The action-oriented approach: From theory to practice

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Workshop Outline

- **Presentation** **30 mins**
- **Breakout Activity 1: Core aspects of the AoA** **10 mins**
- **Plenary Discussion** **10 mins**
- **Presentation** **10 mins**
- **Breakout Activity 2: Action-oriented scenarios** **60 mins**
- **Plenary Discussion** **30 mins**

Presentation Outline

- From the CEFR 2001 to the CEFR 2020
- Learners as social agents
- From a linear to a complex perspective
- From communicative to action-oriented
- Action-oriented scenarios
- Conclusion

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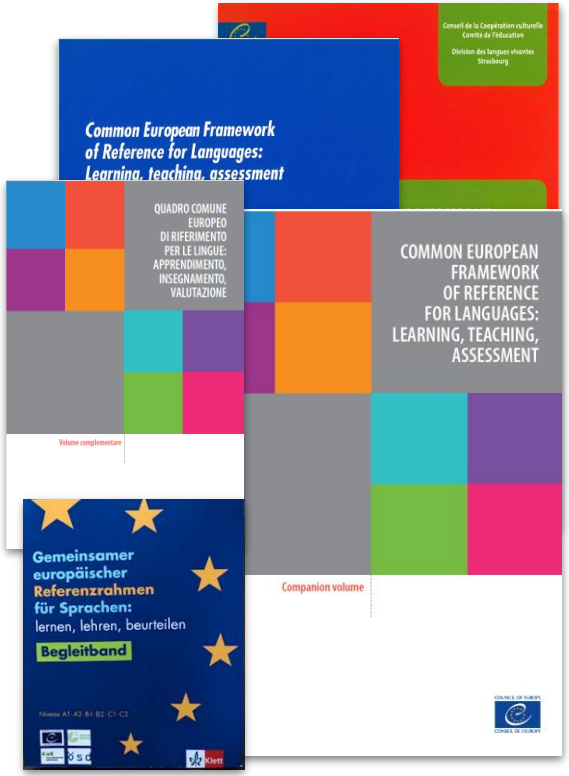
The CEFR 2001 pioneered the AoA idea

The CEFRCV refines and broadens the AoA pedagogical vision

- In the last 20 years: bottom-up experimentation by practitioners

  but no theorization and little practical guidance (Piccardo, 2014; Bourguignon, 2010)

- The CEFR Companion Volume (2020) makes the Action-oriented Approach explicit



listening + reading

speaking + writing

Reception

Production

Interaction

Mediation

Speaker/Hearer

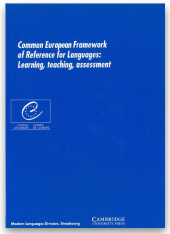
Participant

Social agent

Code:
accuracy / fluency

Social use of language

Mobilising linguistic resources



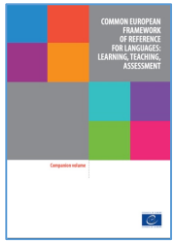
CEFR 2001: Pioneering a new vision

The action-oriented approach: From theory to practice

Social agent:
Acting in the social world and exerting agency in the learning process.
(CEFRCV, 2020, p. 22)

User/learner as Social Agent

Reception	Interaction	Mediation
Production		
Speaker/Hearer	Participant	Social agent
Code: ***complexity*** *accuracy / fluency*	Social use of language	**Co-construction of meaning**
Mobilising general and **plurilingual / pluricultural** competences		



A new vision developed

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In an Action-oriented Approach

learners are seen as social agents:

- **Social:** exerting agency within a specific social context, which imposes conditions and constraints.
- **Agent:** mobilizing ***all*** their resources (cognitive, emotional, linguistic and cultural), developing strategies in iterative cycles in order to plan, produce results, and monitoring their action.

= include in the curriculum **collaborative tasks** in which learners **construct and mediate meaning**

Seeing learners as social agents implies

- involving them in the learning process
- recognising the social nature of language learning and language use,
- recognising the interaction between the social and the individual in the process of learning
- extensive use of the target language in the classroom – learning to use the language
- allowing learners to use all their linguistic resources
- encouraging them to see similarities and regularities as well as differences between languages and cultures

