

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

## checklist<sup>1</sup> Transparency of language requirements (1/7)

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>

<sup>1</sup> 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.

## 1. TRANSPARENCY OF LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS IN SETTING UP ATTAINMENT TARGETS AND TASKS FOR SUBJECT-SPECIFIC LEARNING

- 1.1. At the beginning of each teaching unit, I usually explain the intended learning goals and comment on the specific language requirements for reaching these goals, *e.g. in the form of advance organisers with a double focus on content and language.*
- 1.2. I make sure that the students have clearly understood what the content and the language goals are, *e.g. by asking questions to check understanding and by encouraging students to ask questions for clarification when they are in doubt. My students can expect that I am willing to rephrase learning goals in a language they can understand.*
- 1.3. When setting tasks or giving assignments, I take particular care to clarify the kind of oral or written verbal action that is necessary for achieving learning goals. My students are familiar with a set of verbs defining specific cognitive as well as linguistic operations, *e.g. summarise, characterise, outline.* Through the reflective and repeated use of such "operators", learners know which cognitive, linguistic and textual strategies are expected. *I work with a manageable inventory of operators (not more than 12), the meanings of which have been discussed and clarified with the students.*
- 1.4. When setting more complex tasks that leave room for individual problem solving and which take up a longer period of time to solve, I communicate these tasks in writing and propose a series of steps that might be useful for problem solving. For each step, I explicitly indicate language demands and cognitive requirements.
- 1.5. When planning my courses, I take particular care to expand the students' academic language competences. In doing so I consider:
  - (a) *cognitive-linguistic functions: e.g. negotiating, naming/defining, describing / presenting, explaining, arguing, evaluating, modelling, simulating.*
  - (b) *Genres relevant for my subject area: e.g. description of an experiment, writing minutes, analysing a newspaper article, giving a PowerPoint presentation, retrieving information from factual prose.*
  - (c) *Communicative skills: listening (comprehension), reading (comprehension), connected speech, talking with one another (dialogue), writing/text production.*
- 1.6. At the end of a teaching unit, I discuss with my students whether the content and language goals have been reached or not, why and what the consequences and next steps should be.