

Language-sensitive teaching of so-called non-language subjects: a checklist¹

Linguistic aspects of evaluating academic language and content achievement (6/7)

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.

6. LINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF DIAGNOSING AND ASSESSING CONTENT AND LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENT

6.1 I am aware of the fact that within the usual forms of subject-based assessment of achievement and evaluation, linguistic aspects play a large role – although in many cases implicitly. Nevertheless, I also use task formats that explicitly require the connected and detailed development of ideas and thought in writing down utterances and also in oral presentations. Following assessment, I give feedback to the students not only about subject-specific content, but also about the language and textual aspects of their performance.

6.2 I regularly give qualitative feedback to students about the language aspects of their performance, e.g. in their folders for homework, comments on their portfolio work and texts, also after lessons commenting on language aspects of oral interaction and presentation. I point out ways and means to expand their language repertoires.

6.3 I see to it that subject-specific achievements on the part of the students are also produced in a written form with an acceptable degree of linguistic and textual appropriateness.

6.4 I present my evaluation of the students' achievement and their language-learning progress at least once a semester in a written account that is transparent and comprehensible for the students and their parents.

6.5 In my school and for my subject we have agreed to design a comparative test for parallel classes (courses) to make sure that language development progresses according to age and subject-specific demands.

6.6 For each year at our school, we have clearly defined the language requirements that our students should have acquired and mastered by the end so that they can successfully follow the curriculum in mainstream classes.