API EDUCATION FORUM

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Stepping back to move forward: redefining the teacher role whilst empowering students through the implementation of the action-oriented approach in the language classroom

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The "action-oriented" approach (AoA) to the teaching of languages fundamentally changes the role of both language learner and teacher in the language classroom through its perspective of learners as "social agents", who collaborate in accomplishing authentic, real-world tasks or projects to produce artifacts. Whilst the innovation of the AoA is broadly recognised in the literature, systemic challenges relating to the complexity of the CEFR documents, constraints of external testing, and ideological and pedagogical beliefs continue to discourage increased application of the AoA in the language classroom. Consequently, further empirical evidence is required in order to increase understanding of how this approach operates in practice, and therefore to contribute to pedagogical innovation.

This presentation outlines the preliminary findings from an empirical study exploring both the conceptualisation and the implementation of the AoA in classroom practice. The study addresses the over-arching question: "What are the affordances of the action-oriented approach, the implied pedagogy of the CEFR, in engaging and motivating students in their foreign language learning experience?"

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus teacher observations and student focus groups at two language centres in France, involving directors, and both practitioners and non-practitioners of the AoA. The lens of third generation activity theory is used to guide this analysis of the complexity of educational change through its focus on the interdependency of the various influencing factors in human ecological systems. Although data analysis is ongoing, initial findings at this stage suggest several important insights. The first is a conspicuous lack of consensus among educators regarding the defining characteristics and conceptualisation of the AoA, with several expressing the belief that this approach implies neglect of explicit grammar instruction. The second finding links the use of the AoA to the teacher's willingness to adopt the role of facilitator, rather than the traditional role implying a teacher-centred classroom. Early data implies that this pedagogical flexibility is associated with prior experience, as the majority of focus teachers had taught pre-literate refugee children and adolescents, for whom traditional teaching methods are less successful due to unfamiliarity with learning in a classroom environment. I will argue that while the use of the AoA empowers learners and builds linguistic confidence, this empowerment necessitates a profound but flexible shift in teacher identity.

And here is some information about the speaker:

Beverley Peet is a PhD candidate at the University of Wollongong, Australia, where she works as a tutor in French & also teaches Foundation Studies to both domestic and international students at UOW College. In her early 20's whilst living in Paris, she completed a diploma in Classical Literature and Linguistics at the Sorbonne. She completed a Master of Education (TESOL) in 2021 at UOW, and this inspired her to embark on a doctorate in the area of foreign language teaching and learning, as languages have been a life-long passion. She speaks both French and Spanish. Prior to this she spent many years as a high school teacher of French, English and music. She completed her fieldwork in France in 2023 at two university language centres.