Framework & Language Portfolio SIG Forum: Looking forward

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The Framework & Language Portfolio (FLP) SIG Forum has been used to take stock of current developments with an eye on the future and making future plans (both for the SIG and individual members). The first report attempts to assess how the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) has been applied in language education in Japan. Positive impacts can be seen as well as difficulties and potential problems in the adaptation of the CEFR. This is followed by reflections on possible future SIG activities. The next report focuses on a project relating to goal-setting, and self-regulative and metacognitive strategies. The paper goes on to deal with the possibility of conducting a research project aimed to develop a coherent language teaching system with a focus on the integration of learning outcomes,

teaching materials and assessment methods. The final report explains a proposal for the creation of a database of ideas and lesson plans divided by CEFR level and skill.

このフォーラムは、未来を見る上で、または未来のプランを立てる上で（SIGと個人会員のための）最近の動向を評価するのに使用されています。ここに収められた最初の要約は、CEFRが日本での言語教育でどう適用されたかを評価しています。CEFRの適合における困難や潜在的な問題と同様に上向きの影響を見ることができます。これは今後有りうるSIG活動の反映によって続きます。次の要約は目標設定、自己規定とmetacognitive戦略に関連するプロジェクトに焦点を合わせています。この論文は、学習成果、教材及び評価法の統合に焦点をあてたコヒーレント語学教育システムの開発を目的とした研究計画の可能性について論じ続けています。最終の要約では、CEFRレベルと技能に分けられた考えとレッスン・プランに関するデーターベース作成への提案を説明しています。

Abbreviations

CEFR: The CEFR (Council of Europe [COE] 2001) self-assessment grid uses *I can* descriptors to summarize language proficiency at six levels in relation to five skills. Each level can also be broken down to a series of *can do* statements.

ELP: The European Language Portfolio is a document aimed to help language learners to keep track of their language learning and record their language learning achievements and experiences. An ELP includes *Goal-setting and Self-assessment Checklists* (a series of *can do* statements which breaks down each level of the CEFR). The FLP SIG has published the publicly downloadable, bilingual (English and Japanese) Language Portfolio for Japanese University. It follows the format specified for ELPs by the Council of Europe:

1. A language passport, which summarizes language learning achievement and owner's self-assessment.

2. A language biography, where intermediate learning goals are set and progress is reviewed, and significant language learning and intercultural experiences are recorded.

3. A dossier, which collects samples of language learning achievements.

The **Framework** & Language Portfolio (FLP) SIG would like to gather interested individuals to garner ideas, discuss developments, and coordinate efforts about the use of the CEFR and the ELP in Japan. There is an emphasis on supporting educators who would like to use these pedagogic tools. The initial publication of the FLP SIG (Schmidt, Naganuma, O'Dwyer, Imig, & Sakai, 2010) was designed to be a beginning venture of the SIG. It includes 23 papers with the primary aim to give specific ideas and resources for educators to bring into classrooms. Several papers seek to explain the development and issues regarding use of the CEFR, the ELP and *can do* statements. It was decided that the subsequent FLP SIG forum was to take stock of current developments and make future plans for both the SIG and individual members. In doing this, it is hoped that we could take one step toward realising these goals, by bringing a better focus to plans. The initial report assesses how the CEFR has been applied in language education in Japan so far.

The actual and potential impacts of the CEFR on language education in Japan

Noriko Nagai & Fergus O'Dwyer

This report examines briefly how the CEFR has been applied in the Japanese language education context in Japan and demonstrates positive impacts as well as difficulties and potential problems in the adaptation of the CEFR. The writers feel that the CEFR has had much influence on the Japanese educational context and, with the great demand of quality assurance (in particular in the higher education sector), it is expected this influence will only increase.

As a result of the rise in prominence of the CEFR in language education, *can do* statements have come to be widely used for different purposes in Japan. A number of case studies have demonstrated how the CEFR has been adapted in Japan (e.g., Nagai,

2010; Schmidt, Naganuma, O'Dwyer, Imig, & Sakai, 2010). The CEFR is used mainly for three purposes in Japan: (1) to improve foreign language education in Japan (pedagogical use of CEFR), (2) for score translation, and (3) for the establishment of Japan standards of foreign language proficiency.

