Communicating effectively: a competency framework for CEFR (2020) mediation skills in use

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Abstract

Goodier (2019) claims that mediation has innovation potential in language education, as mediation skills are integral to successful communication, and can be used for a range of communicative activities. In mediation, language is conceptualised as more than a linguistic construct, as it also focuses on the use of soft skills and being sensitive to another's ideas, needs or culture (Kiddle, 2019). Mediation competences reflect the effective real-life communication of information through integrated skills and collaborative interaction. A competency framework was designed with the use of adapted CEFR (2020) mediation skills to improve communication skills for a university foundation stage cohort of healthcare students. The mediation competency framework was put into practice with a formative roleplay task, and this enabled the learners to develop the use of both sociolinguistic skills and critical thinking skills (Goodier, 2019). The competency framework can be adapted for different contexts and communicative acts, and can be used as an ongoing reference and feedback tool. It can help learners and teachers to be more aware of the complex nature of language, which includes collective, cognitive and social functions (Piccardo et al., 2019).

Keywords: Competency framework; Communication; Mediation; Competences; Collaboration; Sociolinguistics

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper explains how and why adapted Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR, 2020) mediation skills were used to design a competency framework to develop the communication skills of a UK university healthcare foundation stage pluricultural cohort of target level C1 level English international students. The CEFR (2020) mediation skills in the companion volume with their focus on facilitating the communication of information through the use of integrated skills and collaborative interaction seemed to provide relevant and useful communicative competences which could significantly upgrade the academic and professional communication skill set of the university healthcare cohort.

The research question in this study was to investigate to what extent the use of CEFR (2020) mediation skills together with a roleplay task for English for specific purposes (ESAP) could address the target learners' needs to develop their communication skills.

CEFR (2020) mediation skills offer some rather new and useful perspectives on communication skills. In mediation, language is conceptualised as more than a linguistic construct as it also focuses on the use of soft skills which are integral to successful communication, such as being sensitive to another's ideas, needs or culture (Kiddle, 2019). This can be seen in Figure 1 which shows the complex interplay of micro skills in CEFR mediation.
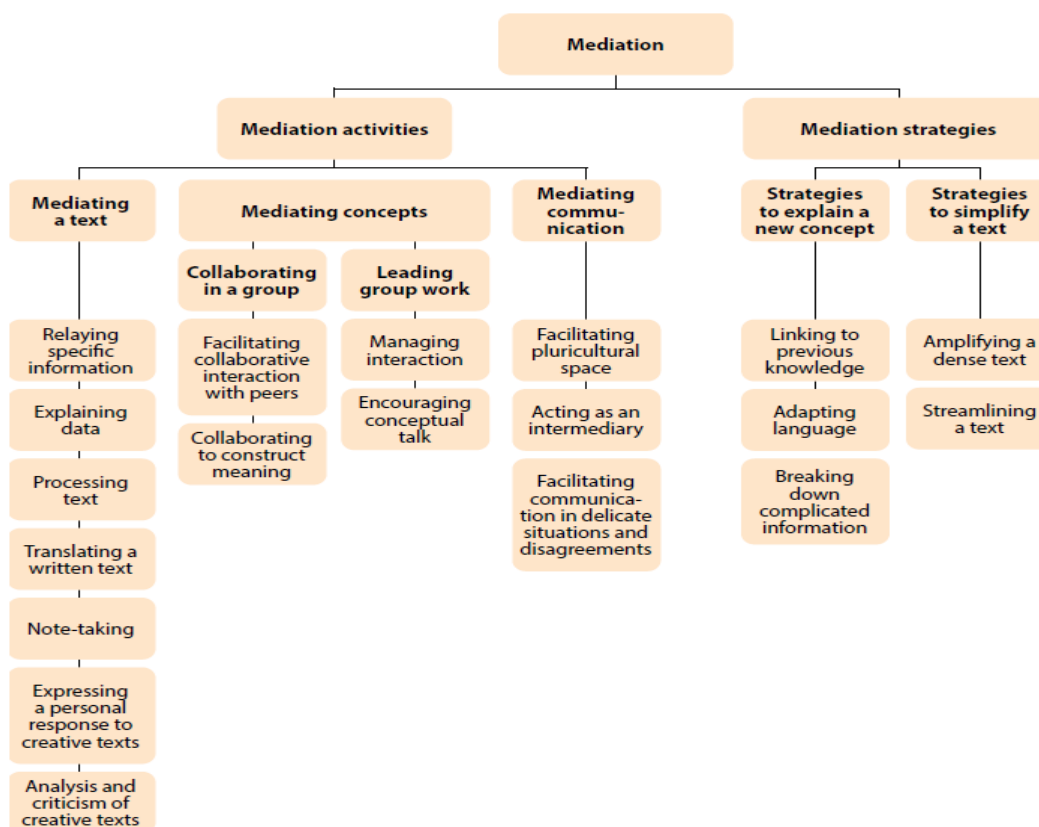
Figure 1. Taken from CEFR (2020, p.90) Mediation activities + mediation strategies

