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The action-oriented approach: From theory to practice

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Presenter

Enrica Piccardo

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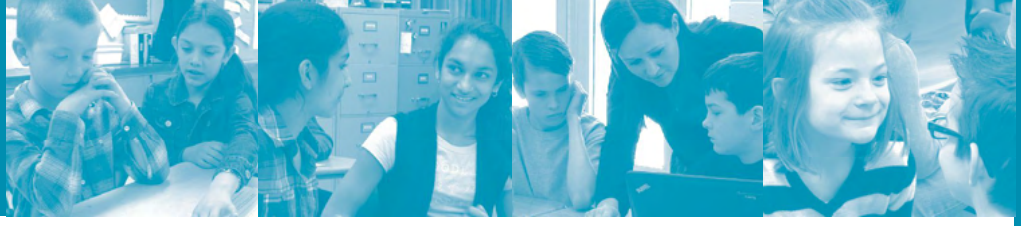
CHAPTER 5



Chapter 5. One Task, Many Tasks

One of the most emblematic aspects of the transition from the communicative approach to the action-oriented approach is the latter's new vision of the task.

Let's begin with the definition of the task found in the CEFR itself:

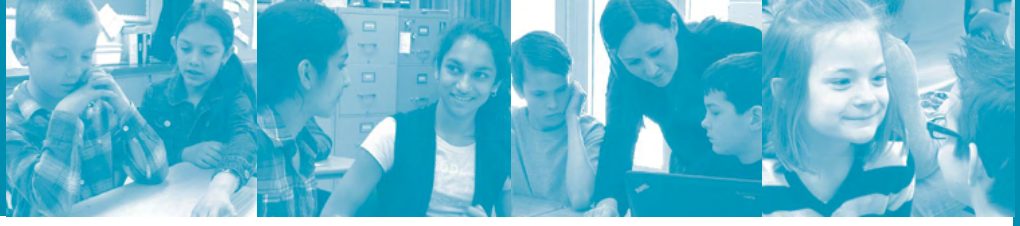
> Tasks are a feature of everyday life in the personal, public, educational or occupational domains. Task accomplishment by an individual involves the strategic activation of specific competences in order to carry out a set of purposeful actions in a particular domain with a clearly defined goal and a specific outcome (see section 4.1). Tasks can be extremely varied in nature, and may involve language activities to a greater or lesser extent, for example: creative (painting, story writing), skills based (repairing or assembling something), problem solving (jigsaw, crossword), routine transactions, interpreting a role in a play, taking part in a discussion, giving a presentation, planning a course of action, reading and replying to (an e-mail) message, etc. A task may be quite simple or extremely complex (e.g. studying a number of related diagrams and instructions and assembling an unfamiliar and intricate apparatus). A particular task may involve a greater or lesser number of steps or embedded sub-tasks and consequently the boundaries of any one task may be difficult to define. (CEFR, p. 157)

As we can see, this is a fairly broad vision; however, it is based on a series of key words that set the stage and point the way.

Let's analyze these key words in greater detail:

- Tasks or **activities**. The use of the term "activity" as a synonym for task reflects a vision of language teaching/learning that is action-based. The task is no longer seen as the equivalent of an exercise or a simple communication task. The task's goal is no longer limited to placing learners in a communication situation.
- **A feature of everyday life**. Tasks are real; they are not simply an excuse for communication, even less for strict progression of learning. Tasks are real actions; they are anchored in everyday life. They relate to particular situations and they have specific goals. Tasks are not designed around a notion that the learner must learn, or even around a simple communication situation. Tasks recreate what social agents do in everyday life. In daily life, communication comes into play when necessary so that tasks can be performed.

«"The task puts the learner into action; it places the learner in the action. The task must make the learner more autonomous as a user of the language. The task must enable the learner to line up needs and a goal to be achieved, by selecting relevant knowledge and useful skills." (Bourguignon, 2010, p. 19; our translation)