For the pedagogical use, the CEFR and in particular *can do* descriptors are used as assessment, goal-setting and reflective tools to develop and plan curricula and courses. Due to several reasons, numerous universities have reformed their language curricula based on the CEFR (e.g., Nagai & Fukuda, 2004; Krause-Ono, 2010; Majima, 2007). This has led to much more coherency through identifiable learning outcomes (e.g., Negishi, 2008; Ware, Robertson, & Paydon, 2010). Sargent & Winward-Stuart (2010) outline a long-term project of a large English conversation organization that involved the adaptation of a set of *can do* criteria, the leveling and assessment of roughly 17,000 students, the retraining of nearly 1,000 teachers, and the creation of over 1,000 new lessons spanning more than 20 textbooks. The CEFR has been much more widely applied to language courses in higher education which are designed and planned by individual teachers. Collett & Sullivan (2010) provide a specific example where the curriculum and weekly learning units are explicitly linked to *can do* statements and a Study Progress Sheet so as to develop learners' self-regulative learning skills of goal-setting and reflection. Sato (2010) developed a program where learners were provided with self-assessment and metacognitive training with procedures including initial completion of the task-specific *Goal-setting and Self-assessment Checklist* before task completion. This was followed by awareness-raising on features of "good" communicative performance and relevant communication strategies, re-practice of the task, a second completion of the checklist before a review and final re-performance of the task and completion of the checklist. Such learning practices can contribute to effective implementation of the practices suggested by the CEFR and the ELP and, in turn,

possibly facilitate lifelong learning. Another basis for bottom-up implementation of the ELP is presented by the learning cycle used by O'Dwyer (2010). The learning stage outline procedure is related to relevant *can do* statements which then leads to self-assessment and goal-setting procedures. The learning stage is then completed before conducting reflection. This may not be revolutionary but when implemented in conjunction with *can do* statements taken from a validated reference system such as the CEFR, the relevance of learning programs can be increased for learners and other stakeholders. The main positive impact of the pedagogical use of *can do* statements can be said to be the perceived shift from teacher-centred knowledge driven classes to students-centred communication-oriented instruction.

Can do descriptors are also used for the score interpretation of the most high-stake English tests in Japan such as TOEIC and Eiken (Test for Practical English Proficiency). In such interpretations, given scores are equated with what learners can actually do using English and provide stakeholders with a clear view of test scores. Furthermore, the scores of these popular English proficiency tests in Japan are now comparable with those of other English proficiency tests, such as TOEFL and IELTS, although the exact correlation among these test scores remains to be seen. The outlook of relating test scores to the CEFR for languages other than English can be tentatively said to be promising. The publication of the Japanese Language Standard 2010 (Japan Foundation, 2010) can enable integrated test development, curriculum development, course design, teacher training and, of course, the relation of standards for Japanese language education to *can do* statements.

A number of research projects have been conducted to further produce language proficiency standards in Japan using the CEFR as a reference point. For example the CEFRjapan project involves the modification of the *can do* descriptors so as to render them more familiar to Japanese learners (Kawanari, 2010; Koike, 2008; Negishi, 2011). The CEFR can be a tool for

transparency (it is a type of ruler that can be used to measure all language learning) but, of course, it was developed to be contextualised and adapted to meet different purposes. However, this leads us to one of the more serious issues regarding its implementation in the Japanese and other contexts: it could be the case that the more it is adapted to a specific context, the greater is the possibility that the CEFR will lose its validity, and the original language proficiency scales will be altered in an unhelpful way. One role of the FLP SIG could be to steer such efforts toward valid and useful applications.

Possible future directions for the FLP SIG

Fergus O'Dwyer

The principles of the CEFR and the ELP are based on student-centered, action-oriented language instruction. As such, they can help facilitate a shift away from traditional teacher-fronted classrooms. So as to support educators who would like to use these pedagogic tools, the SIG should continue to hold workshops and seminar like events regarding goal-setting, assessment, reflection (or other related topics). The fact that the CEFR is still not widely known or acknowledged among a large group of educators in Japan is an additional consideration.