The mediation competencies tend to reflect real-life communication where skills are integrated, practical and action oriented (Goodier, 2019c). The mediation strategies intend to facilitate the mediation activities, for instance *Adapting language* in order to *Relay specific information* when *Mediating a text*, and sensitivity to different cultural viewpoints may need considering (*Facilitating pluricultural space*). Hence, the emphasis is on actively helping others to understand specific information and collaborating to ensure that concepts are mutually understood (Goodier, 2019b; Kiddle, 2019; Piccardo & North, 2019).

Brand (2020) lists several reasons why mediation has gained in significance. This includes an increase in the number of people choosing to study and work abroad who need effective academic and professional communication skills. Phipps et al. (2001) maintain that this has led to greater importance being attached

to cooperative learning and working together. Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) also seems to have influenced the growth of mediation where subject specific content and use of language have become more integrated (CEFR, 2020). These factors and a closer exploration of how Halliday's (1973) communicative approach has evolved to include a greater focus for example on sociocultural competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972), interactional competence (Hall, 1995; Kramsch, 1986), and functional competence with its focus on 'can do' (Savignon, 2002), helped inform the decision to create the competency framework of adapted mediation descriptors in this study.

Mediation in the CEFR is the fourth category for communicative language skills, and linguistic competence, pragmatic competence and sociolinguistic competence are seen as intertwined (CEFR, 2020). Combining these competences can lead to more effective use of language for different purposes in different contexts (CEFR, 2020). In applied psychology and the sociocultural approach to learning, competence only exists if put into use, and this is particularly true if related to professional training (CEFR, 2020). Use of the CEFR (2020) mediation skills in this study was deemed relevant as the competencies so neatly appear to meet the needs of increasing social and educational diversity characteristic of communication in the 21st Century (Brand, 2020; CEFR, 2020; Goodier, 2019b).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Use of CEFR (2020) mediation descriptors

CEFR descriptors have long been used to assess English language skills. The CEFR *can do* descriptors are 'positive' (Taylor, 2006, p.52) and 'help to define the learning target, and develop learning activities' (Little, cited in Figueras, 2012, p.482). The CEFR scales, however, merely provide illustrations of competence, and hence can need adapting to suit the context and students' needs (Figueras, 2012;

Fulcher & Davidson, 2006; Goodier, 2019a; Ross, 2006). Particularly within the rather abstract and complex concepts of mediation descriptors 'boundaries are fuzzy and overlap is inevitable' (CEFR, 2020, p.250), hence care is needed to avoid cognitive overload and ensure the adapted skills are accessible, specific and focused (Zhang et al., 2019). Ensuring that the descriptors are manageable aids both transferability of the skills in the framework, and sustainability of the task (Boud & Soler, 2015).

The CEFR scheme is compatible with a task-based, action-oriented approach, and all approaches informed by sociocultural and socio-constructivist theories, which imply that learners flexibly adapt their behaviours to the social situation (CEFR, 2020; Vygotsky, 1978). This is an ability which is needed by the target students both academically and professionally. For this to occur relational, cognitive, cultural and linguistic mediation are all involved (Piccardo, 2020), hence reflecting the areas of competency in mediation. Mediation combines reception, production and interaction (Figure 2), where a source text or information is (re)formulated for another person to facilitate understanding and communication through 'languaging' (CEFR, 2020; Piccardo, 2020), as the students would be doing in the roleplay task.
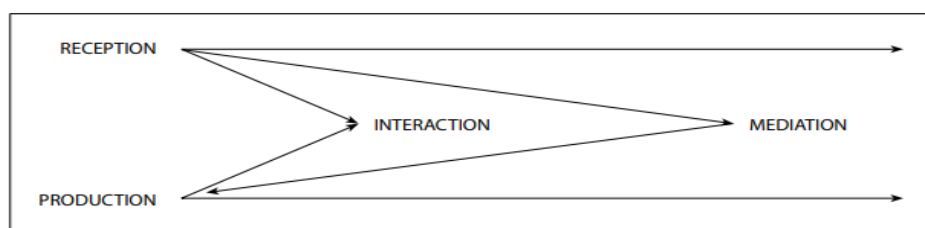

Figure 2. Taken from CEFR (2020, p.34) The relationship between reception, production, interaction and mediation

This research project, completed in 2021, consisted of designing an innovative mediation descriptor framework to use with an ESAP roleplay task to develop the communication skills of the university healthcare foundation students.