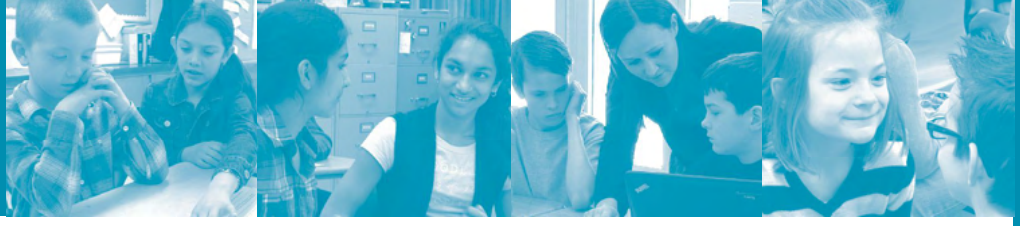
- **Strategic activation** of specific competences. The learner/social agent chooses a goal, — one or more — objectives. In order to achieve these objectives, the learner must act strategically. In other words, he or she must make choices. The more the learner is aware of what he or she must do in order to perform the task, and what general competences and communicative language competences this will require, the more effective he or she will be.
- A set of **purposeful actions**. Instead of performing a series of exercises that do not share a connection, or even performing a series of organized steps in a language progression, the learner/social agent performs a set of purposeful actions that point toward a clearly defined goal — steps that apply specific aspects of language, all of which contribute to a successfully performed task.
- Extremely **varied in nature**. Because each of the steps we have just described exercises different aspects, which implicate language use to a greater or lesser extent, the actions that the learner/social agent will accomplish may be very different.
- **Language activities** are involved to a greater or lesser extent. In the trajectory that leads to successful accomplishment of the task, there will be times when language is used heavily (reception, production, and/or interaction), and there will be other times when language plays a marginal role.
- Quite **simple** or extremely **complex**. Not all tasks are equivalent. Some are very simple, while others are more complex. In other words, some tasks will involve what can be referred to as **sub-tasks**, or steps, that make it possible for the learner to achieve the objective.

In the example provided, that is, "studying a number of related diagrams and instructions and assembling an unfamiliar and intricate apparatus," we can picture what some of these steps might be:

1) A comprehension phase that consists of:
   - Reading and decoding texts by means of images (probably diagrams, symbols, and drawings), but also
   - Activating prior, non-language-related knowledge about similar apparatuses and how they work
2) An implementation phase, which:
   - will be more silent if the process only involves one individual
   - will be more "spoken" and interactive if two or more individuals are working together to understand how to proceed and if they are interacting, for example, by means of questions, suggestions, and comments

From this description, we can already see the key role that the task plays in language teaching/learning. The task is a federative tool. **It makes learning tangible, palpable, and meaningful**. A learner does not learn a language as an abstract concept so that one day, he or she can use it, for example, in speaking, reading, or writing, or so that he or she may perform tasks that may or may not relate to everyday life. Rather, a learner performs real-life tasks in order to develop competences and, in the process, learn the language and develop competences. The learner engages in communicative activities with a clear meaning, whose purpose is to help the learner to perform the task.

A task is not synonymous with an exercise. It is not an excuse for using language forms and structures, orally or in writing. A task is a way to launch learners into action in the pursuit of a specific goal. And action is always contextualized. Bourguignon (2010) talks about the *approche communic'actionnelle* or "communic'actional approach," stating that the goal of the task is to carry out a mission, within a number of conditions and constraints.



The action-oriented task seeks to break down the walls of the classroom and connect it with the outside world. In the communicative vision, shaped in the 1980s and 1990s, the task was seen as class work, involving the students in activities that entailed comprehension, manipulation, production, or interaction in the target language, with an emphasis on content rather than form (Nunan, 2004). In the communicative approach, the task served communication; in the action-oriented approach, it is the reverse. Communication is one means, but not the only means, at the learner's disposal for accomplishing the task. Strategy, reflection, and critical thinking also play an important role.

In the communicative approach, the teacher accompanied the learner, step by step, toward the accomplishment of the task, providing all of the elements that the learner needed and guiding the process. In the action-oriented approach, the focus shifts. **The learner becomes an agent in his or her learning**. The learner is called upon to make choices and grasp the objectives and, therefore, the knowledge and know-how required and the competences he or she must develop. The learner must understand why he or she is doing things and how best to do them. The teacher facilitates this process, helping the learner to become increasingly autonomous.

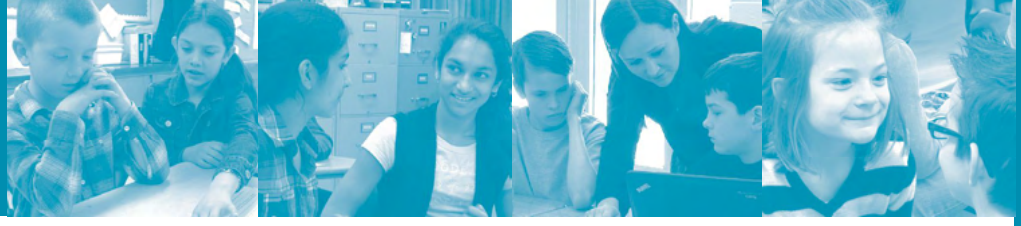
The task is a federative tool **making it possible to structure learning around moments, actions, and products that are vivid, defined, and concrete**. The learner is not speaking or writing for the teacher or pretending to speak or write to another person. The learner is a social agent who needs to be able to be effective in real life. Clearly, the classroom situation, even if it retains a "real-life" social and interactive nature and "immediacy" as the CEFR states (p. 157), requires that "learners engage in a 'willing suspension of disbelief' and accept the use of the target language rather than the easier and more natural mother tongue to carry out meaning-focused tasks" (CEFR, p. 157). Nevertheless, the approach has moved away from an accumulation of knowledge and know-how and toward a logic of activating competences (both general competences and communicative language competences) in order to achieve an objective.
The communicative activities required are not the goal, in and of themselves: learners are not communicating for the sake of communicating. Communicative activities help the learner to perform tasks. For example, they may provide information (reading activities, listening activities). They may make it possible to simulate an exchange (activities involving a dialogue or an exchange of letters or emails). They provide opportunities to produce relevant written and oral texts. Lastly, they provide opportunities for the learner to ponder the structures of language and to appropriate them (activities that create awareness of the grammatical, lexical, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic aspects of the language).

