

# Action-oriented approaches being at the heart of the action

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<b>Potential impact</b>	medium
<b>Timescale</b>	ongoing
<b>Keywords</b>	action-oriented, scenarios, task-based, community-based

## What is it?

An action-oriented approach views

“Users and learners of a language primarily as ‘social agents’, i.e. members of society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action. While acts of speech occur within language activities, these activities form part of a wider social context, which alone is able to give them their full meaning” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 9).

As ‘social agents’, learners fully engage in meaningful real-life situations to which they learn to respond in a wholly cognitive and emotional manner, mobilizing their unique linguistic and sociocultural repertoires. Here, the notion of ‘task’ goes beyond the mere notion of a communicative activity to encompass the realization of projects or problems to be solved rooted in reality, socially, and culturally situated, through a set of targeted and concerted ‘social’ actions, ‘not exclusively language-related’, to achieve a clearly defined objective. Whether

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within the community in a community-based approach, or in the classroom, itself perceived as a mini-society with a social dimension (Puren, 2009), learners engage and collaborate with peers and others as they mobilize and acquire prior and new skills, knowledge, values, and know-how to solve real-life problems. Communication is not the goal, it is the means, along with critical thinking, self-reflection, creativity, and adaptability, to achieve the task.

It is because the action-oriented approach takes us closer to the authenticity of language exchanges, grounded in the complexity of the sociocultural realities of learners, of the tasks to complete and of the different contextual environments, that it is both so inspiring and so contemporary. Indeed, in an era where social media are omnipresent and there is an overload of information, the issue is no longer that of communicating with others. Working with others and collaborating with others “is the condition for a true understanding of the other” (Puren, 2006, p. 38). The action-oriented approach is a reflection of this societal transformation.

### Examples

The first example illustrates how a community-based program for English language learners integrates an action-oriented approach to actively engage late arriving immigrant and refugee high school students in the United States to learn a new language, explore a new culture, and develop a sense of belonging in their new community. The [Linking Learning, Belonging and Community](#) program funded by a National Leadership Grant of the Institute of Museum and Library Services, is an inter-institutional project offered in public libraries, generally identified as inclusive centers for learning and community connectedness.

The design of the curriculum activities is based on technology-based and action-oriented projects, to develop language competencies along with skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, leadership, and adaptability. The student-led projects prompt students to explore their new cultural environment, ask questions to community members, and take risks in their learning while offering them opportunities for reflection and dialog. This approach incorporates the sociocultural values and perspectives of the students and their own ethnic/

cultural backgrounds and brings them awareness of their new environment and culture. The personal and psychological benefits of collective problem solving that this project offers especially help the students to expand their social networks, build social capital, and begin to fulfill the fundamental human need to belong. The community-based activities also include student-led facilitated issues forums in which parents and community members are invited to participate. This dialog helps youth appreciate the value of their parents' culturally traditional approaches and help parents understand that their children are trying to find solutions acceptable in both their worlds.

### **Example of a scenario: Navigating my neighborhood community**

- Your group is tasked to report about an association/organization of your neighborhood community that offers services and social activities for youth and families, as well as opportunities to be more involved in the life of the community. You will present and discuss this report to your peers, families, and community members.
- Explore and select one community association/organization.
- Collect and organize information about it.
- Identify opportunities of community and civic engagement in this association/organization
- Create a multimedia report to discuss in a visually engaging way the information you have collected, synthesized, and organized.

The second example comes from the Canadian Research Council funded research project – LINGuistic and Cultural DIversity Reinvente ([LINCDIRE](#)). Based on an action-oriented approach, LINCDIRE embraces plurilingualism at its core by recognizing and mobilizing the unique linguistic and cultural repertoires of students in the language classroom. The process of language

learning is organized around scenarios that lead students to accomplish real-life tasks and produce significant artifacts (see a collection of scenarios developed by language teachers: <https://lite.lincoreproject.org/all-scenarios/>).

## Benefits

As learners actively engage in solving real-life problems or in creating purposeful projects, they not only are involved in meaningful communication, they are exposed to cognitively challenging content while searching, assessing, and organizing resources and information to achieve the tasks. Processing this content requires complex and higher-order thinking, allowing for learners to engage in meaningful and authentic intellectual work. Manipulating, transforming, synthesizing, explaining, and interpreting meaningful information, enhance knowledge retention, and understanding, and offer better chances to result in greater student engagement and academic achievement (European Commission, 2018; Holm, 2011; Newmann & Wehlage, 1993; Zohar & Dori, 2003).

Furthermore, an action-oriented curriculum, culturally inclusive as it takes into consideration the sociocultural values and perspectives of the student and his/her community, is conducive to improved learning outcomes. It helps develop a positive sense of self for the learner, whose multicultural and plurilingual identity is valued and respected (Cummins, 2011; Cummins & Early, 2011).

Finally, more than language skills, by placing the learner at the heart of the action, the action-oriented approach creates an environment and a dynamic conducive to the development of lifelong learning skills such as critical and creative thinking, resilience, intercultural competence, and autonomy (Little, 2006).

## Potential issues

As Piccardo and North (2019) point out, although since the publication of the definition of the action-oriented approach by the Council of Europe (2001) many language teachers have intuitively implemented this approach, current language

education still relies largely on methodologies removed from meaningful social interaction. Professional development to operate this social and real-life oriented shift is essential, and a challenge. Designing relevant real-life scenarios with all the core components of an action-oriented approach, transforming the roles of learners into social agents and teachers into facilitators, and assessing learning are difficult challenges.

## Looking to the future

Multiple factors, including important research in the field of cognitive development and neuroscience, have accumulated evidence of the importance of developing global and intercultural competencies to thrive in our globalized world. New access to opportunities and learning experiences offered by the Internet and current technologies point to a promising future for action-oriented approaches.

Social media and Web 2.0 technology have opened language classrooms to the world, enabling language teachers and learners from all over the globe to interact with others, work on collaborative and interdisciplinary projects, acquire new knowledge and a better understanding of other ways of seeing the world, and develop greater cognitive flexibility, better problem solving, higher thinking skills and creative thinking. iEARN-International Education and Resource Network, eTwinning, BabelWeb, or the project e-lang are excellent examples of platforms facilitating such collaborations.

From ‘learner’ to ‘user’ and ‘social agent’, the language learner is at the heart of the action.

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## Chapter 14. Action-oriented approaches

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## Resource

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You can find some action-oriented scenarios by CEFR level by Lite, the LINCIRE online portfolio here: <https://lite.lincoreproject.org/all-scenarios/>



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