Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT)

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CASLT encourages excellence in second and additional language teaching and learning throughout Canada by creating opportunities for professional development, by encouraging research, and by facilitating the sharing of information and the exchange of ideas among second language educators.

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Note to the Reader

This handbook contains web hyperlinks as well as bookmarks to other sections of the document. You will encounter the following helpful icons in this handbook:

Identifies relevant resources for further reading.

Identifies reflective questions for the teacher.

Indicates information being presented in a more practical way.

Throughout this handbook, the term “second language” is used in a broader sense, referring to additional languages, foreign languages, etc. The term “parents” refers to parent(s), guardian(s), and caregiver(s).
Preface
Preface

Languages are an important part of Canada’s history, current reality, and future. Canada’s two official languages (English and French), Indigenous languages, and non-official languages are all symbols of a diverse and inclusive society. According to the 2016 census, over 200 languages are spoken in Canada as a home language or mother tongue (Statistics Canada, 2017). With the increase in mobility and globalization, plurilingualism and linguistic diversity are on the rise in Canada. This increasingly diverse linguistic landscape brings opportunities for individuals and societies, such as strengthened identities, interconnection, intercultural enrichment, and the growing of a globally connected economy.

All teachers play a vital role in supporting language development and building stronger, inclusive communities where diversity is valued and promoted. The Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001)¹ and the Common European Framework of References for Languages: Companion Volume with New Descriptors (CEFRCV; Council of Europe, 2018)² provide Canadian teachers with a common point of reference for the learning, teaching, and assessment of languages. The CEFR is a tool that articulates a complex vision of language education. It is designed to be context-free for broad use. This handbook seeks to “unpack” key elements of the CEFR and CEFRCV for teachers — in particular the principles of the action-oriented approach — through a Canadian lens.

The content of this handbook is presented in a simplified and practical way, focusing on the development of scenarios based upon action-oriented tasks. It is a resource written by teachers, for teachers, designed to deepen understanding of the CEFR beyond a surface level. The resource promotes a holistic approach to language learning that considers individual needs, and supports the well-being and achievement of learners. It is important to stress that this handbook does not present a prescriptive approach. It encourages a reflective approach on the part of teachers, as well as an open and flexible outlook on language learning.

This resource recognizes that other frameworks are used in Canada in various contexts and encourages all teachers to look for the commonalities in approaches, such as the notion of tasks, and to share effective practices that enhance language learning, teaching, and assessment. This resource also recognizes that education is a provincial and territorial responsibility in Canada and that some language programs, such as those for adult newcomers, also involve the federal government. This handbook is written from a pan-Canadian perspective and, wherever possible, draws upon other pan-Canadian resources. The reader’s experience will also be enhanced by making connections to the specific provincial/territorial/federal resources that apply to their specific context.

Today, more than ever, linguistic diversity matters. Whether learning one of Canada’s official languages, Indigenous languages, or non-official languages, the truth remains that languages build connections to the past, the present, and the future. This handbook was written to better equip language teachers for the important work that they do in supporting language learners and, ultimately, fostering a united, diverse, and prosperous Canada.

The Action-Oriented Approach
which are more specifically related to language. General competences include declarative knowledge, skills and know-how, existential competence, and ability to learn. Communicative language competences can be linguistic, sociolinguistic, or pragmatic. The learner draws upon their competences to perform actions in order to achieve real-life goals.

**Language Activities and Strategies**

The CEFR explains that a learner’s competences are activated strategically through language activities that involve reception, production, interaction, and mediation in oral and/or written form. Oral receptive activities may include listening to a song or a podcast, while written receptive activities could include reading a magazine, a travel guide, or a newsletter. Leaving a phone message or making an announcement are examples of oral productive activities, whereas writing anything from a shopping list to a formal letter would be examples of written productive activities. Examples of interactive activities include having a phone or a text conversation (the former oral, the latter written). Very often, communication involves the use of many language activities simultaneously.

As described in the 2001 CEFR, mediation involves making communication possible between two or more people who are unable to communicate directly with one another. This explanation was further developed in the 2018 CEFR companion volume to include mediating a text, mediating concepts, mediating communication, and mediation strategies. Examples of mediation could include paraphrasing what a politician said on the news last night, summarizing what a friend wrote in an email, or explaining a story in a language more familiar to the learner. Mediation could also include managing interactions during collaboration and facilitating conversation in a disagreement. Piccardo and North (2019) describe four contexts of mediation: linguistic, cultural, social, and pedagogy. Mediation is a key concept in understanding the notion of “social agent” given the role mediation plays in the co-construction of meaning and in the relationship between the individual and social dimensions of communication.

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Communication Tools
Communication Tools

The link between parent involvement and student success cannot be underestimated, as the Ontario Ministry of Education (2018) points out:

Study after study has shown us that student achievement improves when parents play an active role in their children’s education, and that good schools become even better schools when parents are involved. Parent engagement is a key factor in the enhancement of student achievement and well-being. Students are more likely to be motivated, to earn higher grades, to have better behaviour and social skills, and to continue their education to a higher level when their parents are actively engaged in supporting their success at school.