Tasks in the action-oriented approach often involve the creation of a product as the students perform the task. This product may be a brochure for tourists, a blog entry, or a fundraising project for a humanitarian cause. "However, not only the specific outcome, but also the process, which leads to the final result, is important for communication in the language classroom: this involves a step-by-step organisation, learners' activation of strategies and competences, consideration of the setting and social forms, as well as materials and supports" (Piccardo et al., 2011, p. 39).

In the action-oriented approach, the path is not clearly marked and the outcome is not really predictable. The role of the student has changed: he or she is expected to act effectively and autonomously in the choices he or she makes and to work in a group and interact with others.

The student is expected to:

- Make judgments about the situation in which he or she finds himself or herself and the issues involved in the task
- Quickly size up the tools at his or her disposal (both linguistic and non-linguistic; for example, general factual knowledge and procedural knowledge, such as where to find information, understanding the cultural context, etc., as well as the ability to organize and plan) and the tools that he or she needs but does not have



- Think about and reflect on how to mobilize the tools at his or her disposal and on the best way to achieve the goal

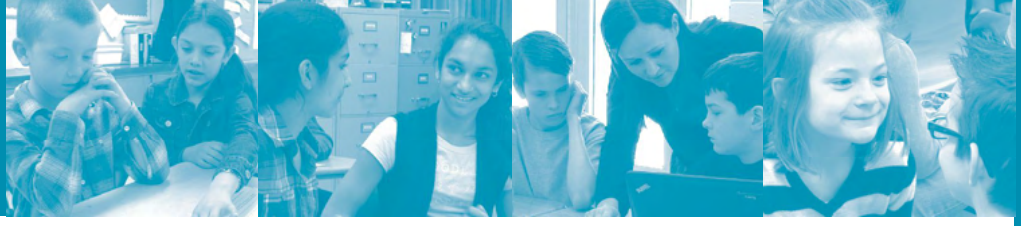
Obviously, this is not a straightforward process; the learner may encounter difficulties along the way. He or she will need to be guided through the steps in a complex task. Here, the teacher has an essential role to play. Instead of transmitting knowledge and skills and know-how and checking learners' acquisition through exercises and activities with more or less pre-determined outcomes, the teacher is a blend of coach, resource person, advisor, organizer, and facilitator. This is indeed a diverse role. There will, of course, be times when the teacher must also convey a concept or provide an explanation (for example, a grammatical or lexical concept or a suitable text form). There will be times when he/she will have to train learners on the appropriate use of tools (for example, linguistic tools such as a verb form, or other tools such as a reading or listening strategy) in exactly the same way as an athletic coach would explain the function of a muscle or have an athlete execute a specific motion. However, this does not happen in a vacuum, and it does not happen for the sole purpose of accumulating knowledge or performing exercises. Just as the coach's goal is to win the championship, the teacher's role is to increase the likelihood that the student will successfully perform the task. The task becomes the federative moment of both the learner's work and the teacher's work.

Organizing a curriculum around tasks is not straightforward:

> Task familiarity, together with prior activation of the learners' competences, can affect the successful performance of the task. Learners' self-esteem, involvement, motivation, states and attitudes towards a task are all affective factors which play a role in task performance. Task difficulty is directly related to learners' competences and individual characteristics. The teacher must therefore take into account all these factors to establish the level of task difficulty, which can be adjusted upwards and downwards. Successful task performance also depends on learners' general and communicative strategies. (Piccardo et al., 2011, p. 39)

In spite of this complexity, this level of planning is completely worthwhile; it enables the teacher to have a long-term vision and to ask him/herself a wide range of questions beyond those that involve language — questions that have to do with cognition, emotion, strategy, relationships, organization, and so forth. In terms of language, this level of planning provides an opportunity to explore the nature of the texts. This, in turn, provides an opportunity to weave a context for grammatical and lexical content.

