

We Need to Align Our Classroom Tasks with ACTFL & CEFR Can-Do Descriptors so that Our TBLT Programs are Chock-full of Proficiency Indicators

Paula Winke

Michigan State University

Task-based language teaching is synonymous with language instruction that has a goal to increase the general language proficiency of students as they progress through the program. The key to this symbiotic relationship is the articulation of proficiency-oriented tasks across the program's courses that guide teaching and evaluation (see Calvert & Sheen, 2014; Norris, 2015; Van Gorp & Deygers, 2013). Language programs that outline increasingly higher-order (more complex, challenging, diverse, and culturally rich) tasks as students progress through the language program can use spoken and written language elicited through task performance to chart and measure proficiency growth. This is because any task can be an assessment: The trick is how to assess, as knighting a task as a "test" may change the way students prioritize their task-based performance goals (Skehan, 2018), and thus influence their performance. The key may be tag all classroom tasks along proficiency scale continua, and to test through tasks as often as possible (and through in a large variety of ways) so that the assessments are indistinguishable from learning. The goal is for all tasks to be proficiency indicators, which would make all tasks truly *formative* assessment-wise.

In addition to tagging tasks for proficiency level and using them throughout the course as formative assessments, educators should also consider assigning (and measuring their students' performances) on tasks that are *well below* the learners' expected or targeted proficiency levels. This needs to be done for two reasons: First, individuals in language classes can be at very different levels of proficiency, so dips into lower-level tasks may be needed for instruction to be as beneficial as possible for all. And second, even after evidence of task-mastery, students need practice to fully master the task genre, that is, to be able to perform similarly well on related tasks.

I will overview how and why language classes, especially at upper levels of instruction, need to be chock-full of tasks that align with a wide variety of proficiency indicators. I discuss how the ACTFL and CEFR scales and their Can-Do descriptors can help with this work (i.e., ACTFL's Can-Do Statements, 2017; the Council of Europe European Language Portfolio <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio>; Little, 2009). Language classes can be terribly heterogeneous, even when placement tests are sound and promotion between levels within a program are hard earned. I will show data from the Language Flagship Proficiency Initiative at Michigan State University that suggests that individuals in upper-level classes may not have mastered tasks taught in lower-level classes, a striking finding that surprised educators in our foreign language programs. The upshot is that upper-level language learners may still need instruction in basic communicative tasks that are further down on the language proficiency scale, but this practice can co-occur as they learn to perform academically and culturally challenging upper-level tasks.