Above all,

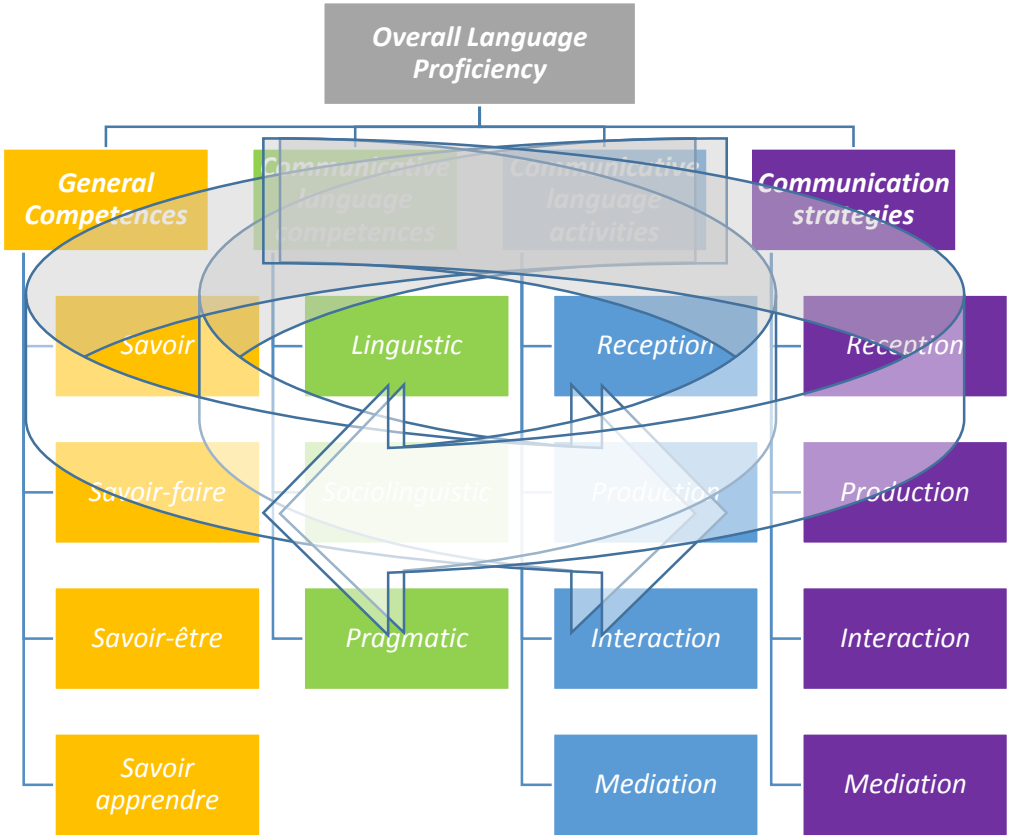
- purposeful, collaborative TASKS, whose primary focus is not language

Learners are seen as Social Agents who:

- (co)-construct meaning
- in real-life tasks
- while engaging in communicative activities
- and drawing upon a series of competences
- and developing communicative strategies

In turn, by performing tasks, they further develop competences and strategies

Increasing proficiency: a dynamic process



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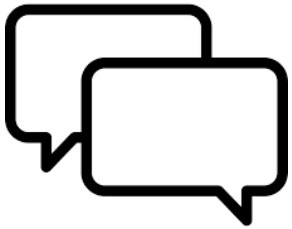
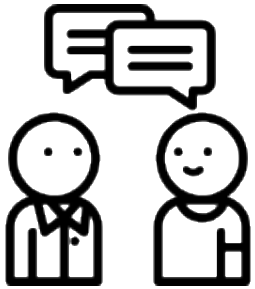
From a linear vision…