CEFR mediation skills were first introduced in the 2018 CEFR Companion Volume, which led to various articles in 2019, particularly by Goodier, Piccardo and North, and Kiddle discussing how mediation skills could be used in practice for action-oriented communication tasks in ELT and CLIL. They argued that mediation skills could be adapted, were useful for most communicative tasks, and were more suited to formative use. Prodromou (1995) supports less objective testing to assess communicative language skills, and Boud (2000) and Nunan (1988) argue the importance of the ability to critically self-assess. Self-assessment reflection, used in this study whilst the communicative task was still fresh in learners' minds, helped them to analyse judgements on their performance (Goodier, 2019a; Hilsdon, 2006; Moon, 2004). A study in Japan by Saito (2020) used a range of adapted mediation descriptors for university students to self-assess assignment tasks in an e-portfolio. This study highlights the transferable benefits of using mediation skills, particularly professionally (Goodier, 2019c). Self-assessment, however, is only of real benefit if learners are interested in what they are learning, find the tasks meaningful, and feel supported within a collaborative learning environment (Dörnyei, 2007; Kurtz et al., 2005). Dudley-Evans and St John (1998, p.210) maintain that 'self-and peer assessment can help to develop the independence that ESP learners require for their continued progress'. Intrinsic motivation in the task and its specific content is therefore vital.

The updated 2020 CEFR companion volume provided a broader view of mediation, adding extra scales for pluricultural competence and sociolinguistic competence shifting away from an earlier focus on the transfer from one language to another (North, 2022). The wording of the scales was also made slightly simpler. The volume also added extra scales for phonology. These were not included in the mediation skills but were deemed useful in this paper's study to include in the competency framework. Regarding phonology, the CEFR (2020) mentions 'intelligibility' as the goal rather than native-like competence. Intelligibility is necessary with regard to pronunciation as poor pronunciation can be responsible for up to two-thirds of communication breakdown (Walker & Jenkins, 2000). Walker et al. (2021) refer to intelligibility as international intelligibility, which is vital for the

effective transfer of information, also for 1st language users. English is a global language, and much communication occurs where one participant may well not have English as a first language. Even with 1st language users, accents can impede understanding, and may need modifying. Jenkins' Lingua Franca Core suggests that intelligibility can be helped by effective use of pauses and voice tone, modifying some features of speech, and adjusting some expectations (Jenkins, 2007). The emphasis is on mutual understanding; adapting our use of language and expectations to ensure that this occurs. As effective communicators we should also make an effort to understand language use which may be different from our own. Learners who are able to focus on intelligibility can become more confident and effective in interactions (Jenkins, 2007; Walker & Jenkins, 2000).

One particular research project in 2021 by Liontu and Braidwood on medical English usefully identified the CEFR mediation skills into dominant scales, which could be used for most communicative acts, such as *Relaying specific information*, and supplementary scales, which were more specific, such as *Explaining data.* This resonates with research done in this study regarding the development of mediation competency frameworks, where the dominant scales could be used and recycled in frameworks for a variety of communicative tasks. A main focus of Liontu and Braidwood's project, however, was still cross-linguistic communication. Recycling dominant mediation skills renders these skills transferable, particularly professionally, as Pavlovskaya and Lankina (2019) also highlighted in their study on the use of mediation descriptors to improve discussion skills.

2.2 Use of Roleplay as a task, and relevancy of OET and NHS values

Roleplays are commonly used as part of healthcare training and programmes to practise the real-life scenario of patient-clinician interactions. Roleplays feature in globally accepted speaking tests and guides for healthcare such as the Occupational English test (OET, 2018), and The Calgary-Cambridge guides (Kurtz et

al., 2005). The OET uses a roleplay task for its patient-clinician speaking test and the speaking criteria contain many similar skills to the CEFR (2020) mediation skills, such as summarising, signposting, eliciting, clarifying, appropriate use of pace and tone, and of soft skills such as respect and empathy. These soft skills are also National Health Service values (NHS, 2023) and so were relevant to be included in the descriptors for the competency framework. In summary, the OET and the CEFR mediation descriptors seem to be mutually supportive and could be combined to enhance clinical communication skills and patient centred care.

