Case Study:

Rennert International

"The GSE has revolutionized our curriculum: it is now tightly mapped to the right levels, externally validated, independent of specific course books and enables us to focus on relevant supplementary materials."

James Stakenburg, Center Director, Rennert New York & Trainer of Trainers, SIT Graduate Institute

RENNERT
BREAK THE LANGUAGE BARRIER ®

Rennert International is a high-quality language school that offers small classes with a focus on conversational teaching methods. Rennert also runs several teacher development and professional development programs. Language courses for students include General English, Business English, Exam Prep, Arts Plus English, and Professional English. In 2015, the centre launched a programme to better align the learning objectives of the General English programme with the CEFR.

Challenges

As the CEFR did not provide enough insight into the learning outcomes for the distinct levels of their program, the school – utilizing a course book as a starting point – crafted its own "can do" statements to provide more detail about learning at different levels. This was an arduous process that required multiple points of reference and much customization. By drafting descriptors aligned to a specific course book, the school became tied to that book and could not change materials without completely revising and changing descriptors, essentially repeating the complex process. Additionally, their descriptors did not provide insight into gaps in the course content that could be addressed with their own custom materials.

Rennert needed a set of tools to improve alignment, select externally validated descriptors to better align the programs and provide a gap analysis for courses, and increase their flexibility to select course materials and make program adjustments in the future.

Adoption of GSE

Working with Pearson, and using the GSE Teacher Toolkit, Rennert mapped their existing descriptors to the relevant learning objectives in the GSE database. Having identified the target range for their courses, they selected descriptors in the target range aligned to course needs, and identified gaps in the courses for in-house materials development. This enabled them to republish new GSE-based Rennert descriptors.

They then developed a training program for teachers on the mapping process and related policies for using the descriptors. Teachers and curriculum directors selected new descriptors as appropriate.

Benefits

Rennert believes their curriculum has been revolutionized – for example, they are now better able to understand why students may be struggling with certain levels, allowing them to better improve their pedagogy. Using the GSE also allowed them to identify supplemental materials to better support language learning at each level. Finally, it allowed Rennert to set realistic expectations for language acquisition in the time allotted to each level.

The audit of the Rennert curriculum improved alignment of course materials to published learning outcomes and freed the organization from a tie to any specific course book, including Pearson (note: it was not previously using Pearson materials).

The next step for Rennert is to compare student data for the time periods before and after the adoption of the GSE descriptors, to more specifically measure the positive impact on student outcomes. They are also starting to use the GSE for business English and academic English, since there are GSE descriptors specific to these areas, which CEFR does not have.