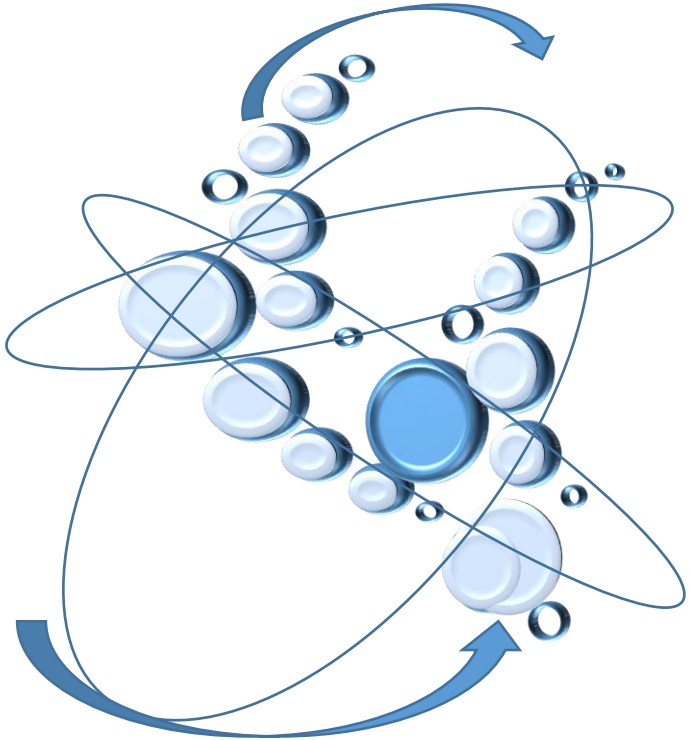


Traditionally, communication and language learning have been seen as **linear and monolingual**: learn to communicate a message in one language, learn in the class in order to apply out of the class (language + culture)

… to a complex vision

Now both communication and language learning are seen as **complex**:

- learn to (co)construct content and communication
- linguistic and cultural repertoires
- class as real social context



What we see is just the tip of the iceberg

The reality is far more complex

Language

Language as an emergent phenomenon

Linguistic/cultural trajectories. Socialisation into communities. Social experiences. Agency. Plurilingualism. Co-construction of meaning. Languaging/plurilanguaging

Theoretical inputs to the action-oriented approach:

- complexity theories / ecological approach ('action-based teaching')
- socio-constructivist / sociocultural theories (social → individual)
- agency: intentionality, planning, self-regulation, reflection
- all languages in individuals' repertoires always present

Informed by Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST): situated learning, action and affordances

The **mind, body, and environment** (which includes culture) make up a **complex dynamic system**.

Learning thus needs to be rooted in **situated dynamic learning situations**

(Masciotra, Roth, & Morel, 2007).

Learning occurs through '**perception in action**' (van Lier, 2004: 97): user/ learner seen as a **social agent** who gives their attention to **affordances** in the environment, in order to carry out a task and/ or achieve a goal.

Learning builds on the capacity to **perceive affordances** (Käufer & Chemero, 2015), which can be thought of as **invitations to action**.

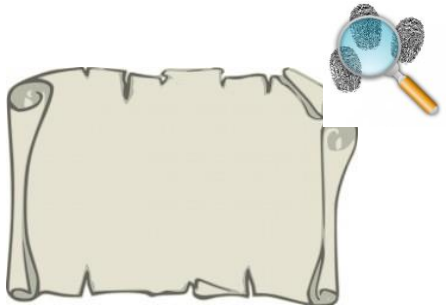
To perceive affordances learners **need to develop agency**

'Cognitive agents experience the world perceptually through **the mediation of action**' (Ramstead, Veissière, & Kirmayer, 2016: 4).

Language is an activity, it is **something we do** but, more importantly, it is something **we do together**

"[L]anguage (even when written) is first and foremost a dialogical and intersubjective activity. Language is an activity that allows us to ***coordinate actions, perceptions and attitudes, share experiences and plans,*** *and to* ***construct and maintain complex social relations*** *on different time scales."*
(Fusaroli et al., 2014, p. 33)

In real-life situations, learners/users draw on all possible resources/tools available to make sense of oral or written texts both in a language and through languages, in order to understand concepts and messages



- But they aren't alone…
- learners/users constantly engage in a double perspective: individual and social

Moving from **language as an entity** to ***language as an activity, a process*** (*languaging*) implies embracing a mediational perspective

Both communication and language learning are now seen as ***situated*** and ***complex***

