

# Language-sensitive teaching of so-called non-language subjects: a checklist<sup>1</sup>

## Classroom interaction and opportunities for the students to speak (3/7)

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>

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<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.

### 3. CLASSROOM INTERACTION AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE STUDENTS TO SPEAK

- 3.1. I control my own share of speech in the classroom so that there is more time for contributions on the part of the students. I am aware that teachers normally take up a high proportion of classroom talking time (on average between 60% and 80%), and that they underestimate their own share and overestimate the students' share. Therefore, I carefully reflect on what to say when and how.
- 3.2. For the sake of language learners, oral interaction in my classroom is slowed down. I leave enough time for the learners to construct meaningful and complex utterances. Normally I wait for 3 to 5 seconds after I have asked a question or have stimulated a response before a student is given a turn. My students need time to think about how they can express their thoughts and ideas in a coherent way. This prevents me from firing quick successions of questions at my students. In addition to allowing adequate time for students' verbal (re-)actions, I often provide them with structural frames, sentence stems and patterns for complex utterances that they can use for various purposes in classroom interaction.
- 3.3. I arrange my questions and impulses for the students in an open way so that they cannot respond with single words or gestures only. During classroom talk, I avoid scripted questions and patterns of a triadic dialogue (IRF cycles = initiation, response, feedback). Such patterns force students into a reactive role and complicate, if not block, further development of their academic language competences because they are not supposed to speak in an extended and connected way, and they do not learn how to open a subject-specific discourse nor how to influence its course.
- 3.4. I give corrective feedback only when language performance has a function for reaching particular subject-specific goals.
- 3.5. I deal respectfully with students' contributions when they are inappropriate in content or language terms and try to motivate them for self- or peer-correction, *e.g. by repeating elements of a student's utterance with a question intonation, by using a questioning body gesture, by asking for clarification or for a revised formulation, or by involving other students for help.*
- 3.6. In my teaching, students are motivated and supported to play different communicative roles, *e.g. as a reporter, moderator, language guard during group/project work.*

- 3.7. In structuring my lessons, I often leave room for writing. This allows students to think about what they want to express and how they can use language in a coherent and meaningful way. Writing allows students to read their own texts more than once with a critical attitude. They have the opportunity to experiment with language, identify inappropriate words and grammar, improve their arguments – not only by themselves, but also as a collaborative activity. Writing also has a positive effect on their oral language and leads to a deeper cognitive processing of complex topics and problems.
- 3.8. In order to achieve subject-specific attainment targets, I frequently use open-task formats: these accelerate the development towards cognitive-academic language proficiency. Closed formats, on the other hand, tend to fossilise the achieved language levels and support mainly the learning of factual knowledge.
- 3.9. My teaching units always include some tasks that challenge higher-order thinking skills and require extended discourse in writing: learning results and task solutions are discussed individually or in class including language aspects. I also make use of writing-to-learn techniques such as "Textlupe" (textual magnifying glass), "Writing beyond the margin...", the "Four Square Writing Method", etc.
- 3.10. I increase the linguistic "turnover" within my content classroom by planning tasks and forms of work that require a high degree of verbal effort and which, at the same time, students find motivating, *e.g. use of prepared and structured debates, role plays, simulations, presentations in connection with peer evaluation, drama, web quests, and interviews with real or fictional experts for the issues in question.*
- 3.11. Exercises and group work are organised in such a way that students can engage in verbal exchange and learn from one another, *e.g. through pair work, joint construction of meaning/solutions, peer editing, peer tutoring, think-pair-share techniques, and peer teaching.*
- 3.12. My subject classroom is organised in such a way that linguistic and communicative needs are supported, *e.g. on the black- or whiteboard there is always a defined space reserved for goal-related language tips and reminders; special seating arrangements make communication easier for work groups or for plenary work; authentic texts are enlarged and put on the wall as "decoration" or "ornaments" together with successful examples of students' writing; rules for classroom interaction are also put up visibly.*
- 3.13. At least once per semester, I organise a project with my students in which they can experience and prove their communicative competences through contact with life outside school, *e.g. investigations or interviews in relevant areas of work and society; co-operative actions/joint ventures with other educational institutions like universities or with local commerce; participation in competitions – possibly also transnational projects – with partner schools in other countries.*