A number of participants at SIG events have voiced opinions about the ELP and the FLP SIG *Language Portfolio for Japanese University* (LP). The LP is based on the European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education (CercleS, which is a confederation of ten national associations and several associate members from 21 European countries) ELP, which was validated in 2002 by the COE. The LP was made available in April 2009 to download to those who registered at the SIG Moodle. A protected version of the LP can be viewed on the SIG website at (<http://sites.google.com/site/flpsig>). The current version of the LP is a template version. The main reason

the LP is only available on the Moodle is that it is designed to be a space for like-minded educators to discuss and share ideas. Many feel that it should be made freely available to all who would like to use it. This may be something that could be done when all improvements and related developments have been implemented. Such improvement included suitably contextualizing the checklists based on research such as the CEFRjapan project. An action group could also improve the content so as to make it more useful and relevant to language education classrooms in Japan. Another suggestion has been that the LP could be made available via a learner Moodle. This would enable learners to save electronic versions of their assessments, reflection and materials that show language learning progress. This could then be carried on after specific learning courses have finished (i.e. throughout their language learning history). Similar efforts in Europe include the The EAQUALS-ALTE ePortfolio (e ELP, see <http://www.eelp. org/eportfolio/index.html>). This ePortfolio uses electronic container technologies (rather than the folder in the paper-based version) to allow learners to create a digital archive via storing items in many media (scanned documents, audio, video, graphics etc.). If such practices are combined with the compilation of a document like the Europass Language Passport, this opens up many marketing opportunities for language learners as job-hunters and candidates for further studies. The Europass (see <http://europass.cedefop. europa.eu/europass/home/vernav/Europass+Documents/ Europass+Language+Passport.csp>) allows learners to describe their language skills in a transparent way that is easy to understand for other stakeholders. This situation would really be applicable if attempting to create such tools for the Japanese context (e.g., providing a reference for stakeholders to interpret the CEFR and language learning efforts).

I feel that the CEFR has had much influence on the higher education sector in Japan; however the current influence on

practices and principles underlying textbooks used in this sector is minimal. This is the case for the English language sector but even more so for languages other than English. The principles of integrating transparent and valid self-assessment, goal-setting and reflection before, during and after task performance could be introduced into textbooks to a much greater extent. This is something that can be the basis for an upcoming project of the SIG. Developments that could preceed this are outlined by the abstract written by Noriko Nagai and Antonio Smith below. The abstract that directly follows focuses on the fundamental practices of developing "learning to learn" skills, something that is at the centre of the CEFR and ELP approaches.

Facilitating learners' use of goal-setting, self-regulative and metacognitive strategies
Paul Collett & Kristen Sullivan

In 2009 we commenced a research project to investigate ways to help our students to better approach and negotiate their English studies at our university. For many students, their previous studies of English have not necessarily promoted the development of an understanding of how to approach classroom and other learning tasks in a self-directed and autonomous way, which leaves them unprepared for the independent study expected of them not only at university, but also in many of their endeavors after graduation. This research project coincided with a major curriculum reform project within the Oral Communication suite of courses, in which a school-wide curriculum and assessment program was introduced. Our key aims within this project were to make the curriculum transparent to both teaching staff and students, to ensure that all concerned understood the expected outcomes of the courses, and were able to use this knowledge to effectively guide their teaching and learning.

A study progress guide incorporating *can do* statements which summarize the skills, language, and social and cultural points covered in each unit of work in a self-evaluation format, and a series of activities designed to support students in identifying their strong and weak points, as well as their unit-based and semester-based goals, was chosen as the device to achieve both of these aims. The Study Progress Sheet used in the classes was designed according to the principles of goal-setting theory, self-regulated learning (SRL), and the use of *can do* statements and portfolio-based teaching/learning activities.

Self-regulated learning, a key principle of educational theory of the last few decades (Dörnyei, 2005; Boekaerts & Cascallar, 2006), sees successful learning as requiring the mastery and application of a range of strategies and skills that are used to plan, monitor and assess outcomes of academic learning tasks. Successful learners are those who know how to effectively negotiate each stage of the learning process via metacognitive, cognitive and behavioral strategies and processes. One important strategy in the cycle is goal setting: through effective goal setting, motivation is both created and sustained in immediate and subsequent academic tasks (Zimmerman, 2008). Goal setting allows for a benchmark against which progress through learning tasks can be assessed, and modified where needed. SRL theory sees good goals as the driving force behind successful learning, but also recognizes that maladaptive goals can impair learning (Zimmerman, 2008; Bandura, 1997).

