



# BUILDING BLOCKS FOR PLANNING LANGUAGE-SENSITIVE TEACHER EDUCATION:

## 4 - HOW CAN MODULES IN TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES BE DESIGNED TO PREPARE TEACHERS FOR LANGUAGE-SENSITIVE EDUCATION?

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## Building block 4

### HOW CAN MODULES IN TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES BE DESIGNED TO PREPARE TEACHERS FOR LANGUAGE-SENSITIVE EDUCATION?

#### What is the purpose of this Building block?

This Building block offers guidelines for teacher educators to develop and adapt modules to include language-sensitive aspects. Both curriculum planners and teacher educators may be concerned with including language-sensitive elements in the modules, in order to foster students' awareness of language sensitivity during their studies and promote the students' critical understanding of the role of language and language sensitivity with regard to different subject matters.

#### Who is this Building block for?

- teacher educators (pre-service and in-service) at all levels and for all subjects
- curriculum planners and curriculum developers for teacher education

To use this Building block, some familiarity with language-sensitive education is recommended. Stakeholders with little background in language education are invited to cooperate with colleagues more experienced in this area.

#### The main objectives:

- to reflect on the integration of language-sensitive aspects in a module for teacher education;
- to familiarise oneself with the necessary steps when creating or adapting a module in teacher education to prepare (future) teachers for language-sensitive education.

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## CONTENTS

- A. Introduction** – contains a definition of how we use the term 'module', as well as information and tasks on how different kinds of modules can prepare teachers for language-sensitive education.
  - B. Examples of modules** – contains a presentation and activities based on course descriptions of three teacher education modules.
  - C. Reviewing a module to incorporate or strengthen language-sensitive elements: Questions for a quick start** – contains a brief summary of the Building block in the form of six questions.
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## A. Introduction

### What is language-sensitive education?

To review or create teacher education modules for language-sensitive education, it is useful to consider and agree on a definition of the term. The definition offered below can serve as a starting point:

The term ‘language-sensitive education’ describes an inclusive approach to teaching any subject: teachers help their learners to deal with the language demands of learning tasks so that, whatever their language and/or social background, all learners can make the most of their education.

For a more detailed discussion of what language-sensitive education involves, users are invited to refer to [Building block 1](#).

### What do we mean by modules?

This Building block is about modules in teacher education. We understand ‘*module*’ as part of a teacher education curriculum that can consist of one or more courses; often, the two terms are used synonymously, such as a first year module/course on pedagogical psychology, an introductory module/course on applied linguistics in one’s fourth or fifth semester (term), or a subject specific module on the teaching methodology of any subject, such as geography, the language of schooling, or a foreign language. Modules often span one or two semesters and are typically under the responsibility of one or more teacher educators. These educators can often decide on aspects of the content and the methodology they use, and perhaps its overall content. They may work on their own or share responsibility for a module with colleagues.

While most examples in this Building block are geared towards initial teacher education, we think that they are also relevant and helpful for addressing language-sensitive education in in-service / continuous professional development contexts.

### What typical kinds of modules are there in teacher education, and how can they contribute to language-sensitive education?

At the level of modules, there are two main ways in which language-sensitive education can be catered for in teacher education:

- teacher educators can **review and adapt** an existing module to include aspects of language education;
- teacher educators can **create** one or more new modules that focus specifically on language-sensitive education.

To consider the options in more detail, it is useful to start with an overview of the modules in one’s teacher education curriculum. Table 1 illustrates a range of typical modules in a generic teacher education curriculum for teachers of one or more subject(s) in obligatory schooling. The three columns cover three subjects: geography (which is used here as an example of a subject other than languages), the language of schooling and a foreign language. The rows are organized by traditional areas of professional competences, based on the notion of “teacher professional knowledge” (Shulman, 1987), and contain indicative titles of teacher education modules.

	Subject other than languages (e.g. geography)	Language of schooling as a subject	Foreign language
General pedagogy and psychology modules	Introduction to educational studies/pedagogy, introduction to learning psychology, educational psychology, special needs education, general methodology (e.g. classroom management), ...		
Subject modules	Physical geography, human geography, technical geography, ...	Linguistics, literature, cultural studies, ...	Linguistics, literature, cultural studies, ...
Subject-specific methodology modules	Geography teaching methodology, geography teaching practicum, ...	Language of schooling teaching methodology, language of schooling teaching practicum, ...	Foreign language teaching methodology, foreign language teaching practicum, ...
Your ideas			

**Table 1: Examples of teacher education modules for three subjects**

Most teacher education curricula contain modules covering general aspects of pedagogy, psychology and related disciplines, which in many cases are offered to (future) teachers of different subjects. The modules concerned with specific subjects and disciplines are organized in different forms. In many contexts, teachers complete a degree (e.g. a Bachelor or Master degree, often depending on the target level of teaching they qualify for) in one or more subjects in higher education before studying to become a teacher at a separate teacher education department, or even a different university. In other contexts, the subject/disciplinary modules are offered within an institution that specializes in teacher education. A broad offer of subject modules is a characteristic component of curricula for secondary teachers, while they may be less prominent in primary education, especially for teachers who will teach all subjects across the curriculum. The modules concerned with subject-specific methodology and teaching practice are intended to build on the competences that students have acquired in general pedagogy, psychology and also subject-specific courses and to 'distil' and 'channel' these competences into the specific professional competences required by teachers, whatever subject they teach.