To date, no other research projects appear to have combined the use of mediation skills with a roleplay task in healthcare, or to have developed a similar mediation competency framework.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Context

The investigation involved a cohort of 17 healthcare students, mostly studying nursing, who had started their university foundation stage course with a fairly high level of spoken fluency (at least an IELTS qualification above 5.5, or an O or A level in English). Their target level of C1 was, therefore, in the students' zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), hence achievable. However, it had become apparent from various speaking tasks that the students needed to refine their communication competences.

3.2 Needs analysis

Initial diagnostic student presentations and a seminar discussion were used by the teacher to informally assess the learners' communicative use of English. The tasks identified the learners' need for an improvement in the following communication skills – coherency of explanations, intelligibility, appropriacy of language, and a heightened awareness of other people involved in the communicative act – their ideas and engagement.

Expert interviews were also conducted as part of the process of needs analysis. The purpose of these interviews was to obtain more information for the design of the competency framework in this study. The five expert interviewees come from a range of educational backgrounds and were asked their opinion on mediation skills in the CEFR, the communicative skills necessary for health professionals and the roleplays used in the OET. The interviewees identified the following needs as important for the development of effective communication skills for the students:

- integrated skills
- 'soft' skills', for example respect, empathy
- confidence
- intercultural competence
- asking appropriate questions
- using appropriate language
- clear pronunciation/intelligibility
- knowledge and use of small talk

The experts were divided over the authenticity and usefulness of roleplays, but the general consensus was that if the roleplay was relevant and action-oriented it could be more successful. Regarding the use of mediation descriptors, these can be useful as metalanguage for both students and teacher, and their use is more

suited to self-assessment. North (2018) maintains that the CEFR descriptors are indeed better suited to learning rather than assessment. The experts stated that adaptation of the mediation skills is necessary to fit the context and students' needs, and that this can be improved with the use of mediation profiling. Mediation profiling means focusing on the competences in the CEFR rather than levels, that is, looking up and down the descriptors vertically to find a suitable profile, not only horizontally at one given level (Goodier, 2019c). All interviewees believed that much progress is being made in creating descriptors which better mirror real life use of communicative competences.

This study investigated to what extent the use of the mediation skills with a roleplay task could address the students' learning needs to develop communicative skills.

3.3 Methodological decisions for creation of mediation skills framework

An action research methodology was used for this study to investigate the learners' use of communication skills and give them an opportunity to develop these skills (Adelman, 1993). The learners could use their performance in a roleplay task to actively practise, reflect upon and formatively self and peer assess the use of mediation skills in the competency framework. This was an opportunity for the students to repeat the use of the framework to reinforce awareness of the mediation skills. Self-assessment was used by the students to judge their communicative performance (Good, OK, Poor/Improve) pre and post the roleplay task using the mediation descriptor framework. The framework with the criterion-referenced performance judgments was also used for peer assessment which was conducted by the students and the teacher for each healthcare professional roleplay performance. A peer rating was quantified using a peer rating index (PRI) to help determine the amount of agreement between students and teacher on individuals' performances of each skill. For the PRI, a Good (G) was awarded 3

points, an OK (O) 2 points, and an Improve (I) 1 point. For example, if the peers judged 10 Goods for a student and 4 OKs, the PRI would be calculated as PRI = (10x3 = 4x2)/14 = 38/14 = 2.71. A PRI of 3.00 would mean high agreement for G/G. The use of the mediation descriptors formatively was an opportunity for students to identify their strengths and weaknesses in communication skills. The formative process was also an opportunity for constructive and supportive feedback, which could actively feed forward into the learning process and further communication tasks (Gibbs, 2015; Goodier, 2019a).

A skills-based approach using experiential methods with the roleplay task could address both the students' academic and professional communication needs. Cognitive and attitudinal learning were prioritised, and this complements a constructivist approach (Kurtz et al., 2005) where learners can construct ideas as to how and why it can be effective to communicate in a certain way. For example, how active listening can be used effectively to understand patients' needs, and how the use of empathy can lead to more positive patient outcomes. Appropriate attitude together with good interpersonal skills tend to be key to effective communication (Kurtz et al., 2005).

Content for the roleplay tasks came from the students' own research into patient case studies using a patient/problem intervention comparison outcome (PICO) formula. In the roleplay the patient's problem would be discussed with the clinician and a solution agreed upon. As the content was learner-generated, this would give students a certain ownership of, interest in, and motivation for the task. Learner autonomy was expected in the search for the case study content input, and as an action-oriented language use situation, the roleplay task could offer the opportunity to develop the 'multiple, highly interrelated subcompetencies' of the mediation scales (Stoynoff, 2012, p.524). Learners were given practice time to develop their own style in the roleplay task and use of mediation skills. 'Going beyond specific skills into individuality is the real challenge of experiential learning' (Kurtz et al., 2005, p.70), and this can be both challenging and motivating. Pre roleplay task, the learners unpacked the descriptors in the mediation competency

framework for meaning and possible language use. Transcriptions of the students' language and expressions in the roleplay were used post task to identify to what extent learners had demonstrated use of the communicative competences in the mediation descriptor framework.