What is essential in helping students to develop the requisite strategies and skills is to explicate expected outcomes of learning, and provide the guidance students need to formulate learning goals along with a clear framework through which they can assess the outcomes of their goal-directed efforts. Here we have identified commonalities with the philosophy behind the creation and use of *can do* statements and learner portfolios, best known in foreign language education through their inclusion in the CEFR and the ELP. Although there is a strong emphasis on their use for curriculum creation and testing, the philosophy be-

hind them is to support the reflective learning cycle of planning, monitoring and evaluation (Little, 2006), which is also a key element of successful self-regulation (Collett & Sullivan, 2010).

Over the period of their use, there have been several changes to the Study Progress Sheets themselves and their incorporation in the courses to make them more useful and effective for both students and teachers. The design and content have been changed to bring them closer into line with the principles of SRL. For example, the initial version lacked a clear mechanism to encourage students to reflect back on the goals they were setting and see how their previous learning experiences could help them with subsequent activities, an important step in successful self-regulated learning; we have tried to make this more explicit in the latest version. Regular completion of the sheets, including an additional student-directed, portfolio-based homework activity, has also been made a compulsory aspect of the course, making up 20% of students' final grade. Many of these changes were made in response to student comments made during a series of interviews, as well as suggestions made by teachers actually using the Sheets in the classroom.

Survey and interview results to date suggest that the use of the Study Progress Sheets has been successful in helping students to identify course content and goals, as well as to broadly identify their own strengths and weaknesses in relation to this, which is a first step toward students being more self-regulated learners. Indeed, our results to date suggest that students seem to understand the point of using the Study Progress Sheets, and are becoming increasingly aware of what they need to do to be successful in their studies. However, many students seem to be lacking the fundamental skills and strategies needed to use the Sheets most effectively. Many students seem to have difficulty with setting effective learning goals, and most critically, with monitoring and evaluating their progress throughout the semester. Another issue is determining

the best learning activities to use to improve the areas they have nominated to work on for each unit. For example, many students decide to focus on studying vocabulary, but use a limited range of learning techniques, with the most popular typically being to repeatedly write the same word over and over. Whilst we need to be careful not to make assumptions regarding students' conceptions of learning in relation to the activities they are using (Benson & Lor, 1999; Purdie, Hattie, & Douglas, 1996), it does seem that many students are not exploring alternative, possibly more efficient, study methods. In our student interviews, several interviewees said that they only thought about different learning strategies for the first time after viewing their classmates' work, or receiving advice from the class teacher. This suggests two points. Firstly, it appears that students need specific support with how to identify appropriate goals and learning activities, and how to effectively use the Sheets in general. Secondly, there are many benefits to be gained from peer-to-peer learning, and that more formal opportunities for this, along with chances for students to gain feedback and advice from their class teachers, should be created and incoporated into class time.

The development of a coherent language teaching system: Integration of learning outcomes, teaching materials and assessment methods

Noriko Nagai

This abstract addresses possible future projects based on the CEFR. One of the greatest merits of the CEFR is to integrate projects of language teaching and learning that have been independently carried out into one coherent project. The development of a language curriculum/course, textbooks and teaching materials, and assessment methods usually take place inde-

pendently. However, if we agree that language learning aims at reaching specific goals expressed by concrete *can do* learning outcomes, then we should be able to combine these endeavors into one grand project. The project will make learning outcomes, textbook development, and assessment tightly synthesized and systemized, ensuring efficient and effective learning.

We need a project that integrates the development of learning outcomes, textbook and teaching materials, and assessment method into one. At the same time we could unite efforts to improve English program of all interested individuals into one stream through the project.

Learning outcomes of an English course are essential for effective teaching as well as teacher- and self-assessment. However, it is not easy to produce concrete and detailed learning outcomes of an English language course, since a producer must seriously consider various aspects and issues involved in language learning. He/she must make specific decisions on contexts of language use, tasks and communicative language activities, and communicative language competences.

To help language teachers develop their own learning outcomes, a model (or template) can be very helpful. Such a model can be built using six parameters discussed in the CEFR. Teachers will fix parameters necessary for their own classes and produce learning outcomes which fit their specific contexts. Learning outcomes tailored to specific courses should be collected as a data base. We can also engage in the development of teaching materials and assessment methods based on those concrete learning outcomes.

