Language-sensitive teaching of so-called non-language subjects: a checklist[1]

Linguistic appropriateness of materials (5/7)

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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[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.

5. LINGUISTIC APPROPRIATENESS OF MATERIALS (TEXTS, DIFFERENT MEDIA, TEACHING/LEARNING MATERIALS)

5.1 I give students the opportunity to identify language difficulties in dealing with teaching materials and to ask for support.

5.2 In my subject teaching, I support students by making them aware of specific learning techniques and skills so that they can overcome language barriers on their own, especially in reading subject-based texts for information and problem solving, *e.g. inferencing the meaning of words from the context ("intelligent guessing"), deconstruction of syntactically complex utterances/sentences, awareness of elements of word composition, making use of other languages, etc.*

5.3 In case I cannot do without the use of a linguistically "difficult" text for subject-specific reasons, I will offer and provide appropriate forms of help, *e.g. through pre-reading activities, thematically oriented work on word fields, with diagrams or pictures, etc. – but no use of alphabetically organised word lists!*

5.4 In my subject teaching, I increasingly use non-linguistic semiotic systems, especially focusing on their verbalisation or the "translation" of given information from one mode of representation to another, *e.g. films, pictures, schemata, diagrams, statistical material – transforming the content of these forms of representing meaning into other forms, adapting them for different groups of audiences, etc.*

5.5 In my subject classroom, materials of a cognitively challenging nature and/or as support for independent work are permanently available, *e.g. handbooks, encyclopaedias, subject-specific dictionaries, different types of atlases, maps and computers with Internet access.*

5.6 I frequently offer diverse reading activities in order to practice different reading attitudes and different reading strategies and techniques, depending on the respective goals or purposes for reading and learning, *e.g. selective, sequential, diagonal, cursory, intensive or critical types of reading.*