3.4 Relevancy of CEFR Overall mediation skills descriptors to creation of framework

Figure 3 shows the CEFR descriptor for overall mediation C1 and this was the starting point for the creation of the relevant descriptors for the framework, as this was the target level for the students.

C1 — Can act effectively as a mediator, helping to maintain positive interaction by interpreting different perspectives, managing ambiguity, anticipating misunderstandings and intervening diplomatically in order to redirect the conversation. Can build on different contributions to a discussion, stimulating reasoning with a series of questions. Can convey clearly and fluently in well-structured language the significant ideas in long, complex texts, whether or not they relate to their own fields of interest, including evaluative aspects and most nuances.
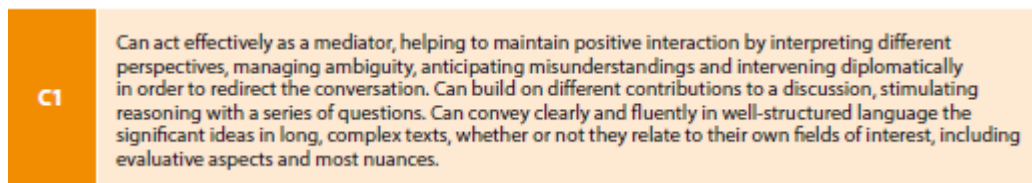
Figure 3. Taken from CEFR (2020, p.91) Overall mediation C1

However, the B2 descriptors, see Figure 4, contain significantly more aspects of effective communication, for example *a supportive environment, encouraging people to explore issues and adjusting sensitively the way they express things, clarifying the opinions, work collaboratively with people from different backgrounds, convey detailed information and arguments reliably.* Hence, mediation profiling was used to look up and down the descriptors vertically, as well as horizontally, for skills from other levels to include in the framework. In the CEFR, it can be useful to focus on the wider breadth of competences, which can be adapted across the levels, and applied to different tasks.

Overall mediation	
B2	Can establish a supportive environment for sharing ideas and facilitate discussion of delicate issues, showing appreciation of different perspectives, encouraging people to explore issues and adjusting sensitively the way they express things. Can build on others' ideas, making suggestions for ways forward. Can convey the main content of well-structured but long and propositionally complex texts on subjects within their fields of professional, academic and personal interest, clarifying the opinions and purposes of speakers/signers.
	Can work collaboratively with people from different backgrounds, creating a positive atmosphere by providing support, asking questions to identify common goals, comparing options for how to achieve them and explaining suggestions for what to do next. Can further develop others' ideas, pose questions that invite reactions from different perspectives and propose a solution or next steps. Can convey detailed information and arguments reliably, e.g. the significant point(s) contained in complex but well-structured texts within their fields of professional, academic and personal interest.

Figure 4. Taken from CEFR (2020, p. 92) Overall mediation B2

3.5 The mediation descriptor framework

Table 1 shows the competency framework with the mediation descriptors on the left, and the criterion (good, ok, poor/improve) for the students to assess what they 'can do' formatively on the right. The descriptors are mainly from the use of adapted CEFR mediation descriptors (CEFR, 2020), but also OET criteria (2018) and NHS values (2023). Use was also made of other CEFR (2020) descriptors for phonological intelligibility, and turn taking.

Table 1: The mediation descriptors (CEFR, 2020) competency framework to use with the roleplay the task

Mediation skills	Pre-task: What you think (good, ok, poor/improve) Consider what would be necessary to do well in these skills	Post-task: How you did (good, ok, poor/improve) Consider why
Processing text in speech		

Can clearly and confidently sequence, summarise, signpost information		
Can adapt use of language to ensure meaning is clear		
Can explain/check understanding of key points clearly and link to previous knowledge		
Can be understood clearly with appropriate use of pace/pauses, word and sentence stress, and tone of voice		
Collaborative interaction		
Can ask appropriate questions for clarification/demonstrate interest		
Can elicit/encourage another's ideas and use active listening, and appropriate turntaking to allow other person to speak		
Can weigh up different points of view/possibilities using logical reasoning (hypothesising, analysing, inferring, justifying, predicting) + how agreement might be achieved		
Facilitate communication		
Can maintain positive/respectful interaction and anticipate problems in intercultural encounters		