CHAPTER 5

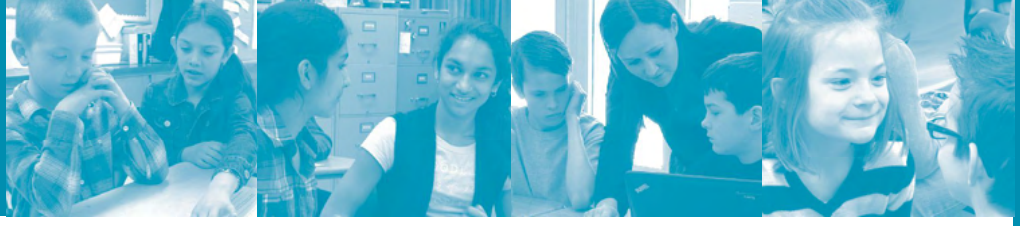


Moving away from the idea of cumulating notions and exercises makes way for the idea of text as a vehicle for learning. In the CEFR, the concept of text is vast: it includes oral texts and written texts, such as business cards, bus tickets, newspaper articles, book excerpts, and wikis, to name just a few. Tasks and texts are closely linked, and both play an important role in everyday life. Most of the tasks we perform involve some sort of text, and all texts have the purpose of performing (and enable us to perform) tasks. Examples of texts in everyday life include bus schedules, city maps, bulletin boards, voice messages, and announcements over a PA system. Planning a task provides an opportunity to think about these different types of text and their linguistic and cultural characteristics. Instead of presenting students with (more or less) authentic materials in order to give them a taste of the target culture, or worse, a semblance of that culture, students work with real texts in order to accomplish real tasks. For example, the act of looking at a train schedule in another language/culture requires a greater level of focus and enables learners to activate a series of strategies for comparing and understanding.

As will be seen from the examples of tasks that follow, these are complex tasks that require the students to make decisions, search for documents and information, work as part of a group, and interact with others. Each of these examples entails a final product or performance. However, they do not all have the same level of linguistic difficulty. Example 5 can be adapted to very low levels; Examples 2 and 3 can be proposed at various levels of difficulty.

As mentioned, the teacher plays an essential role in deciding what level a particular task is suitable for and how to make it doable — for example, suggesting resources, models of subtasks, dialogues, documents, and so on. Texts also play an essential role; this type of task requires the students to put down their textbooks and venture forth, exploring authentic texts from real life.

One can see that the choice of tasks makes it possible to work on different aspects of language, such as grammar. For instance, Example 2 allows students to work on the present tense; Example 3 allows them to work on past tenses; Example 1 deals mainly with vocabulary, but also numbers; Example 4 draws on different verb tenses, especially the future and conditional tenses in Phase B. The choice of tasks also makes it possible to work on the sociolinguistic dimension (for instance, the dialogue between teenagers will be different from the conversations with adults, the letter to the supermarket managers will require a very formal tone, and so forth) and the pragmatic dimension (for example, asking a salesperson for help picking out a gift). Various tasks also make it possible to work on the cultural dimension, while avoiding stereotypes: the students will always start with what they know,



gradually discovering what they do not yet know. Thus, the teacher must keep in mind the communicative objective (communicative activities to be given priority: reception, production, interaction), the linguistic objective (vocabulary, grammatical structures, sociolinguistic competences, and/or pragmatic competences), and the cultural objective (awareness of cultural differences).

As we shall see in Chapter 8, organizing the course around tasks also makes it possible to link teaching and assessment right away. In fact, the teacher must choose targeted descriptors that make it possible to assess the way in which the student has performed the task, the competences he or she has activated, and the strategies he or she has used.

In order for students to work efficiently, particularly when they are not accustomed to an action-oriented approach, the teacher must help them with their strategic approach, notably during the stages that involve planning the task, making decisions, realizing which competences to activate, understanding their strengths and weaknesses, conducting searches, and reflecting on what they have learned, what they are able to do, and how they do it. Lastly, the teacher must help them to systematize what they have learned from performing the task, in terms of thinking about language structures, sociolinguistic aspects of language, pragmatic aspects of language, the strategies they used, and the cultural aspects they learned.