Mediation at the core of knowledge (co)construction, (re)construction

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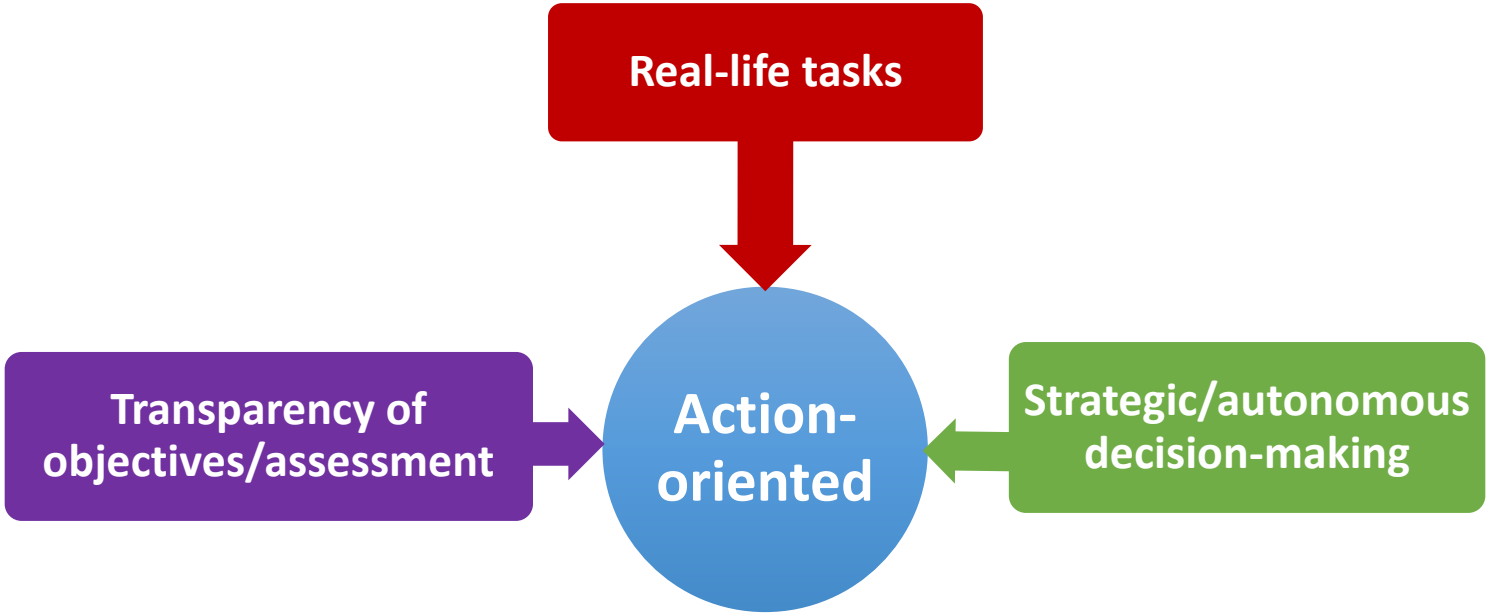
Communicative approach	Action-oriented approach
Main aim: functional and communicative (communicating in a foreign/second language)	Main aim: social (acting in another language, acting for reaching a shared goal, a common action)
Tasks with a linguistic aim, calibrated according to their level of linguistic difficulty, implying a final project or not	Increasingly complex tasks, not exclusively linguistic, problem-situations implying a strategic decision making process
Knowledge of the language, linguistic skills and know how, communication strategies	Transfer and strategic mobilization of competences > savoir d'action/savoir agir
Language goal (linguistic knowledge/savoir and skills/savoir-faire)	Non linguistic goal: accomplishing a mission