Can demonstrate sensitivity and empathy		
Can establish a positive/supportive environment, also with use of appropriate body language		

The mediation skills competency framework for the roleplay task has ten descriptors, grouped into three sections to aid recall and use. It might seem that there is some logical progression to the mediation descriptors in the framework, but the framework is not designed with a prescriptive structure in mind. The grouping of skills can provide a focus for the competences, though explanations and collaborative, supportive interaction are relevant, core, dominant skills which can be used throughout the task. This non-prescriptive nature can give learners the opportunity to personalise the task, experimenting and intertwining linguistic and professional skills. Natural interaction does not repeatedly use the same patterns, and learners need opportunities to experiment with what they can do and make their own meanings (Willis, 1996).

3.6 Creation of framework descriptor categories *Processing text in speech*

The first descriptor category in the framework is *Processing text in speech* (CEFR, 2020, p.98) from the CEFR scale *Mediating a text*. This was immediately relevant as the student-clinicians in the roleplay had to communicate information from their researched healthcare case study clearly and confidently to a student-patient in a way which took into consideration the patient's needs, concerns and culture. This would involve summarising, signposting, and checking understanding of information, linking to previous knowledge, and adapting language both lexically

and phonologically. Adapting language is a CEFR mediation strategy for explaining a concept effectively to the other person, and this can also apply to pronunciation. Intelligibility is vital for the effective transfer of information (Walker et al, 2021).

3.7 Creation of framework descriptor category *Collaborative interaction*

The scales for *Mediating concepts* deal specifically with the collaborative elements of mediation which can be conducive to effective interaction, and interactional alignment (CEFR, 2020; Rasenberg et al., 2020). Descriptors in the framework for collaboration, for example weighing up different points of view and coming to an agreement involve the use of logical reasoning, and hence tend to assume a certain level of social and cognitive maturity (Goodier, 2019a). The skills reflect Bloom's taxonomy of higher order thinking skills, for example analysing, evaluating, creating (Bloom et al., 1956), and hence suitable to 'higher level thinking' skills required academically and professionally.

Collaboration involves asking appropriate questions and using active listening to encourage interaction. Turntaking is included in the framework, as inherent in the idea of collaborating (Silverman et al., 2005) though different cultures can have different viewpoints on turntaking, and when to give space and time to others in an interaction (Hall, 1995).

3.8 Creation of framework descriptor category *Facilitating communication*

Facilitating communication is the final section of descriptors in the framework, and this includes relational competences and NHS (2023) values such as respect, empathy, sensitivity, and positivity, which should pervade the entire consultation (CEFR, 2020; Silverman et al., 2005). Collaborative interaction tends

to require a positive and supportive environment (CEFR, 2020; Kalet et al., 2004). In the CEFR this is mostly mentioned in the B2 levels but is a prerequisite for all levels. Regarding the use of soft skills, these are life skills and human skills, and vital to relationship-centred care (Silverman et al, 2005). They are qualities which all users may not have, are often 'dependent on past experience' (CEFR, 2020, p.251), and use tends to be the result of a link between personal values and professional values. In healthcare it is necessary not only to care, but to learn how to communicate this care, also with appropriate use of body language and non-verbal messages.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Roleplay self-assessment and use of mediation descriptor framework – analysis of data

The learners self-assessed their performance (Good, OK, Poor/Improve) pre and post the roleplay task using the mediation descriptor framework. Generally, students felt they were better at *Facilitating communication* (two-thirds of students felt they were good at this skill) and poorer at *Collaborative interaction* (only a third of students felt they were good at this skill). Soft skills as part of *Facilitating communication* are vital to effective healthcare and often skills intrinsically inherent in those who have chosen to either study or work in healthcare (Silverman et al.,2005), such as the healthcare cohort in this study. However, the framework undoubtedly served to heighten awareness of the significance of these skills and how they could be applied. The skill which most students felt they had improved post roleplay was *Explaining key points* (71%), particularly the ability to link information to the other person's previous knowledge.

Regarding *Collaborative interaction* skills, *Encouraging a patient to speak* and *Weighing up possibilities* received the highest percentage (29%) for the number of

students who felt they did worse at a skill. *Weighing up possibilities* can be a challenging skill involving higher order thinking skills needing much practice (Alexander, Argent & Spencer, 2008). *Encouraging the patient to speak* involves active listening and turntaking, which can take a good degree of self-control and awareness of the other person to ensure the interaction is patient-centred (Hall, 1995). *Adapting use of language* received the most varied response - appropriate choice of language in a specific context with a specific person seems to be a skill which requires flexibility and much practice.

