at their disposal in various contexts under various **conditions** and **constraints** to engage in **language activities** involving **language processes** to produce and/or receive **texts** in relation to **themes** in specific **domains**, activating those **strategies** which seem most appropriate for carrying out the **tasks** to be accomplished. The monitoring of these actions by the participants leads to the reinforcement or modification of their competences." (Council of Europe 2001:9, emphasis in original).

The CEFR's action-oriented model

Cognitive ⟷ Socio-

Domain of use

The language learner/ user

Strategies

Processes

Knowledge

Language activity

Task

Topic (situation, theme…)

Monitoring, assessment

The individual's general competences (CEFR 2.1.1)

Knowledge (Savoir)

Skills and know-how (savoir-faire)

Existential competence (savoir-être)

Ability to learn (savoir apprendre)

The individual's general competences (CEFR 2.1.1)

Knowledge, i.e. declarative knowledge (savoir): all human communication depends on a shared knowledge of the world.

Skills and know-how (savoir-faire): depend more on the ability to carry out procedures than on declarative knowledge

Existential competence (savoir-être): the individual characteristics, personality traits and attitudes which concern self-image, one's view of others and willingness to engage with other people in social interaction.

The individual's general competences (CEFR 2.1.1)

Ability to learn (savoir apprendre): mobilises existential competence, declarative knowledge and skills, and draws on various types of competence.

May also be conceived as 'knowing how, or being disposed, to discover "otherness"'.

Whilst the notion of ability to learn is of general application, it is particularly relevant to language learning.

The individual's general competences (CEFR 2.1.1)

"Attitudes and personality factors greatly affect not only the language users'/learners' roles in communicative acts but also their ability to learn.

The development of an 'intercultural personality' involving both attitudes and awareness is seen by many as an important educational goal in its own right."

Learning outcomes (James and Brown, 2005)

1. **Attainment** – often school curriculum based or measures of competence in the workplace.

2. **Understanding** – of ideas, concepts, processes.

3. **Cognitive and creative** – imaginative construction of meaning, arts or performance.

4. **Using** – how to practise, manipulate, behave, engage in processes or systems.

5. **Higher-order learning** – advanced thinking, reasoning, metacognition.

6. **Dispositions** – attitudes, perceptions, motivations.

7. **Membership, inclusion, self-worth** – affinity towards the group where learning takes place.