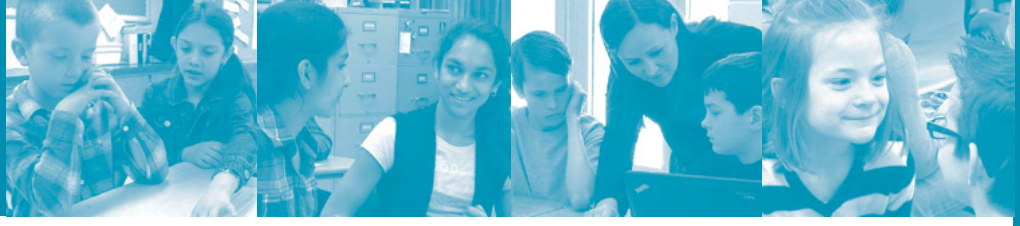
In Chapter 7, we will focus on strategies. Before doing so, we will see how the new understanding of the task and of the learner as a social agent redefine the function of language and language learning, revealing a more open, dynamic, and evolving vision — a vision of plurilingualism.

Here are some examples of tasks:

Example 1.

The holiday season is fast approaching, and relatives from New Brunswick are coming to stay with your family over the holidays. Your parents are very busy at work—too busy to organize every detail, including the holiday meal. You have three cousins and you need to find a gift for each of them. Your parents need your help. They have asked you to think of a menu and make a shopping list. They have also asked you to buy gifts for your cousins. For this, they have given you a total budget of $100.

You must prepare a menu for the meal, create a shopping list for the ingredients, and come up with gifts for your cousins to suggest to your parents. You are going to shop for the gifts, asking the salesperson to help you. Unfortunately, one of the gifts that you thought of is not available and you have to find an alternative. Once you have finished, you will show your parents the menu and the shopping list, as well as the gifts you purchased and why you made the choices you did.



Example 2.

Your school has been twinned with a school in Quebec City that is sending a delegation consisting of three teachers and three student representatives. The purpose of the visit is to create exchanges: first, virtual exchanges in the form of emails and computer projects, and then, if possible, student exchanges. The delegation will be staying for three days. You are going to organize the schedule for their visit, including work sessions, an outing in town, a shared meal, and a cultural evening. You will work in small groups, with one organizing the content of the work sessions, one organizing the outing, one organizing the meal, and one organizing the cultural evening. Each group will prepare at least two options and present them to the class. As a class, you will choose one of the options presented by each small group. You will define the entire program and prepare a written document to send to the delegation in Quebec City.

Example 3.

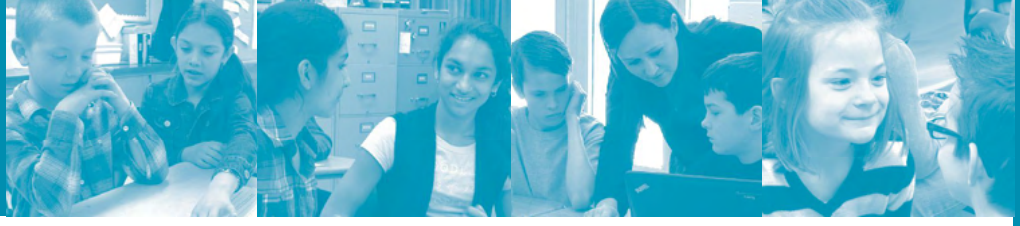
Your school has organized a celebration on Canadian history over the past 60 years. Each class will work on a different aspect (economic development, social trends, lifestyle, etc.) and submit a maximum of three student productions to a final jury. With a group of friends, you will each work on researching your families and their immigration to Canada. You will create your family tree and describe your family's life before and after immigrating. You will create a portrait of your family today (language[s] spoken, traditions, food, etc.). You will prepare a poster and have five minutes to present your work to the class. The class will choose three posters to give the school principal to be posted in the gym. You will also prepare a letter for the posters that are chosen, explaining your choices.

Example 4.

With your Science teacher, you have learned about the problem of intensive farming, or factory farming, of livestock. You were really struck by this problem and you discovered that many of your fellow students didn't know about it or didn't think it was a problem. You decide to take action.

Phase A. Prepare a presentation illustrating the key aspects of the problem. Create a two-page pamphlet that will make readers aware of the problem. Include statistics, studies on the advantages and disadvantages of intensive farming, excerpts of interviews with stakeholders, and photographs of intensive farming. Your pamphlet will summarize the key points of your presentation, which you will present to the entire school.

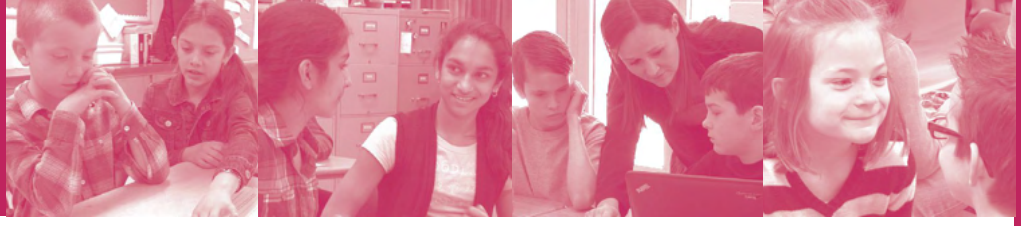
Phase B. Next, you decide to write a letter to the managers of various supermarket chains, asking them to carry more meat and poultry that has not been produced intensively and to make consumers aware of the problem. You attach a copy of your pamphlet to the letter.