Adapted from Bourguignon, 2010

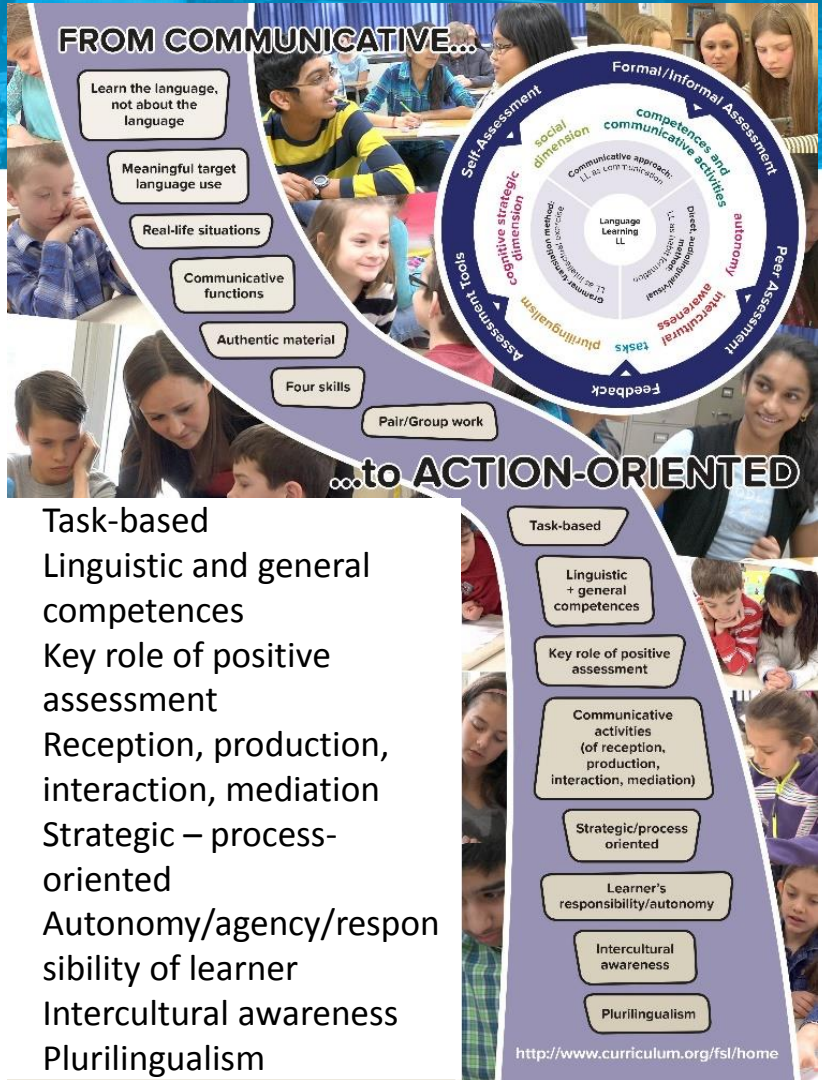

Real-life tasks
Transparency of objectives/assessment
Action-oriented
Strategic/autonomous decision-making

Stepping stones to the AoA

From communicative

- Learn the language not about the language
- Meaningful target language use
- Real life situations
- Communicative functions
- Authentic materials
- 4 skills
- Pair/group work

to action-oriented



Pre-Reading
(Piccardo 2014)

- Task-based
- Linguistic and general competences
- Key role of positive assessment
- Reception, production, interaction, mediation
- Strategic – process-oriented
- Autonomy/agency/responsibility of learner
- Intercultural awareness
- Plurilingualism

Group activity

Breakout Activity 1: Core aspects of the AoA

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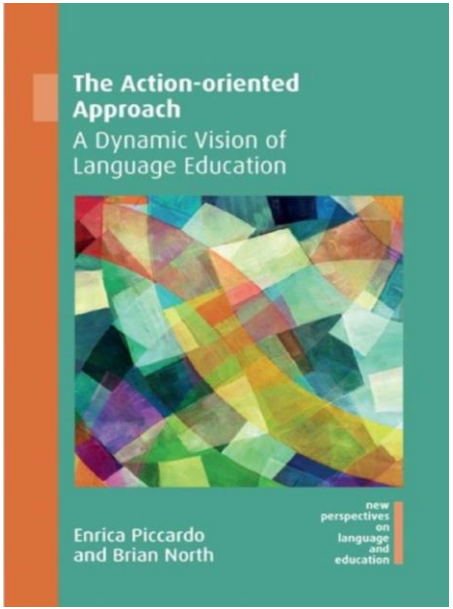
The AoA holistically integrates:

- real world variables (domain, context, tasks, communicative activities and texts)
- 'can do' descriptors (as objectives)
- transparent criteria (for assessment)
- aspects of competence, strategic, pragmatic, linguistic (as objectives)

Scenarios translate the AoA into practice



Piccardo, E. & North, B. (2019). *The action-oriented approach: A dynamic vision of language education.* Bristol: Multilingual Matters

Scenarios:

"are **blueprints for projects** and they contain one (or more) **culminating, action-oriented tasks** that provide the necessary coherence to the entire scenario. Users/learners are working towards **a precise goal** and each task implies the creation of **some form of artefact** (it can be a written or an oral text, or a multimedia product involving some other semiotic code(s), like pictures or graphics, etc.)".

(Piccardo & North, *The Action-oriented Approach*, Multilingual Matters, 2019, p. 272)

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A2 CEFR LEVEL

Lost in a New Town

You are participating in an exchange program to Germany and you have lost your group after the city tour. Now you are trying to find your way back to the youth hostel, but unfortunately, your cellphone is out of battery. You cannot check online or call a friend. However, you do have a paper map and can ask someone on the street for help.

German Version: In einer neuen Stadt verlaufen

Bulgarian Version: Изгубен в нов град

LESSONS

STEP 1: HAVE YOU EVER LOST YOUR WAY?

Have you ever lost in a city that you had never visited before? Where were you a your way back [...]

STEP 2: COMPARING CITIES

In this step, you will become more familiar with German street naming conventi landmarks. In your groups, compare the German city maps with other...

STEP 3: CAN YOU HELP ME FIND MY WAY

In this step, you'll learn some helpful phrases that you can use when asking for provided, can you highlight the useful phrases and...

STEP 4: LET'S GET LOST TOGETHER

It's time to practice getting lost! Ask your friends to help you find directions to a Come up with a couple of...