Savoir

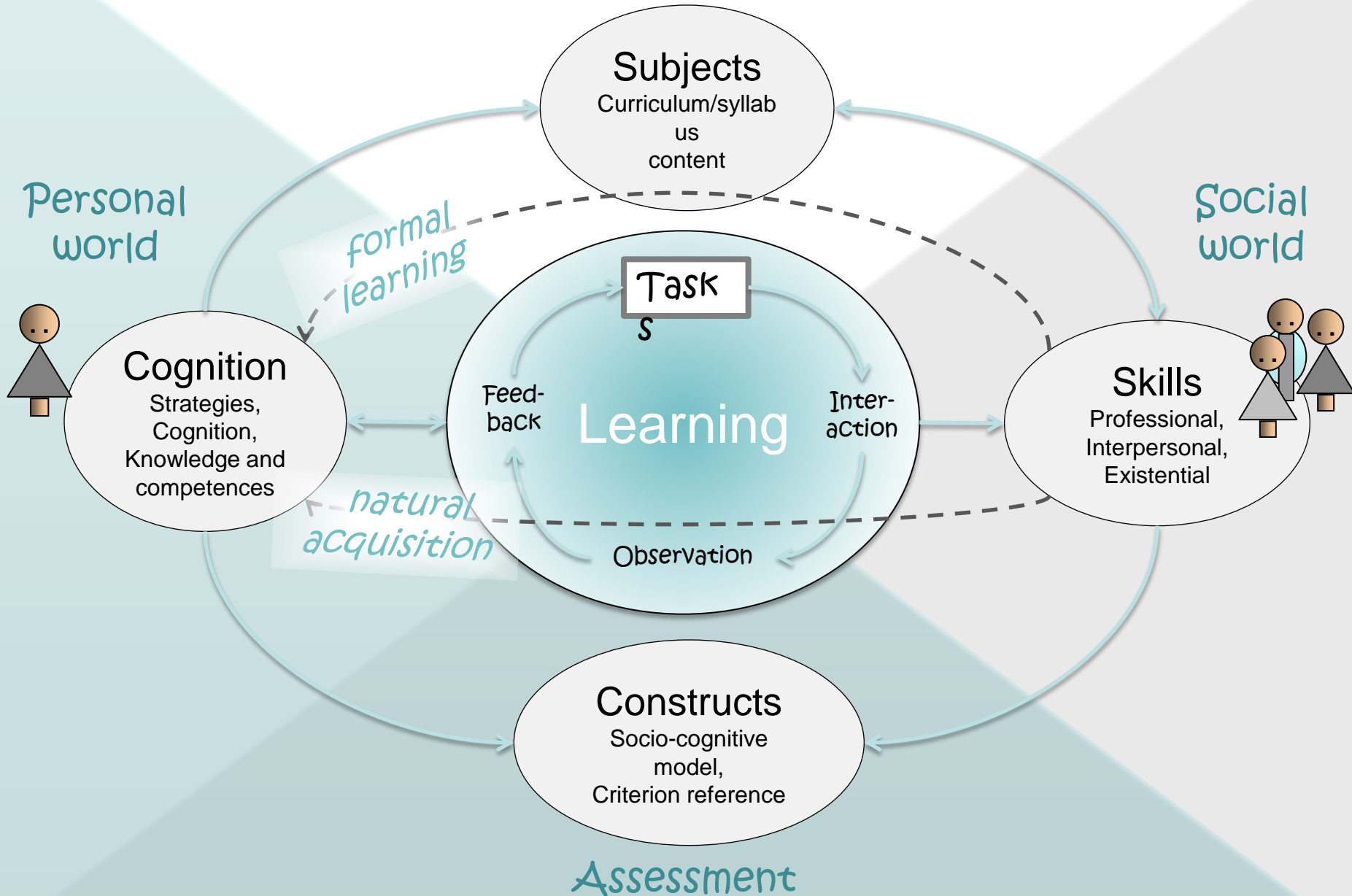Savoir-faire

Savoir apprendre

Savoir-être

Aligning learning and assessment

Alignment of learning and assessment requires a shared conception of learning outcomes.

The notion of task-based interaction at the heart of the CEFR's action-oriented approach provides a basis for the alignment of four worlds:

- The learner
- Society
- Education
- Assessment

How should intercultural competence be acquired?

I am treating intercultural competence as a key goal and mechanism of language learning, rather than a policy

But the CoE states that "attitudes and behaviour, knowledge and skills relevant in intercultural contexts are *not* acquired as a side effect of developing language competences" (my emphasis) (*CoE white paper on intercultural dialogue 2008*).

This seems to view intercultural competence as something to be explicitly taught (and tested?).

My claim is that a social-constructivist approach to language education should promote precisely the attitudes and behaviours of interest.

This will also prove a more practical and productive approach.

The development of intercultural competence

Ausubel's principle of contingent teaching: 'The most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows; ascertain this and teach him accordingly' (1968, p. vi).

With every step that takes you away from your own family, your own street, your own town, your own social class, your own country – the more differences from your previous experience you will encounter.

To appreciate the differences is to acquire intercultural competence.

It is about *foreignness* only in the sense of what is *unfamiliar*.

The social-constructivist classroom offers opportunities to develop a natural awareness of it.

The development of intercultural competence

In relation to languages, intercultural competence develops in the space between L1 and L2, or more generally:

- Between the languages you know and the language you are learning;
- Between the worlds you know and the world you are just entering.

Can intercultural competence be tested?

The important learning outcomes are not about mastery of content, but changing the person and imparting new life skills:

– Becoming a lifelong learner

– Becoming a member of a learning community, and of society

We must find forms of assessment which give due weight to these important educational goals.

But how can they be evaluated?

Can intercultural competence be tested?

Investments are evaluated by the interest they generate.

Course content is useful, but in itself pays no interest (and you may forget, i.e. lose it).

Skills of learning pay interest in the form of better learning (or greater self-efficacy, more generally): during schooling and then through a lifetime.

Dynamic measures of learning - evaluating *rate of change* - will indicate better learning, thus the acquisition of these skills.

Evaluation (not testing) of schools will validate conclusions.

Thus we avoid objectifying something which cannot be objectified.

The problem with indicators

Governments increasingly use indicators to drive progress.

e.g. UK government uses exam grades to judge school performance. This feeds "perverse incentives" into the system, and true learning outcomes are lost sight of (cf UK performance in ESLC).

The EU Learning to Learn Indicators project (Fredriksson and Hoskins 2007: 251) shows constructs being shaped by a focus on accountability and measurability.

- "The political imperative to identify indicators … has brought about a situation … characterised as 'the proverbial assessment tail wagging the curriculum dog' ".

We should hope there will never be an indicator for intercultural competence.

Common errors which governments make

Mistakenly viewing "performance" in terms of mastery of course content.

A focus on what is measurable rather than what is important.

Ignoring the negative impacts on education resulting from accountability testing

Excessive focus on simplistic aspects of educational outcomes (e.g. performance in maths and science in international surveys)

Regressing towards the early 20th century view of education as characterised by Shepard (2000).

Can intercultural competence be tested?

We should not treat intercultural competence as a subject to be taught and tested – that would lead to its trivialisation.

Better to think how to develop the life skills discussed in this talk through reflection on the social-constructivist implications of the CEFR's action-oriented approach.