Example 5.

You are planning to spend the weekend with your cousins, who live two hours away. Sunday is the birthday of one of your cousins. To get to your cousins' place, you and one of your parents will take the train. He or she asks you to pack your backpack, reminding you that you don't have to take everything, as your cousins will have many of the things you need such as towels, toothpaste, and soap. However, you have already assembled lots of things and your backpack isn't very big. In addition, each of you wants to bring a birthday present for your cousin, and these presents have to be packed somewhere. Each of you will have to bring a backpack and make sure that it isn't too full.

You create a list of the things that you want to take. You discuss this list with one of your friends, asking for help to decide what to take and what to leave at home. Then, you get help choosing a nice gift for your cousin that is not too big so that it will fit in your backpack. Next, you get your backpack ready and answer questions from your Mom or Dad, who wants to make sure that you have everything you need.



Chapter 7. Learning as a Reflective, Strategic, and Transferable Process

As we have seen in previous chapters, one of the fundamental characteristics of social action is its dynamism and its adaptability to the context and situation consequently, it is impossible for social agents to anticipate every contingency or to foresee the exact outcome of their actions.

This is the logic that informs the action-oriented approach, which sees the task as a tool for creating conditions conducive to social action. As we have seen, the task is not a pretext for communication. Quite the opposite: effective communication is what enables social agents to be effective in completing a task and achieving a specific goal or goals.

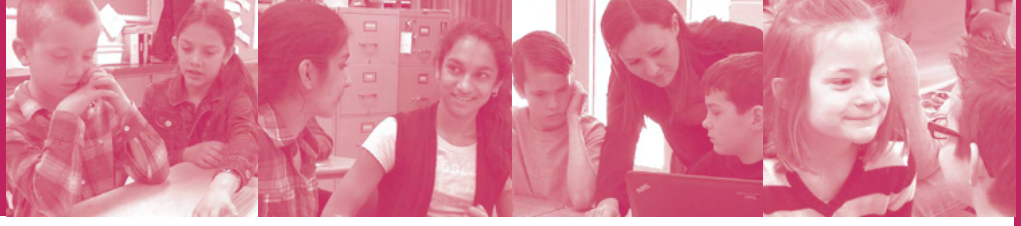
Communication plays such a central role that social agents will do whatever they can to communicate as effectively as possible. They will make choices, watch for reactions to these choices, and modulate their actions based on the reactions they observe. In fact, they will think before, during, and after the action. In other words, they will act strategically.

> Strategies are a means the language user exploits to mobilise and balance his or her resources, to activate skills and procedures, in order to fulfil the demands of communication in context and successfully complete the task in question in the most comprehensive or most economical way feasible depending on his or her precise purpose. (CEFR, p. 57)

Strategies play a key role in the successful completion of the task. A strategic learner/social agent knows where he or she is coming from and where he or she wants to go. A strategic learner/social agent is also aware of his or her strengths and weaknesses, how to adapt to the situation and, if unsuccessful, how to further adapt in order to be successful.

The strategies are "seen as a hinge between the learner's resources (competences) and what he/she can do with them (communicative activities)" (CEFR, p. 25)

According to the strategic vision of learning, the learner is always aware of what he or she is doing, what is happening in the classroom, the reasons why he or she does certain things, and the goals he or she sets. This vision is diametrically opposed to the vision of the learner as someone who is carried along by the current, absorbing language passively by virtue of being immersed in it and automatically transferring unconscious learning to communication situations that require him or her to be active, capable of oral and written productions, and capable of participating in a discussion. The strategic vision represents a giant step toward learner autonomy and a transfer of responsibility from the teacher to the learner. The learner takes charge of his or her own learning experiences.



The teacher creates conditions conducive to this learning by offering adapted tasks that create logical sequences of experiences that move the learner toward targeted learning goals. The teacher acts as a resource, as a guide, and as an observer able to offer effective feedback.

There are a great many different strategies. Researchers have categorized them and produced lists to help teachers and learners to identify them and use them more intentionally and effectively.

Oxford, 1989, 1990
O'Malley & Chamot, 1990
Cyr, 1998

These strategies can be divided into two broad categories: communication strategies and learning strategies.

