

Attachment to the Call for contributions IVLA Journal Special Issue 2022

European Framework of Reference for Visual Literacy (CEFR-VL) Summary

Why a CEFR-VL?

We live in an increasingly visual culture. Pictures play an important role in public and private communication. Visualizations strongly influence the way we perceive the world. Visual design decides about economic success or failure and by this about economic growth and jobs. Caricatures can decide whether your life is threatened. Visual objects and presentations influence what we believe and how we believe. And last but not least, life without visual art lacks beauty and imagination. Therefore, to be visually literate is important for a fully developed person but also for a responsible and empowered citizen.

Summary of the CEFR-VC (2016) and the revised CEFR-VC (2020) However there is a discrepancy between the importance of Visual Literacy and it's too often marginal position in education. This calls for a combined effort to reduce this gap. Therefore in 2010 a *European Network for Visual Literacy (ENViL)* was founded with more than 60 researchers, curriculum developers and teacher trainers from nine European countries. The network began a bottom-up process for the development of a "Common Framework of Reference for Visual Literacy" (**CEFR-VL**). This framework Summary of the CEFR-VC (2016) and the revised CEFR-VC (2020) aims to be a tool for the development of curricula, lesson plans and assignments as well as assessment instruments. (Wagner & Schönau, 2016)

Basic assumptions of the CEFR-VL

- ENViL uses a competency-oriented approach. Weinert (1999) describes competencies as "the cognitive skills and abilities that an individual possesses or is able to learn and that are used to solve certain problems, and the associated motivational, volitional and social willingness and skills required to use the solutions successfully and responsibly in changing situations."
- ENViL defines Visual Literacy as a group of acquired competencies for the production and reception of images and objects as well as for the reflection on these processes.
- The concept of a 'framework' was chosen to cover the variety of national, regional and subject-specific curriculum traditions in the European context.

How was the CEFR-VL developed?

Summary of the CEFR-VC (2016) and the revised CEFR-VC (2020) In order to find a common starting point ENViL asked experts all over Europe about the national or regional curricula. The answers gave an understanding of the curriculum structures, as well as curriculum contents and curriculum contexts. E.g. in most curricula Visual Literacy mainly comprises production (creating and using images) and reception (responding to images). These two main dimensions are divided into different sub-competencies. Sometimes a third dimension is added, which relates to the other two dimensions, reflection. Despite differences in denominations and subcategories, the European curricula show a high degree of conceptual similarity.

Based on this survey ENViL developed a systematic and comprehensive competence model that covers these relevant aspects and that can build the ground for assignments, curricula, assessment etc.

Summary of the CEFR-VC (2016) and the revised CEFR-VC (2020) The core: CEFR-VL's competence model

