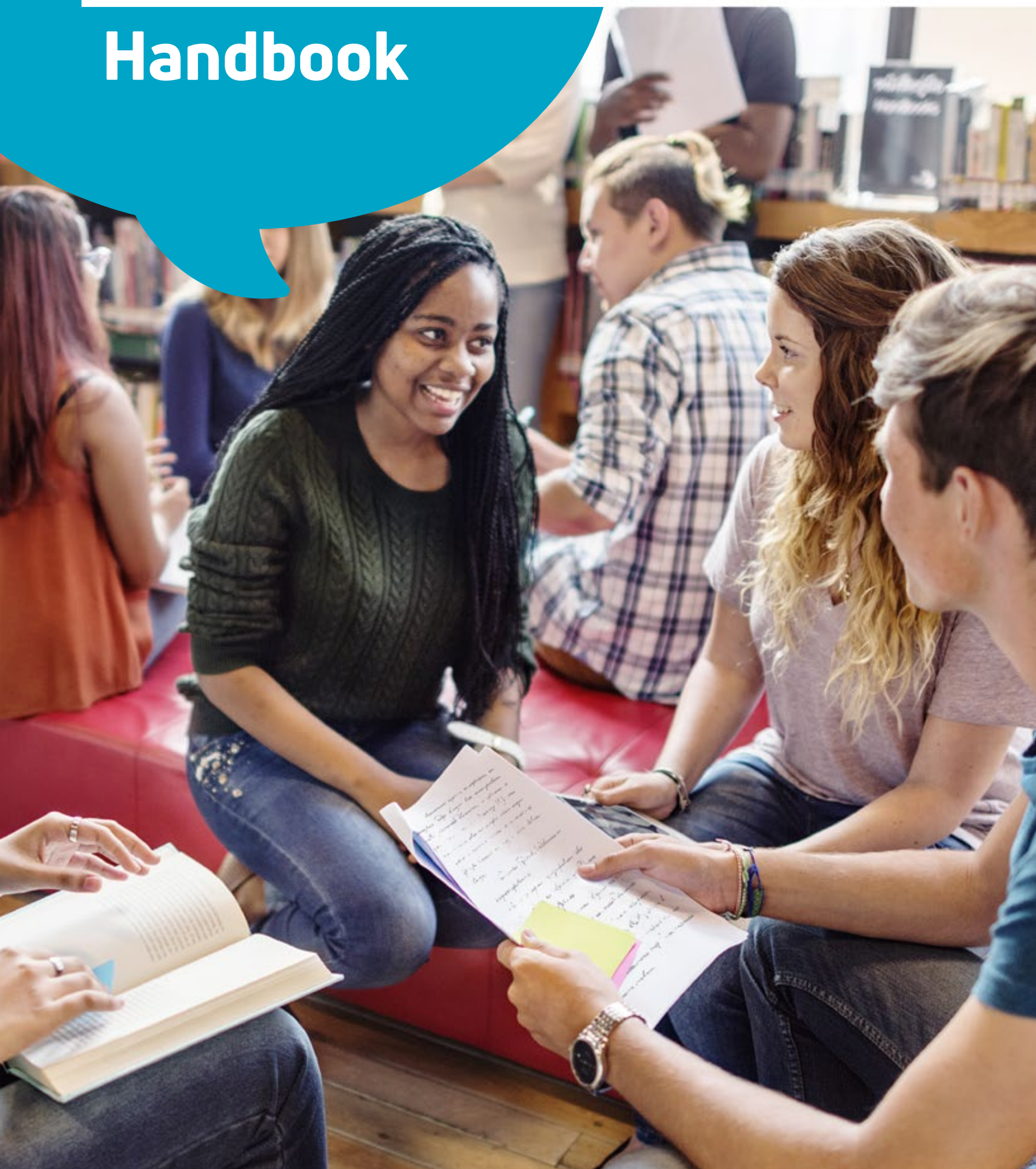


Action-Oriented Approach Handbook



Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers
Association canadienne des professeurs de langues secondes



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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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Action-Oriented Approach Handbook

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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).



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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](https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages) (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001)¹ and the [Common European Framework of References for Languages: Companion Volume with New Descriptors](https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989) (CEFRV; 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 CEFRV 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.

¹ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages>

² <https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989>

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The Action-Oriented Approach

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.



To learn more about competences visit...

[Chapter 5 of the CEFR⁴⁷](#)

[Chapter 4 of *From Communicative to Action-Oriented: A Research Pathway*⁴⁸ \(Piccardo, 2014\)](#)



In Practical Terms

In the CEFR CV, Overall Language Proficiency — which includes general competences, communicative language competences, and communicative language activities and strategies — is presented in an [organizational chart⁴⁹](#) to assist users.

Communicative Language Competences — which include linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic — are also presented in an [organizational chart⁵⁰](#).

