

Language-sensitive teaching of so-called non-language subjects: a

checklist¹ Use of language by the subject teacher (2/7)

The following checklist is intended for subject teachers who would like to reflect more closely on the language dimension of their own teaching and its implications for their students' development of subject literacy. The checklist can also be used as a tool for mutual classroom observation and discussion among subject teachers within a school. It is NOT meant as an instrument for external evaluation. The checklist consists of statements related to different aspects of classroom language use:

1. Transparency of language requirements in setting up attainment targets and tasks for subject specific learning;
2. Use of language by the subject teacher;
3. Classroom interaction and opportunities for the students to speak;
4. Scaffolding academic discourse skills, strategies and genres;
5. Linguistic appropriateness of materials (texts, different media, teaching/learning materials);
6. Linguistic aspects of evaluating academic language and content achievement; 7.

Incorporating Multilingual Aspects in so-called non-linguistic subjects. Each of the statements, when considered to hold true or applicable for one's own teaching, can be ticked off. Those statements that do not apply (yet) may give rise to further reflection by the individual teacher or discussions with colleagues. Based on the advice of subject teachers, we have deliberately kept the checklist simple and avoided using scales. But if there is a demand for scales, these could be easily created, for example from 1 to 4, as a tool for drawing up profiles of the strengths and weaknesses of a teacher's language-sensitive content teaching. Such a procedure would also allow subject teachers to map the degree of progress made in specific areas of pedagogical action – provided the checklist is applied repeatedly with the purpose of devising a more differentiated agenda for further professional development. Some of the statements may be more relevant than others. Some of them may not apply at all for a specific subject area or a specific pedagogical purpose. Still others could be added by subject teachers when they critically reflect on the language dimension of their own or their colleagues' teaching practice.

NB: This list is extracted from Beacco, J.-C., Fleming, M., Goullier, F., Thürmann, E. & Vollmer, H. J. (2016), *The Language Dimension in All Subjects. A Handbook for Curriculum Development and Teacher Training*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, pp. 149-155. (ISBN 978-92-871-8456-6).

Downloadable under:

<https://rm.coe.int/a-handbook-for-curriculum-development-and-teacher-training-the-languag/16806af387>

¹ An extended version of this checklist has been published in German: Thürmann, Eike and Vollmer, Helmut Johannes (2012), "Schulsprache und Sprachsensibler Fachunterricht: Eine Checkliste mit Erläuterungen", in Röhner C. and Hövelbrinks B. (eds.), *Fachbezogene Sprachförderung in Deutsch als Zweitsprache*, Juventa, Weinheim, pp. 212-233.

2. USE OF LANGUAGE BY THE SUBJECT TEACHER

- 2.1. In my teaching, I use linguistic means and strategies in a very reflective way. I choose different language registers that are functional and appropriate for different teaching situations. *I distinguish between an informal, everyday language register (e.g. when the organisation of the learning process is being negotiated), a more formal register of general academic language (e.g. when learning paths and negotiation of meaning are at stake), and a subject-specific register to establish cognitive concepts, e.g. by applying subject-specific terminology ("mass" instead of "weight") or by providing collocational expressions ("exerting force on something" in physics).*
- 2.2. I am aware that imagery, figurative expressions, metaphors, idiomatic phrases and elements of a regional dialect, also irony and/or sarcasm are not easy to understand and to process for many students. Therefore, I mainly use topic- and process-related neutral expressions in situations of formal teaching.
- 2.3. My students need a model for their own academic language development. I provide students with such language elements (general academic words and expressions, subject-specific terminology and set phrases) by integrating them into my own language performance as a teacher, *e.g. I use thinking-aloud techniques making inner monologues public, emphasise specific patterns, structures and linguistic means through intonation and body language, repeat and paraphrase relevant language material to direct their attention and to facilitate their language intake.*
- 2.4. I consciously support important statements, requests or questions with appropriate sentence intonation and gestures so that students can assess the general message even if they do not understand the details.

- 2.5. I adapt my speech tempo and the use of language means as far as feasible to the competence level of my students: *simplifications like "motherese" or "teach-speak" do not really help students to develop academic literacy. Therefore, in situations of formal content teaching, I choose expressions slightly above the students' competence level for them to adopt such language patterns. On the other hand, I know which of the students have difficulty following the oral interaction in the classroom. I use simple, short sentences when dealing with these learners and – when necessary – informal, colloquial words.*
- 2.6. I normally use a broad range of different non-verbal techniques, signalling important aspects of content as well as transitions from one topic to another, or from one phase of teaching to the next, *e.g. by vocal control and modulation, reduced tempo of speech, lowering or raising the voice, and repetition, gestures, and body language.*
- 2.7. I try to make difficult areas of subject-specific content comprehensible by using redundancy or by intensifying my verbal investment, *e.g. repetition, rephrasing, paraphrasing, extending meaning, exemplifying and/or giving more concrete examples, summarising and repeating the main points.*
- 2.8. For the cognitive guidance of the students as well as for facilitating comprehension, I often use "announcing" and "discourse-commenting" words and expressions, *e.g. expressions like "and this is particularly important now" or "we will deal with this on Monday in more detail", back- or forward-references like "please recall what we said about the structure of a lab report".*
- 2.9. When communicating important content to the students in writing, I make coherent statements and take particular care to use appropriate expressions and to avoid slips of the pen and spelling mistakes. My writing serves as a model for the students to adopt for their own use, *e.g. I try to avoid using lists of keywords in writing on the blackboard, transparencies, computer projections or work sheets; I also pay attention to the basic rules of punctuation and let students "check" my texts.*
- 2.10. According to the students' needs and the subject-specific demands of teaching targets, I play different roles, *e.g. as a person providing information or giving linguistic help or structuring cognitive processes.*