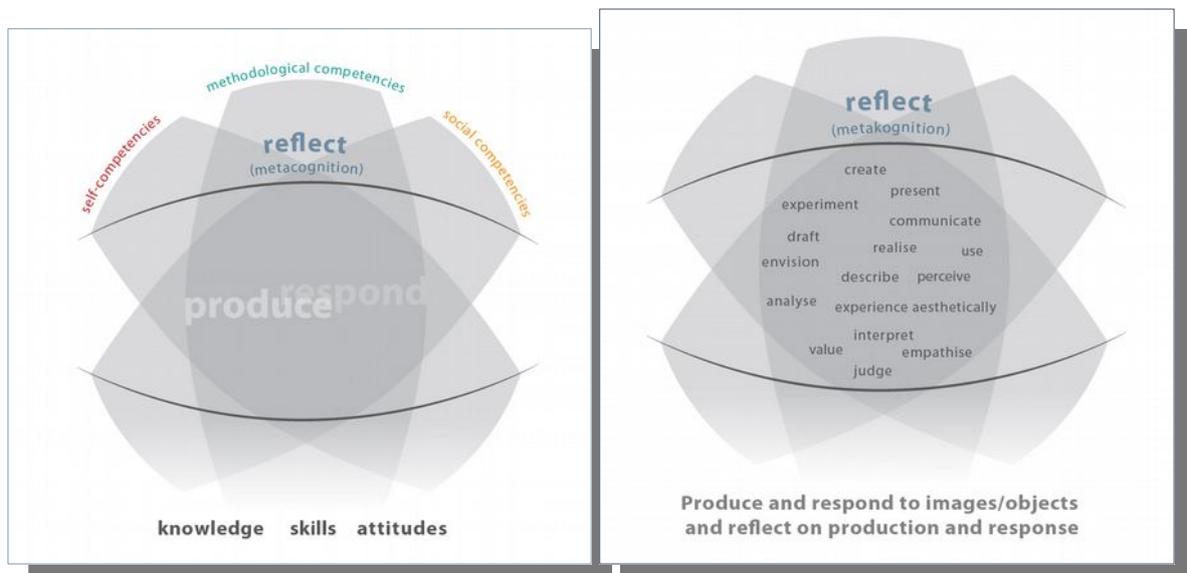


Figure 1 and 2: Basic dimensions of Visual Literacy / Differentiation of sub-competencies

Visual Literacy is a competency that can be modelled by describing the knowledge, skills and attitudes involved. The model as shown in figure 1 distinguishes in the centre three main dimensions: producing, responding - and reflecting (metacognition): whatever a student is doing or learning (by producing or responding), he or she has to use metacognition in order to understand what he or she is doing or to control the learning process. Furthermore, Visual Literacy as a domain-specific competency is embedded in a concept of general education: Visual Literacy is always connected to personal competencies (self-competencies), to social competencies (expression and communication) and to methodological competencies (methods of working).

The basic dimensions of producing and responding can be broken down into sub-competencies (figure 2). The following sub-competencies have

been included: analyse, communicate, create, describe, draft, empathise, envision, experience aesthetically, experiment, interpret, judge, perceive, present, realise, use, value (in alphabetical order). The CEFR-VL delivers concise and in-depth definitions of the sub-competencies.

What is the CEFR-VL good for and how can it be used?

Scales

The CEFR_VL delivers for each sub-competency a scale of three levels. Such scales can be used to determine a specific performance of a pupil. The competency level achieved by an individual describes her or his ability to deal with a specific challenge in a specific situation on a specific level. Therefore, the set of scales can be used as an instrument to assess learners' achievements. The levels developed by ENViL are general ones, i.e. they are not related to specific ages, contexts or curricula. They build the ground for defining specific levels for certain tasks, ages and learner groups. In order to ensure that consistent differences in, for example, advancements in learning can be recorded, three standard levels have been determined: 'elementary', 'intermediate' and 'competent'. The elementary level describes the basic requirements for participation in society and personality development. The third level ('competent'), by contrast, describes the characteristics of the fully visually literate citizen (i.e. *not* professionals trained as designers, artists, art critics or art historians, for whom a higher, 'professional' level could be made applicable).

As an example, the three levels of the sub-competency *creating* are presented in table 1 below. To 'create' means primarily to purposefully develop the visual form of images/objects, and by this, to interpret a topic. The levels described refer above all to independence of the solution, the scope of the repertoire and the quality of the relationship between form and content.

Level	Description
Elementary	Can select familiar motifs and topics for a draft or realisation that are appropriate for his/her intention and use pre-set artistic means. Can apply rules and principles, as well as the results of experimentation when producing an appropriate form.
Intermediate	Can choose appropriate content, motifs and topics on the basis of suggestions and under consideration of what he/she intends to depict. Can select artistic means and strategies from among a number of options and use them appropriately. Can take into account artistic rules but break them to a certain extent in order to achieve a desired effect.
Competent	Can use a range of contents, motifs and topics and give them an adequate form under consideration of the intended effect. Can use methods and strategies purposefully and in a targeted manner or experimentally in order to enhance his/her artistic expression. Can reflect critically on rules and conventions with regard to a specific effect and consider them when producing (follow or break them).