In addition, each descriptor scale is presented with a [short rationale⁵¹](#).

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 pedagogic. 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.



To learn more about mediation visit...

[Developing Illustrative Descriptors of Aspects of Mediation for the CEFR⁵²](#)

[CEFR Companion Volume with New Descriptors⁵³](#)



In Practical Terms

In the CEFR CV, communicative language activities and strategies for reception, production, interaction, and mediation are presented in overall [organizational charts⁵⁴](#).

In addition, each descriptor scale is presented with a [short rationale⁵⁵](#).

⁴⁷ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages>

⁴⁸ <https://transformingfsl.ca/en/resources/from-communicative-to-action-oriented-illuminating-the-approaches>

⁴⁹ <https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989.pdf#page=30>

⁵⁰ <https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989.pdf#page=130>

⁵¹ <https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989.pdf#page=90>

⁵² <http://rm.coe.int/common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-learning-teaching/168073ff31>

⁵³ <https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989>

⁵⁴ <https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989.pdf#page=82>

⁵⁵ <https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989.pdf#page=90>

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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/accomplish tasks in the real world.



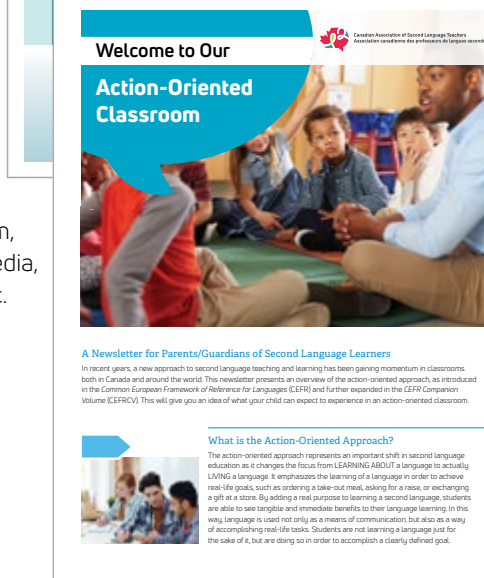
What other ways can you think of to involve parents in their child's second language learning?

How can you better use social media in communicating with parents?

How can you tell when parents are becoming more engaged in their children's second language learning?

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 an Action-Oriented Task?

Central to the action-oriented approach is the notion of language being used for a real purpose, namely to complete a specific task. The successful accomplishment of the task is, therefore, the goal of the language learner. The teacher guides students as they acquire the language necessary to complete the task. Action-oriented tasks vary in nature but are always meaningful and set in the context of everyday life. They can range from the simple (e.g., finding out what the time is in order to set up an appointment or inviting a friend over for dinner) to the more complex (e.g., planning a three-week family vacation in Europe on a limited budget). They often require an element of research or planning, as well as a number of steps or sub-tasks, if they are to be successfully completed. Conditions or constraints can also render a task more demanding and require a degree of critical and creative thinking on the part of the learner (e.g., ordering a pizza for four people while taking into account variables such as food allergies, preferences, and splitting the cost). Language is an essential tool for the learner, both in the preparation of the task and in the execution of the final product (which demonstrates completion of the task), be it oral or written. With this understanding, the learner can better appreciate the value of second language learning and the role language plays in accomplishing real-life tasks.



What Does the Action-Oriented Classroom Look Like?

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of an action-oriented classroom is the amount of time that students are engaged in speaking the new language in spontaneous, purposeful, real-life situations created in the classroom by the teacher. Student time is maximized by giving the students many opportunities for oral interaction. Once a strong oral foundation has been established, reading and writing can be introduced much more effectively. Grammar and new vocabulary is presented in context rather than in isolation. Authentic texts such as newspapers, websites, video clips, podcasts, and so on, allow students to become comfortable with the language as it appears in the real world. In short, students in the action-oriented classroom spend their time interacting with the teacher and with each other in purposeful, everyday situations in order to acquire the language skills necessary to accomplish real-life tasks.



How Will This Approach Affect My Child's Experience of Learning a Language?

Research has shown that both teachers and students have reported that their experience of the action-oriented approach has been very positive. Students have noted a greater ability to function in a second language, which in turn leads to increased proficiency, confidence, and motivation to learn. By using the language they are learning for a real purpose, to achieve certain clearly defined goals, they become more aware of the benefits of bilingualism and plurilingualism. Furthermore, by being encouraged to reflect on their progress and develop their metacognition skills, students are more inclined to take ownership of their learning and become independent, lifelong language learners.



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Annexes

Annex 1: Blank Scenario Planning Chart



Blank Scenario Planning Chart

Scenario:

Domain:

Level:

Authentic Resources Used:

**Expected Learning Outcomes
(e.g., Overall Expectations):**

Assessment Opportunities:

For Learning:

As Learning:

Of Learning:

Action-Oriented Task

Description:

Checklist:

- ☐ 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.



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