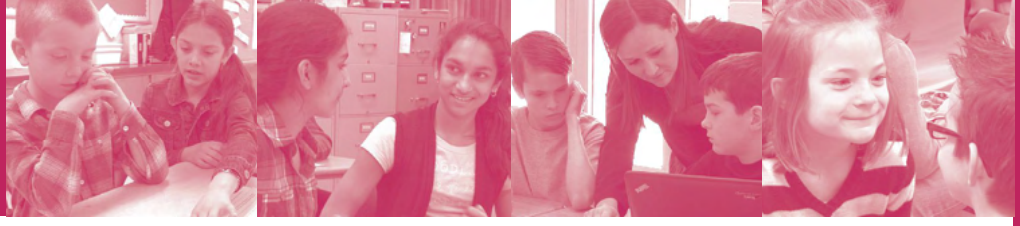
The CEFR further divides communication strategies into four subcategories: **planning**, **execution**, **evaluation**, and **repair**.

Let's examine what this means in practical terms. When we prepare to read a text, we look at its format (newspaper article, memo, poem, etc.), its title, any images it contains, and perhaps certain key words. In the process, we set expectations and find clues. As we begin to read, we check to see whether our expectations match what we are reading and whether the clues we found assist us in our understanding. We begin to formulate hypotheses and make deductions to construct meaning. We evaluate to determine whether we have understood correctly. Evaluation can involve the use of other texts, for example, questions that guide and/or confirm understanding. Evaluation can also take the form of co-operation with other learners. If necessary, we repair, or revise, our initial assumptions.

It might appear that a learner has the time to perform all of these steps, using strategies intentionally and also evaluating his or her use of them, only when confronted with a written text. In reality, however, the process of planning, execution, evaluation, and repair and the strategies that accompany it are activated for each communicative activity.

For example, when we are called upon to produce an oral text, we think about what we are going to say, about the message and its form, at a pace determined by the time at our disposal and then we make a plan — at least mentally. We begin to speak, trying to follow this plan. Our listeners' facial expressions — the nodding of heads and the taking of notes, or perhaps their blank stares indicating a lack of understanding or interest — help us to determine whether or not we are getting our message across and sparking our listeners' interest. If their response is a blank stare, we seek to repair, for instance, by repeating passages, providing more explanation, and using images and diagrams.

In addition to each of these strategies, for activities that involve interaction we will also need specific strategies such as speaking, co-operation, and requests for clarification.



Now, let's explore the other strategies, those that favour the accomplishment of the task.

As we saw earlier, task performance is not limited to the dimension of communication, as important as this dimension is.

> Task performance is a complex process, therefore, involving the strategic interplay of a range of learner competences and task-related factors. In responding to the demands of a task the language user or learner activates those general and communicative strategies which are most efficient for accomplishing the particular task. The user or learner naturally adapts, adjusts and filters task inputs, goals, conditions and constraints to fit his or her own resources, purposes and (in a language learning context) particular learning style. (CEFR, p. 159)

In the strategic vision of language learning found in the action-oriented approach, the learner thinks about what it takes to complete the task, taking into account any external conditions and constraints. The learner also thinks about his or her own strengths and weaknesses, about the resources that he or she will need and to which he or she will have access, and about making the best possible choices, taking all of these factors into consideration.

What does this mean in practical terms?

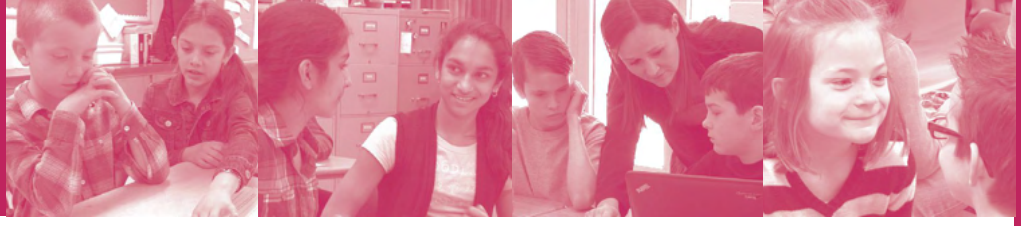
Let's go back to one of the examples of tasks presented in Chapter 5. In Example 1, the learner has the task of organizing a holiday dinner and purchasing gifts for his or her teenage cousins.

While reading the instructions for Example 1, the learner must think about the requirements of the task: he or she must think about the situation, any useful and available resources, the competences (linguistic and general) that he or she must activate, any conditions and constraints, and the final products that he or she must produce.