STEP 5: CULMINATING TASK: LOST IN A NEW TOWN

Now you've really lost your way and will need to ask a stranger for help getting someone on the street for...

STEP 6: (HOMEWORK) – OUR PLURILINGUAL CITY

Now it's your turn to design your own town! Draw a map of your town and add b like. Like in a real town, all...

LOST IN A NEW TOWN – CAN DO QUIZ

Click here to Do a Reflection and then click "View Lesson Quiz" below.

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A2 CEFR LEVEL

Town Hall Environment Meeting

The preservation of the environment is a critical issue in our lives today. The town in Quebec where your francophone friend Thomas lives wants to be known as a "green municipality". A Town Hall meeting is being organized in Thomas' school, and the headmaster has asked the students to decorate the hall with posters illustrating actions that municipalities and their citizens across the world have done to preserve the environment. Unfortunately, Thomas cannot attend the meeting, so he has emailed you to attend on his behalf.

LESSONS

STEP 1: THE TOWN HALL INVITATION

You've got mail! Your friend Thomas has invited you to participate in an upcoming very important one: saving the environment. [...]

STEP 2: WHAT HAS BEEN DONE? WHAT CAN WE DO?

Do you take care for the environment? What has your municipality done recently t creation of your own environmental action poster, research what...

STEP 3: CREATING A DIGITAL POSTER

You're now ready to create your environmental action poster for the Town Hall mee including are a list of green actions that community...

STEP 4: ATTENDING THE TOWN HALL MEETING

It's almost time for the meeting, so you'll want to display your poster around the ro Town Hall gallery to see what other...

STEP 5: SPREADING THE WORD

The meeting is over, and you had a very productive time. It's now time to send Tho short description of...

TOWN HALL ENVIRONMENT MEETING – CAN DO QUIZ

Click here to Do a Reflection and then click "View Lesson Quiz" below.

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Most used scenarios in my recent research project

A2 A2 B1

Our Community Cookbook

1

A1

How are you feeling?

2

B2

The Time Machine

3

A2

Lost in a New Town

4

A1 A2

Wanna Be My Buddy?

5

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Creating a scenario:

Part 1: Scenario description (choosing/adapting/writing)

Part 2: Selecting relevant 'Can-do descriptors' (CEFR CV 2020)

Part 3: Scenario development: (sub-tasks and culminating task)

Part 4: Doing a reflection

Part 5: Assessment and self-assessment (self-assessment checklist and teacher assessment rubrics – from descriptors)

Storytelling for the 21st Century

*Scenario initially created for a German class in Canada, later adapted and used for other languages in Italy

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Scenario description

In order to encourage younger community members to actively appreciate stories, your local library is asking the community to donate some of their favourite childhood fairy tales. You take a look through your collection and decide that many of your favourites need to be updated because they are not written in English and do not include any modern morals that would interest the younger generation.
To complete this scenario, you will need to write an original English fairy-tale with modern twists for a 21st century child.

Overall Goals

By the end of the scenario, students will be able to…

- Identify stereotypes common in fairy-tales/legends from around the world and varying cultures and discuss why these might be damaging to young minds today.
- Identify common linguistic features of fairy-tales/legends from German-speaking regions, but also from other cultures (e.g. Common opening and concluding expressions and structures, use of dialogue, repetition, a narrative past tense)

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Choosing descriptors

the "What"

Communicative activities expressed through CAN DO statements

- Can understand the main points and important details in *fairy tales*, provided the speaker speaks slowly and clearly
- Can give or seek personal views and opinions in discussing common storylines, character traits and morals
- Can write straightforward connected fairy-tales on a range of familiar subjects within *his/her field of interest*, by linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence
- Can give a prepared straightforward presentation on *his/her own fairy tale* which is clear enough to be followed without difficulty most of the time, and in which the main points are explained with reasonable precision

the "How"

Communicative competences expressed through CAN DO statements

Linguistic (grammar/vocabulary/phonology)

- Can use language to get by, with sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some hesitation and circumlocutions on topics such as fairy-tales
- Pronunciation is generally intelligible; can approximate intonation and stress at both utterance and word levels
- Spelling, punctuation and layout are accurate enough to be followed most of the time

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the "How"

Communicative competences expressed through CAN DO statements

Pragmatic and sociolinguistic (functional/discourse, register/contextual appropriacy):

- Can form longer sentences and link them together using a limited number of cohesive devices, e.g. in a story
- Shows awareness of the conventional structure of *fairy-tales* when communicating his/her ideas
- Can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions

Sociocultural (proximity convention, directness/indirectness):

- Can understand customs, attitudes, values and beliefs prevalent in the community concerned
- Can discuss in simple terms the way his/her own culturally-determined actions may be perceived differently by people from other cultures
- Can adopt conventions for formal presentations (*e.g., oral storytelling*)

Plurilingual/Pluricultural dimension

- Can use what he/she has understood in one language to understand the topic and main message of a story in another language
- Can deduce the message of a text by exploiting what he/she has understood from texts on the same theme written in different languages (e.g. *linguistic and sociocultural features common to the fairy-tale narrative style*)

Mediation

- Can summarize in writing the main points made *in fairytales from different cultures*, using simple formulation
- Can can collaborate in simple shared tasks and work towards a common goal in a group by asking and answering straightforward questions (e.g. identifying common linguistic and narrative features)

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To summarise

- Scenarios are **unifying tools** making it possible to structure learning around actions that are **vivid**, **defined**, and **concrete**.
- The AoA has moved away from an accumulation of knowledge and know-how toward **a logic of strategic activation** of resources in order **to achieve an objective**
- Organizing the course around scenarios with culminating tasks also makes it possible to **link teaching and assessment** right away

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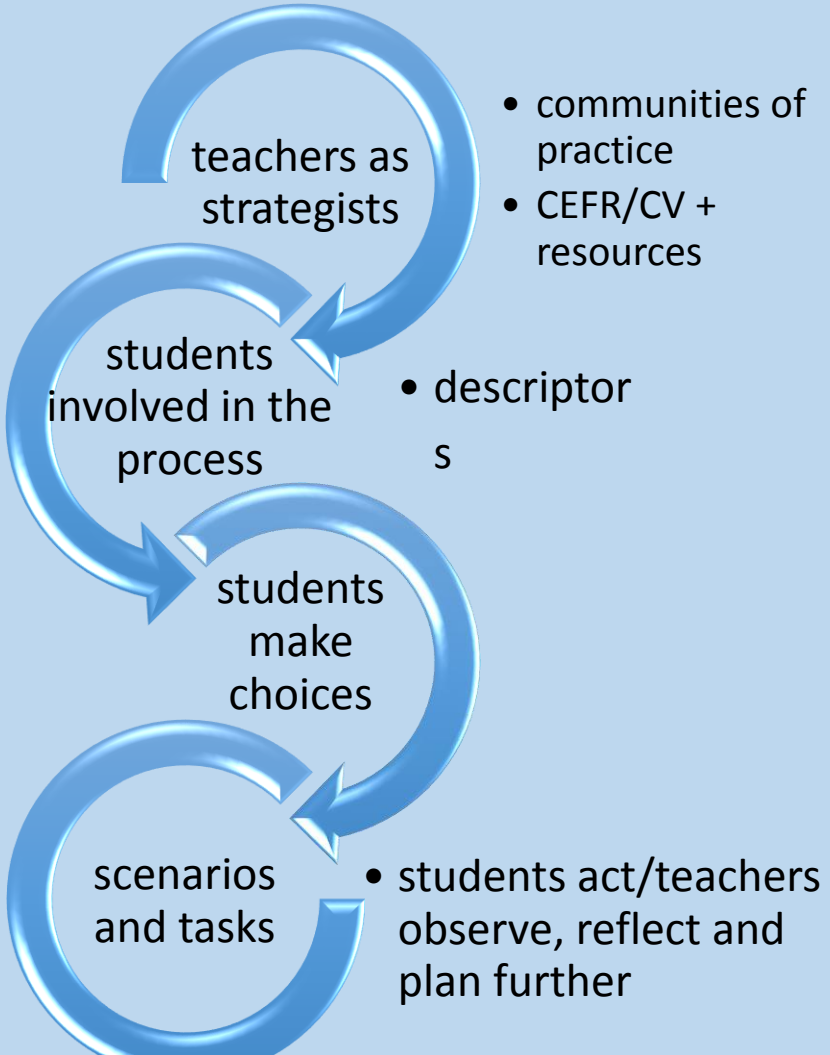
The action-oriented approach:

