

## Chapter 7

# Reconceptualizing Language Education With Mediation: Perspectives From Israel

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### ABSTRACT

*The central argument in this chapter is that mediation is not simply a fourth mode of communication sitting alongside the other three modes of communication in the CEFR-CV, but should continue to evolve to become a core principle of the framework and a powerful engine for reconceptualizing language education. The central goal of this chapter is to support wide-scale implementation of mediation by putting forward possible paths for helping practitioners overcome some prevalent misunderstandings regarding mediation. To provide language educators with a deeper understanding of the entangled relationship between language and context, the authors borrow the concept of context from linguistic anthropology, as well as concepts such as positioning, roles and relationships. The overlapping, yet widely differing mediation activities described in the CEFR-CV are distilled down to just two groups - single context and double context - each with its own set of student-centered competences. Practitioner-friendly recommendations are provided for classroom use.*

### INTRODUCTION

This book's call for reconceptualizing language norms in multilingual contexts comes at a time of division and disorder within and between societies: Everywhere we see battle lines drawn, with increasingly complex challenges facing societies on multiple fronts. These 21st century challenges – international conflicts, immigration issues, threats to freedom and democracy – have dramatically increased the need

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for people to communicate appropriately and effectively, in a way that facilitates communication across gaps and barriers and creates conditions in which people can move forward together. On top of all this, generative AI-based technologies are disrupting language programs worldwide and creating an unprecedented demand for rethinking the way we learn and teach languages.

In this light, we argue for a reconceptualization of language education by drawing on an expanded understanding of mediation. An expanded conceptualization of mediation is already presented in the 2020 Companion Volume (CV) of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), and it provides a blueprint for helping language students to develop this potentially powerful mode of communication that could move us forward towards addressing 21st century challenges. Since its 2001 publication by the Council of Europe, the CEFR has become an internationally accepted framework for learning, teaching and assessing languages worldwide, adopted in many countries, across Europe and beyond (see Byram & Parmenter, 2012). According to Figueras, by 2012 (p.477), the document had been translated into many European languages, and its scales were available in more than 40 languages, including in sign language. As we describe below, the CEFR-CV, which updated and extended the earlier, 2001, version of the CEFR, puts forward a number of ground-breaking innovations including a new vision for mediation that has the potential to reconceptualize language education programs worldwide. This new vision goes beyond the vision of a language user as just an intermediary between two interlocutors who cannot communicate independently due to a communicative gap between them. This new vision retains this deficit concept but extends it to now include the potential power of the language user as a constructor of meaning and a facilitator of collaboration.

The central argument in this chapter is that mediation should continue to evolve in order to become a core principle of the CEFR-CV – and not simply a fourth mode of communication sitting alongside other modes of communication. In order to make this case, we first briefly review the history of CEFR and CEFR-CV and then position mediation therein. Next, we take a deeper look at mediation in its current form to draw insights about mediation's full potential. We illustrate why mediation requires additional clarification to allow this concept to unfurl and take up its position as a key aspect of the CEFR-CV, instead of being one of its least-visited corners. Third, we discuss potential sources of confusion that we have found working within the Israeli context, as well as potential sources of confusion that result from overlapping and disparate competences that emerge from mediation descriptors in the CEFR-CV. Fourth, we draw on understandings of language and communication from the literature in linguistic anthropology to relate core conceptualizations of the way language works with context as a fruitful way to move mediation forward. Lastly, we operationalize the conception of mediation put forward in this paper for practical use by practitioners. Our hope is that this chapter will contribute towards more effective pedagogies and professional development on mediation, enabling this mode of communication to serve as a potential engine for changing the way we learn and teach languages.

## **THE CEFR AND THE CEFR-CV**

During the past two decades since its publication in 2001, much has been written on the CEFR and the [Council of Europe's website](#) offers a wealth of support materials on the framework (n.d.). Though they began as separate processes, the CEFR coincided with the Bologna Process, in that it introduced a set of descriptors of linguistic and communicative abilities set at a range of levels, providing standards for language education programs. And thus, language education programs at the tertiary level, in many

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