The outlook of the grand project is schematically illustrated as follows:
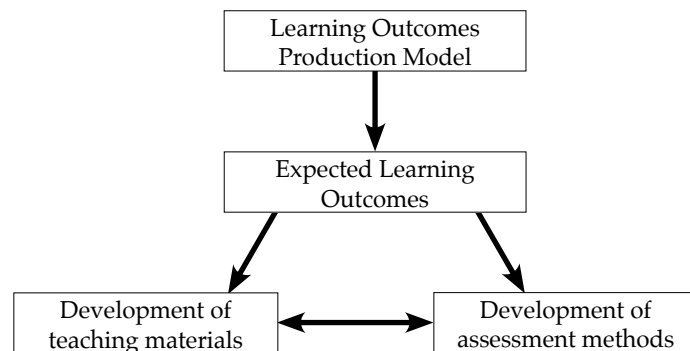

Figure 1. Outline of proposed project

This project is very much in the pre-planning stage and many details have to be negotiated and organized. Possible elements of the *development of teaching materials* component could include developing a database of ideas and lesson plans divided by level and skill (for more details, see Smith's abstract below). This could lead to the development of textbooks closely related to the underlying principles and practices encouraged by the CEFR and the ELP. The *development of assessment methods* component could include improving and suitably contextualizing the FLP SIG *Language Portfolio for Japanese University* based on research such as the CEFRjapan project (Koike 2008; Kawanari, 2010).

"Can-do delivery database" divided by level and skill
Antonio Smith

This abstract proposes the creation of a database of effective ways to help students affirm new *can do* statements. Any SIG member, and possibly others, could contribute to the database.

In 2011, potential contributors could begin researching how to deliver particular *can do* statements, and successful results could be added to the database at any time. Perhaps government funding could be obtained to research ways of delivering especially challenging *can do* statements. At present, probably no single teacher or publisher knows how to deliver every *can do* statement to students efficiently, and no single student knows how to develop every *can do* independently via self study; however, there must be a great many teachers and students who have experienced success in teaching/learning particular *can-do's*. If they pool their knowledge in a database, it should be possible to compose a nearly complete picture of how to deliver the abilities described in the CEFR. However, the database need never be "finished": New and improved means can always be added, and the database can evolve together with the CEFR and its *can-do's*.

Once the database is populated, teachers interested in trying CEFR can refer to it in planning their classes, programs can refer to it in planning curricula, and individuals can refer to it as a guide to self-study.

What can do statements should be included?

One often touted benefit of the CEFR is that "it is much more than a set of scales" (Imig & O'Dwyer, 2010). For example, it includes an ever expanding item bank, advice about action-oriented teaching, and means of bridging from the original scales to scales suited to the desired outcomes of individual institutions. Nevertheless, the CEFR does include a set of carefully validated scales/*can do* statements which should form the core/skeleton of the database. Institutions that have adapted particular *can do* statement(s) to suit their own situation would contribute to the database by citing the original *can do* statements and how/why they were modified.

Levels to target

For English majors at Japanese universities, the sensible set of *can do* statements to use is the same as that used in Europe, and the *Language Portfolio for Japanese University* (LP) is based on that of the European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education. Ideally, English majors at top universities should reach C1 (or at least B2+) on this scale the level required for admission to good universities in Europe and America, and proved by IELTS 6.5-7, by passing Cambridge ESOL's CAE (Certificate of Advanced English with a C or a B), or by meeting the TOEFL requirement of universities (iBT 80-100). For English majors at mid-level universities, solid B2 may be a reasonable target; for lower-level universities, just entering B2 may be a more realistic target to aim for. For English minors, B1 and, in some cases, A2 may be logical targets. However, potential contributors should research whatever *can do* statements match their students: A1-C2. For teachers of young learners, Cambridge ESOL has preliminary tests (YLE) that use *can do* statements tuned to cognitive development by age, see

<http://pdftop.net/speaking+test+sample+yle+flyers-pdf/>

All in all, as Noriko Nagai mentioned at the FLP forum, the creation of the database conceived and proposed by Smith would provide a chance for many to participate in a project and it would be a very useful tool to promote effective CEFR-based teaching and learning in Japan. Moreover, it is has been suggested that database researchers may be able to exchange information with the English Profile project, <http://www.englishprofile.org/>. The database could even include a section for students to contribute successful means of independent learning. The following is a simple model of coordination using CEFR self-assessment:

1. *Placement in levels via self-assessment at the beginning of first year*: Using a set of *can do* statements appropriate for a program, students perform self-assessment; Smith will

introduce a new automated version of a Web-based self-assessment computer program in April, 2011. If students understand the instrument's *can do* statements properly, they should affirm accurately enough. According to Smith (2009), however, too many students under- or overestimated on the Swiss Version of Checklists, when compared with TOEIC, BULATS and teacher assessment. Possible remedies include improved clarity/increased concreteness of *can do* statements (i.e., replacement of the Swiss Version with the LP described above), a workshop for students to understand *can do* statements used, better matching of self-assessment instrument's *can do* statements and objective test constructs (e.g., confirm those of BULATS).

2. *Identification of least affirmed can do statements (hereafter, "LACs") in a class:* Analyze checklists manually, with EXCEL or other statistics program, or with Smith's coming software.

3. *Meeting of teachers to share responsibility for "delivering" LACs to a class or program on a tentative schedule;* for example, there are three groupings of English Area Studies majors at Osaka University in first year; they are referred to as A Class, B Class and C Class. Each has seven 90-minute periods/classes of English per week; the teachers of these could collaborate to deliver LACs; English minors have one period per week with a level designation (pre-intermediate through advanced) and taught by part-time native teachers who could be requested to target LACs.

4. *Explanation to students of LACs targeted in class:* Students compare targeted *can do* statements with the set they personally have yet to acquire (as shown in their personal Language Portfolio Checklists, paper or computerized version) and in consultation with their teacher; students can then seek a class targeting more similar *can do* statements if necessary. However, Smith's software will, in theory, enable

administrators to form classes composed of students with maximally similar sets of disaffirmed *can do* statements.

5. *Rectification of misplaced students:* Based on class performance and conversations/consultations with students in week one or two (and objective test results when available) teachers identify grossly misplaced students and send them up or down a level. Students sent down can retest at the end of a term of study (semester or year etc.). The percentage of gross under- and over-estimators should fall to reasonable levels as the self-assessment instrument becomes more clearly phrased and familiar to users.

6. *Mid-term self-assessment and teacher assessment:* Identify successfully and unsuccessfully delivered LACs.

7. *Assignment of responsibility for remaining LACs:* Teachers volunteer/director assigns.

8. *End-of-year evaluation:* self-assessment, teacher assessment, completed assignments in the Language Portfolio and an objective test—either one created by the program to assess achievement of its particular set of *can do* statements or an off-the-shelf test linked to CEFR levels, such as BULATS, IELTS (now administered by STEP in Japan), or the Cambridge Main Suite of tests (KET for A2, PET for B1, FCE for B2, CAE for C1 and FCE for C2). At a minimum, TOEIC or TOEFL can be used together with plausible cut scores relating those tests to the CEFR (e.g. TOEIC 900+/-20 for C1, 740 or so for B2, and somewhat less than 550 for B1). However, as the time and effort needed for Japanese to go from B2/740 to C1/900 is daunting, perhaps B2+ should be introduced between 825 and 850 (Smith, 2009). Unfortunately, students cramming for a test measuring constructs different from those of the CEFR scales can and do produce misleading results.

9. *Methods and materials for successfully delivered can do statements recorded:* In Belgium a handful of researchers

have created teachers' manuals linking available resources / texts to CEFR level; this is good, but better would be vast numbers of teachers creating an ever-growing database of lessons, both original and from existing texts, that have been shown to work empirically.

10. *Teachers research better ways to deliver unsuccessfully delivered LACs.*

11. *Same process for separate body of learners*, such as second year students.

Conclusion

2010 was a big year for the FLP SIG with a first publication; there are many future possible activities that the SIG could pursue. The summaries above outline some possible directions that could be taken. The results of these projects could become a part of the growing "toolkit" of materials (e.g., the English Profile project) to help those who wish to make effective use of the tools (*can do* statements, the CEFR and the ELP). However, in general there is still the need for a greater explanation of these tools and reaching out to educators at the grassroots level. This is something that should be the emphasis of some future FLP SIG activities.

Bio data

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