Good communication with parents can be extremely beneficial to the success of the language learner. Parents are not only influential in fostering a positive attitude towards learning a new language, but can also be tremendously supportive in maintaining the interest, motivation, and engagement necessary for success. The following resources support the teacher in communicating with parents about the action-oriented approach adopted in the classroom.

Classroom Poster

This poster is designed to present a clear picture of the key elements of the action-oriented approach to parents. It emphasizes the functional use of a language to achieve goals/achieve tasks in the real world.

Letter to Parents

This letter is a way of introducing parents to a second language classroom that uses the action-oriented approach. It could be sent to parents in print form, through email, or via social media, a teacher’s blog, a website, etc.

What is the Action-Oriented Approach?

The action-oriented approach to language learning takes a unique approach to second language acquisition. Unlike traditional teaching methods, the action-oriented approach places the focus on the practical application of the language to real-world situations. The approach emphasizes the functional use of language, allowing students to see tangible and immediate benefits to their language learning. In this way, students are more likely to stay engaged and motivated, leading to increased proficiency, confidence, and motivation to learn. By using the action-oriented approach, students are able to see the relevance of the language they are learning and become independent, lifelong language learners.

Real-Life Tasks

What are Real-Life Tasks?

Real-Life Tasks are tasks that are designed to simulate real-world situations, allowing students to practice their language skills in a practical and meaningful context. These tasks are designed to be challenging enough to push students to use their language skills in a variety of situations, while also being realistic enough to reflect real-world scenarios. Real-Life Tasks are essential for developing students’ metacognition skills, as they are required to reflect on their own learning and take ownership of their language development.

What are the Key Elements of the Action-Oriented Approach?

Central to the action-oriented approach is the notion of language being used for a specific purpose. This purpose-driven approach helps students understand the practical applications of language in real-world situations. The action-oriented approach also emphasizes the importance of students being able to use language for communication, whether it be for personal or professional reasons. This approach helps students build confidence in their language skills and encourages them to use language in a variety of contexts.

What are the Benefits of the Action-Oriented Approach?

The benefits of the action-oriented approach are numerous, including increased proficiency, confidence, and motivation to learn. Students who use the action-oriented approach are more likely to stay engaged and motivated, leading to improved language skills and greater success in their education. Additionally, the action-oriented approach helps students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as they are required to think creatively and find solutions to real-world problems.

How Can I Support My Child at Home?

As a parent, you can support your child’s language development by creating a language-rich environment at home. Encourage your child to practice their language skills by engaging in conversation, reading, and writing in their second language. You can also provide opportunities for your child to use their language in real-world situations, such as going shopping or cooking. In addition, you can help your child develop their metacognition skills by asking them questions about their language learning and encouraging them to reflect on their own learning.

What Other Ways Can We Include Parents in the Classroom?

Incorporating parents into the classroom can help support their child’s language development. This can be done through parent-teacher conferences, regular newsletters, and parent involvement in classroom activities. By involving parents in the classroom, students can benefit from additional support and guidance, which can help improve their language skills and increase their confidence in their abilities.

How Will the Classroom Be Different?

A classroom using the action-oriented approach will emphasize the functional use of language in real-world situations. This approach will help students develop their language skills in a practical and meaningful context, leading to improved proficiency, confidence, and motivation to learn. The classroom will also be more interactive, with opportunities for students to engage in group activities and real-life simulations, allowing them to practice their language skills in a variety of contexts.

Communication Tools

A Newsletter for Parents/Guardians of Second Language Learners

This newsletter presents an overview of the action-oriented approach, as introduced in the CEFR Companion Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRCV). This will give you an idea of what your child can expect to experience in an action-oriented classroom.

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Annexes
Annex 1: Blank Scenario Planning Chart
## Blank Scenario Planning Chart

### Scenario:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Authentic Resources Used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expected Learning Outcomes (e.g., Overall Expectations):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Assessment Opportunities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For Learning:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As Learning:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of Learning:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Action-Oriented Task

#### Description:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Checklist:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
- Learners are “social agents” in an authentic social context
- Action is purposeful with real-world applications
- There is a clearly communicated goal to be accomplished that results in a product or outcome
- Learning is supported by authentic, real-life texts and experiences
- There are conditions and constraints that promote critical and creative thinking
- Learners draw upon their existing and newly developed competences
- Learners make choices and think and act strategically

#### Descriptors:

*Expressed through can-do statements*

### Language Activities and Strategies Needed to Complete the Task:

### Language Competences Needed to Complete the Task:

Note: General Competences (i.e., declarative knowledge, skills and know-how, existential competence, and ability to learn) are always combined with language competences (i.e., linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic) to complete a task. Although there are not descriptor scales for general competences, they are an important component of language proficiency.
Informed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the Companion Volume with New Descriptors (CEFRCV), the Action-Oriented Approach (AOA) Handbook is designed to assist second language educators in creating action-oriented scenarios to enhance students’ spoken interaction. This handbook provides insights into the research that informs the approach, practical suggestions for implementing the AOA within any given curriculum, and classroom-ready examples that can be used as is or adapted to other contexts. The handbook also includes a repertoire of helpful links and communication tools to support educators.