Table 1: Example of a scale of levels in respect to the sub-competency create

Situations in which visual competencies are needed

Visual Literacy becomes apparent in specific situations in which individuals act. Thus, the CEFR-VL offers a collection of relevant, existing and future situations where Visual Literacy is required. This collection refers to the following questions:

- In which situations will learners need to use Visual Literacy?
- Which activities will they need to engage in them adequately?
- What kinds of people, places, occasions and time periods will be involved?
- What types of images/objects will they draw on?
- How will they produce images/objects and what resources will they use?
- What knowledge (e.g. knowledge of former or other cultures) will they need in order to help shape their world responsibly?

The choice of domains that learners are to be prepared for has far-reaching effects on educational decisions. We consider the following categories as relevant for visual literate European citizens: the personal domain (home life, life with friends or holidays, buying goods, decorating a room or practising a hobby), the public domain (in which a person acts as part the general public or a public organisation), the occupational domain (in which a person works) and organised learning in and outside of educational institutions. As an example, table 2 shows some situations within the personal domain.

Action	Images, objects, genres, media	Places	Core competencies, topics
dressing with a specific visual appearance in mind	clothes, jewellery, accessories	private space (home), public space	cultural identity, intercultural awareness, creativity, lifestyle, self-confidence, active dialogue with the world, personal fulfilment
designing one's own private space	interior design, design, images, textiles, furniture, plants, lighting	home, garden	lifestyle, creativity, cultural identity, self-confidence, ability to express oneself with visual means, personal fulfilment
expressing personal memories with images and objects	photographs, memorabilia	photo album, memory board, cabinet in home, shelf, grave	integrated personality, ability to act, ability to express oneself with visual means, lifestyle, appreciation
using visual media for leisure activities	TV, digital and interactive media, video, computer games, music video	online, on a screen, TV, home	cultural identity, integrated personality, critical thinking, openness, curiosity, lifestyle
observing foreign customs and rituals and understanding their aesthetic forms	rites - multimodal	travel, urban space	intercultural awareness, critical thinking, openness, curiosity, empathy, appreciation, exchange, active dialogue with the world
consuming	consumer products, advertisement, presentation, staging, packaging	supermarket, shops, online on a screen	critical thinking, reflective thinking, ability to act, lifestyle

Table 2: Example of a table of situations (personal domain)

Teachers can use the collection of situations for formulating assignments. Assignments referring to these situations are in accordance with a competency-based approach and tend to be more life-like and relevant for pupils.

The revised model of Visual Competency (2020)

The sub-domain 'Producing'

The five new generic sub-competencies in the sub-subdomain of 'producing' are:

- the competency to generate visual ideas;
- the competency to do visual research;
- the competency to make visual images;
- the competency to present one's images;
- the competency to evaluate one's images and image-making processes.

The order is not prescriptive but reflects the most common way of working. Some stages can in some cases be skipped and other stages can be repeated, when for instance a work does not fit the expectations of the maker and she or he has to go through the process again. The concept 'visual' is also used here to refer to the haptic, motor and kinaesthetic aspects of objects and processes in the visual domain, as for instance in making and experiencing three-dimensional objects or architecture.

The sub-domain of 'responding'

The four (new) generic competencies in the sub-domain of 'responding' are:

- the competency to look at images;
- the competency to research images;
- the competency to evaluate images;
- the competency to report about images.

In contrast with the structure in the domain of 'producing' the activities related to these four new competencies may be executed in a stricter order. Research without good looking at the image first, judging without research and reporting about an image without any of these preceding activities cannot produce good results and can even be seen as a demonstration of incompetence. Of course, it is always possible to return to an earlier phase to adjust or improve one's observations, insights or conclusions, but in the end the process should always start with observation and end with reporting.

The concept of 'competency'

'Competencies' are here used in their most common definition: the combined use of knowledge, skills and attitudes in a relevant situation. This definition still leaves many issues open, both on a theoretical as well as on a practical level. On a theoretical level one can think of the connection between these sub-competencies and their constituent elements with issues of higher order thinking, like creative and critical thinking. At a practical level it can help, for instance, to give support students to overcome their problems in motivation and achievement goals.

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