Being understood received the highest number of *OKs* regarding performance, which means most students felt they were not *Good* at this skill. Features of intelligibility, such as use of pauses and appropriate use of stress can take time to improve, and can also be lost when enthusiasm for the content and interaction itself takes over (Walker et al., 2021).

Use of the mediation descriptor framework raised awareness of the skills which were necessary for effective communication and enabled students to focus on their strengths and weaknesses, which was where improvement was inherently needed.

4.2 Roleplay peer assessment and use of mediation descriptor framework – analysis of data

Peer assessment was conducted by the students and the teacher using a peer rating index (PRI) for each healthcare professional roleplay performance. This determined the amount of agreement between students and teacher on individual's performances of each mediation skill.
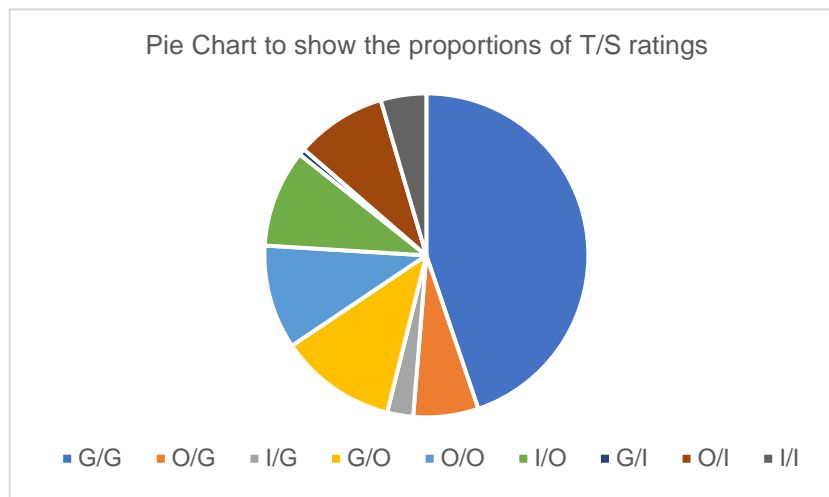
Figure 5. Proportions of T/S (Teacher/Student) ratings

Figure 5 highlights where the ratings or judgements of the students and teachers agree. The pie chart shows that there was a 45% agreement for G/G (Good), in blue, which means that there was much agreement between the teacher and student peer assessments. Agreements also occurred with O/O (OK) in darker blue (10%), and I/I (Improve) in dark grey (5%), making a total 60% where the teacher and student agreed showing a certain validity of use for the descriptors.

Amidst the variations in judgments, 19% of students gave themselves a higher judgement than the teacher, but 21% gave a lower judgement. These variations show that there was a fairly equal distribution between students who overestimated their ability and those who underestimated themselves. Boud and Falchikov (1989) state that over-estimation of performance can be common with weaker and less mature students whereas stronger, more mature students tend to have the opposite tendency. It could be argued that over-estimating performances by peers could be seen as supportive and encouraging, and the sharing of the experience in a positive way. Goodier (2019b) maintains that peer support is a key aspect of mediation, in that it relates to the needs of others. Kurtz et al., (2005, p.3) argue that self and peer assessment can be unsettling, as communication skills are 'closely bound to self-concept, self-esteem and personal style'. OK can be a judgement used by students when they are unsure of the level of capability (Sargeant et al., 2011).

Table 2. Average PRI for each of the 10 skills.

Skill	Average PRI
Can clearly and confidently sequence, summarise, signpost information	2.71
Can adapt use of language to ensure meaning is clear	2.66
Can explain/check understanding of key points clearly and link to previous knowledge	2.58
Can be understood clearly with appropriate use of pace/pauses, word and sentence stress, and tone of voice	2.49
Can ask appropriate questions for clarification/demonstrate interest	2.69
Can elicit/encourage another's ideas and use active listening, and appropriate turntaking to allow other person to speak	2.81
Can weigh up different points of view/possibilities using logical reasoning (hypothesising, analysing, inferring, justifying, predicting) + how agreement might be achieved	2.80
Can maintain positive/respectful interaction and anticipate problems in intercultural encounters	2.82
Can demonstrate sensitivity and empathy	2.62
Can establish a positive/supportive environment, also with use of appropriate body language	2.86

Table 2 shows the average PRI for each of the 10 skills. Agreement is higher (2.86) for the descriptor regarding a positive and supportive environment facilitated by good body language. This is a skill students appeared to be good at, perhaps because this is usually a skill inherent in healthcare students. Soft skills such as sensitivity and empathy, and adapting use of language both have low average PRIs possibly because these skills are particularly hard to judge. The lowest average PRI (2.49) was for being understood. Intelligibility can be hard to judge as this can depend on many variables, for example being used to or more accepting of

another person's way of speaking (Walker et al., 2021). As a general consensus, the students felt that the judgements could help identify which skills were stronger or weaker, and hence which skills they would need to improve.