An iterative, strategic process of:

planning
doing
reflecting
acting
+
sharing



Implications of the AoA for the class

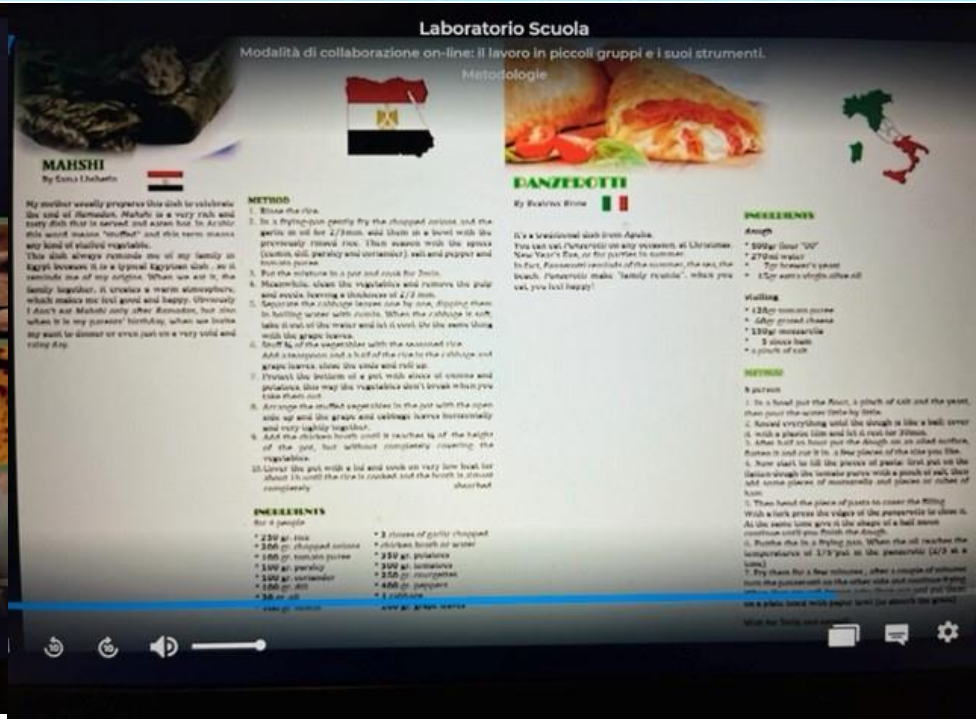
- ***real and meaningful*** language learning
- fosters ***self-directed learning*** & encourages flexibility, creativity, versatility
- ***changes the teacher's role*** → coach, facilitator, resource person, advisor, organizer
- encourages ***lifelong language learning*** & appreciation for the cultural diversity of self and others

Laboratorio Scuola
Modalità di collaborazione on-line: il lavoro in piccoli gruppi e i suoi strumenti.
Metodologie
-04:36

Modalità di collaborazione on-line: il lavoro in piccoli gruppi e i suoi strumenti.
Metodologie
FEELINGS
Book
My
FEELINGS
BOOK
My feelings book
Angry
sad
dance
FEELINGS
BOOK!

Laboratorio Scuola
Modalità di collaborazione on-line: il lavoro in piccoli gruppi e i suoi strumenti.
Metodologie
JE SUIS AU SEPTIEME CIEL!
C'EST FANTASTIQUE!
QUAND ON EST CONTENT·E
ON PLEURE
ON EST ACTIVE

The action-oriented approach: From theory to practice



Action, Inclusivity, Plurilingualism, Collaboration

"the important thing is to be aware, and also because they can be the actors of their learning process themselves. *They don't depend on others because they could be more responsible of what they're doing and how"*

And the final prototype, … they have to write a very little book that was their feelings book. And there were many different books. Some of them realized very interesting things and with pictures of them and with the different pictures and the feelings that are related to that picture. Some of them also added the Arabic words about the feelings and so it was totally creative, and they were totally their own creations, and they were very proud of it.

I have got students with different origins and some of them used the language they speak at home … for example, a Brazilian student. She really wanted to add the Portuguese to her poster. Even if she we of course don't teach it. So it was really nice to see how she could also translate that for her classmates. *And also translating from Portuguese to English. We are of course Italian mother tongue,* so was quite quite challenging for them and very nice for me … to see they really … added something personal. *It was, I think the best part of it."*

the students with special needs really wanted to participate and to take the same part as all the other ones. And so, they did everything, *and they want it to ask and be asked for help. And so, they went out of the class to repeat it before shooting the little video because they really wanted to do that. And if that video was not good enough, they wanted to repeat it and I said: "OK, come on, you're not an actor." So it doesn't matter, but they wanted it and they did it over and over and again. And so it was really inclusive, really inclusive."*

Teachers and learners should be equipped and empowered to take intelligent decisions in the light of learner needs, interests, characteristics and resources. Trim, 2011

Thank you

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