This involves thinking about:

- What constitutes a realistic and feasible holiday meal (obviously, filters from his or her own culture will shape this meal)
- What kinds of gifts his or her teenage cousins would like and what he or she can buy within the budget his or her parents have provided (situation and conditions and constraints)
- What competences to activate. These may include linguistic competences in the form of asking questions and answering them using the present tense; knowledge of the vocabulary for food and gifts; knowledge of numbers so that he or she can discuss prices; etc. They may include sociolinguistic competences, such as knowing when to use the formal tone and vous to speak to a salesperson and when to use the informal tone and tu to speak to a parent. They may include pragmatic competences, such as knowing how to start and end a conversation, knowing how to present something to another person, etc.
- Resources that could help him or her to complete the task (for example, consulting menus for holiday meals online, visiting websites for stores that cater to teens, etc.)
- What strategies to use for organizing the work involved (for example, individual research, sharing, negotiating to arrive at a shared list, assigning roles for the presentation, etc.)

Nevertheless, in a classroom learning situation, the student is not alone: the teacher is there to accompany him or her in this experience and to ensure that he or she has as many opportunities as possible to successfully complete the task. Thus, the teacher's role is not limited to choosing and suggesting adapted and realistic tasks conducive to the learners' involvement and autonomy. The teacher must also anticipate which aspects of the task will pose difficulties, help the students to organize their work, choose resources, and even plan brief periods of preparation (what the CEFR refers to as pre-communicative pedagogic tasks).

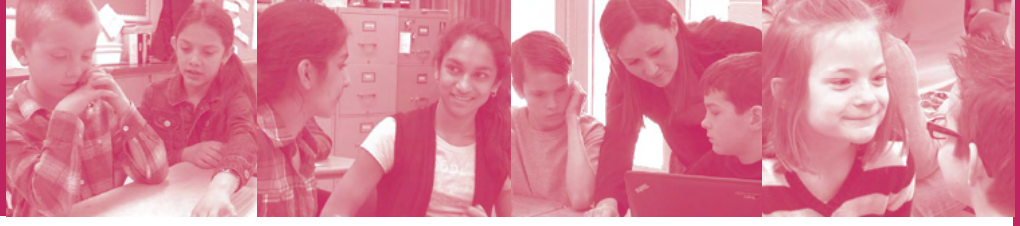


These preparations help make certain aspects of the task easier (for instance, viewing a document on a family reunion during the holidays, reading a holiday menu, doing a short role-play in a store, etc.). In order to help all students succeed, the teacher may plan individualized supports that will make the task more or less challenging. Lastly, the teacher will prepare evaluation grids and checklists that contain clear descriptors for the competences and skills that are activated during the task. The checklists will include the strategies.

If the goal is to foster student autonomy, why would the teacher focus on the strategies and choices that the learner makes in completing the task? The answer to this question helps to illustrate why the teacher has such a fundamental role to play. Autonomy is not innate, it is learned. Similarly, the awareness that some strategies are more effective than others — whether these are communication strategies or learning strategies or the awareness that some work methods are more effective than others — is also learned. Explicit work on strategies is not a "waste of time" nor is it time taken away from language learning, even though it might seem this way since the learner is not working directly on language. Quite the contrary: explicit work on strategies is a valuable tool for the learner. He or she will learn to recognize strategies, use them more effectively, and transfer them to other learning at school and outside of school, in a process of lifelong learning.

> In many learning experiences it may seem preferable, at one time or another, to focus attention on the development of strategies that will enable one or other type of task having a linguistic dimension to be carried out. Accordingly, the objective is to improve the strategies traditionally used by the learner by rendering them more sophisticated, more extensive and more conscious, by seeking to adapt them to tasks for which they had not originally been used. Whether these are communication or learning strategies, if one takes the view that they enable an individual to mobilise his or her own competences in order to implement and possibly improve or extend them, it is worthwhile ensuring that such strategies are indeed cultivated as an objective, even though they may not form an end in themselves. (CEFR, p. 137)

As we have seen, even though there are many different strategies and they fit into many different categories, work on strategies takes learners in the direction of a common goal: developing awareness and the ability to think and reflect. This is why the awareness of the strategies used to complete a task shares many features with work on learning strategies. In the example we just considered, the



learner becomes aware of how to organize resources; steps to follow in making a presentation or creating a written document; communication structures to employ for the interaction required to make a purchase; his or her own personal preferences for learning vocabulary; aspects that he or she needs to spend more time on; and so on. This work of developing awareness will be useful in the process of learning the language; becoming aware of the universals of language and of any communication; becoming aware of the synergy between linguistic and non-linguistics aspects of language in the completion of tasks; understanding cultural similarities and differences; and learning many other aspects of language. This work of awareness also helps the learner understand his or her own work methods, strengths, and weaknesses, along with what it takes to improve and make progress. Lastly, because of its applicability to other disciplines, this work will enable the learner to transfer this awareness and to apply it to his or her own learning.

Learning that is autonomous and intentional benefits from transparent assessment performed with assessment tools that are clear and effective. We shall explore the dimension of assessment in the next chapter.