5 IMPACT AND LIMITATIONS

The transcripts of the roleplays illustrated how the students seemed to use the mediation skills from the framework naturally as a specific focus for appropriate language and task performance (Careless, 2007). The students were particularly good at using appropriate language to express soft skills, inherent in CEFR mediation, for example *I'm sorry to hear that, I can imagine you're feeling....,* *It's completely understandable to be worried.* As the students were C1 level, they had been able to find suitable expressions while practising for the experiential roleplay task. Students with a lower level of language might find use of the rather abstract mediation skills tricky to apply, or the teacher would have to feed in appropriate language, and administer more control over the task, for example content input. Getting the balance right between learner autonomy and learner ownership can greatly affect the level of motivation, which in turn can impact on the success of the task.

The soft skills in mediation are relational competences and can make most communicative acts more effective. However, showing empathy, sensitivity, being supportive and having good body language are also skills which some students may feel are too personal to 'act out'. One should perhaps add, that in some cultures the use of empathy and patient-centred care may be viewed as less professional behaviour in healthcare (Silverman et al., 2005).

Mediation is arguably a tricky and abstract competence to develop and measure, and this does raise questions such as to what extent it is perhaps an innate skill or even perhaps dependent on culture (Goodier, 2019c). The healthcare

students in this study had chosen a field of study which tends to expect the use of soft skills, and almost half of the students came from cultures which embraced the use of soft skills. This study did, however, raise awareness of the significance of soft skills in effective communication, along with other important skills, such as intelligibility and adapting use of language. Effective communication skills should not be considered 'just a matter of personality' but can be learnt, and 'learnt better if broken down into specific components, practised and then put back together again' (Kurtz et al., 2005, p.21).

Through doing, participants in this study learnt how the use of mediation skills could improve their communicative competences. Ownership of and responsibility for the tasks encouraged student autonomy but also sharing, motivation, and engagement. The teacher also learnt by participating in this process, designing and modifying tasks and the materials to better suit the context and participants (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998). Further communication tasks recycling the mediation descriptors can satisfy the transferability of the competences (Goodier, 2019c).

6 Conclusion

The term mediation appears to have many connotations. In recent post humanism studies, it even appears to be used for an understanding of the human-world relationship (Weis et al.,2016). Little wonder perhaps that the students in this study seemed reluctant to use the term confidently, and perhaps a reason why CEFR mediation skills appear to be little used in language education. As can be seen from this study, use of the CEFR (2020) mediation skills can raise awareness of what skills are necessary for effective communication. Their use can emphasise how effective communication regards mutual understanding and how important it can be to focus on the other person's needs, ideas, culture. It can help us to analyse the way we communicate and ask ourselves whether the transfer of information

can be clearer if we listen more actively to the other person, link what is said to their previous knowledge, or adapt our use of language or pronunciation to meet their needs. The framework developed for this study can have a flexibility of use for most communicative acts, be that in one-to-one communication, group or pair activities, and also in other fields, such as in Business English for example. It can be used to improve staff and student communication. It has made me think about the way I communicate and how others around me communicate. Dominant descriptors from the framework can be extracted and used for different tasks together with supplementary scales which can reflect specific skills of individual tasks.

The use of mediation competencies is growing in English language teaching as ever more contexts and activities appear to provide opportunities for its use (Goodier, 2019a). Piccardo (2020, Slide 41) claims that mediation has 'innovation potential in language education', as it can make students and teachers aware of the complex nature of language, which includes collective, cognitive and social functions. Mediation skills with their emphasis on collaboration, intercultural communication, re-formulating information, and acknowledging other viewpoints are real-life skills for lifelong learning which can equip learners for the future in an increasingly connected world (Goodier, 2019b). The CEFR has managed to create descriptors which include a consideration of soft skills and can be used in a myriad of contexts, be that education, workplaces or in almost any communicative context. A more unified approach to communication skills teaching globally could use mediation skills to inform future curriculum development and build communicative competences across a range of specialities, and differences in culture. The inherent complexity of communication means that there are always more possibilities to explore.

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