### Discussion questions

- a) To what extent does the categorization of disciplines and modules correspond to your context? Could you think of further subcategories of modules (further rows in the table), or alternative ways of categorizing and visualizing the content and the target competences of teacher education? If so, which ones?**
- b) Consider the modules in the first row ('general pedagogical knowledge'). In what ways can they contribute to language-sensitive education?**

### Commentary

General theories of learning often incorporate language and communication, as language is important in most psychological and educational theories, and also a key aspect of ‘general didactics/methodology’, including classroom management, counselling students, interacting with parents, resolving problems and dealing with conflicts, etc.. For instance, in developmental psychology, the extent to which language and cognitive development is intertwined can prepare teachers for appreciating the importance of appropriate levels of language to support learning. Moreover, the importance of safe and supportive learning environments, a topic with important implications for classroom management, influences how teachers should cater for learners who need specific support and scaffolding to feel comfortable participating in class.

In recent years, some teacher education institutions have also introduced modules with a specific focus on the language dimension of learning. Examples of module titles are ‘Communication in education’, ‘Language education’ or ‘Applied linguistics for all teachers’. Often, the focus is on the learning of the language of schooling, but also on other languages, such as home languages and foreign languages. Tables 3 and 4 in section B below illustrate two such modules.

- c) Now consider the subject of geography, or any other subject of your choice other than languages. What kind of subject (e.g. geography) module would you create or adapt to include language sensitivity?**

### Commentary

The answer will probably depend on the number and content of the existing modules. In modules with a focus on content knowledge, an explicit focus on the terminology and text types associated with the subject is likely to prepare future teachers for an understanding of the language dimension of the subject – as a basis for the language-sensitive teaching of the subject. This implies that in the tertiary teaching of all academic disciplines, students should be able to become aware of the language dimension of the disciplines. In the subject-specific methodology modules, (future) teachers can engage with concrete teaching and learning strategies for their subject. They learn about the typical discourse functions of their discipline and how to scaffold their learners’ learning of important geographical concepts. The exact choice and topics will depend on various aspects, including the amount of time available and of course the discipline itself. To define competence aims, the competence descriptors in [Building block 6](#) are a useful starting point.

- d) Table 1 also contains modules of exemplary language subjects, the language of schooling and a foreign language. How can these modules contribute to language sensitivity? What are some possible pitfalls?**

### Commentary

Some contributions and pitfalls are summarized in table 2 below:

<b><i>How these modules can contribute to language-sensitive education</i></b>	<b><i>Possible pitfalls to avoid</i></b>
Focus on a range of topics and competences related to language and cultural awareness	Narrow focus only on some aspects but excluding others, for instance overemphasizing

	language structure at the expense of discourse and text
Focus on metalinguistic and metacultural aspects of education and of the subjects involved	Narrow focus only on specific subjects or disciplines
Focus on beliefs related to language and language ideologies (e.g. prescriptivism, linguicism)	Avoiding engaging with language ideological debates
A pluralistic view of a range of languages and varieties relevant for learners and learning	Focusing only on one or few languages and varieties (such as the standard variety of the language of schooling, or a single foreign language) in an isolated way Lack of coordination between the curricula for different target languages, which may result in redundancy for teachers who study more than one language

**Table 2: Possible contributions of language subject modules to language sensitivity and possible pitfalls**

## B. Examples of modules

This section contains three examples of secondary school teacher education modules concerned with a) the language of schooling in teaching, b) profession-specific language competences of teachers in various subjects, c) an introduction to the academic discipline of linguistics for future teachers. The modules are exemplified by means of their course descriptions.

Below in Table 3, there is a short description of the module “Slovene for teachers”, which is offered to future secondary school teachers at the University of Ljubljana. The content includes various aspects ranging from information on the status and use of Slovene to various communicative strategies in the target language. It is offered as an optional (elective) course to future secondary school teachers of a range of subjects other than languages.

Further down in Table 4 is a description of the module “Profession-specific language competences”, a module offered to future secondary teachers of all subjects at the St. Gallen University of Teacher Education. One key aim of the course is to highlight the role of language as a means for teaching, as well as an instrument that both represents and constructs the subject matter in different disciplines.

Table 5 contains an account of the module “Introduction to Linguistics”, also from the St.Gallen University of Teacher Education. It is part of the curriculum for future lower secondary foreign language teachers, and approaches a range of linguistic sub-disciplines from a multilingual perspective, to equip teachers with competences for plurilingual and intercultural education.

***You are invited to read the module descriptions in Tables 3-5 with the following questions in mind:***

- 1. Do the courses described below cover language-sensitive education in a way that could be useful in your context?***

2. Which topic areas from these courses would you consider incorporating into the module that you are reviewing / revising?
3. Which profession-specific aspects do you think are missing, and how could they be embedded?

Course title	Slovene for teachers
Course content	<p>Role and position of the Slovene language;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Slovene as the language used for communication in the pedagogical process, social and functional types;</li> <li>- Relational speech; politeness and pragmatic clarity as selection criteria for the means of expression to create relationships in the classroom;</li> <li>- Cognitive speech: a relationship between statements and illustrative material; description; narration; explanation; justification;</li> <li>- Expression of logical relations with linguistic resources;</li> <li>- Communication – language – text;</li> <li>- Teacher’s preparation for oral presentation in the classroom; advantages and disadvantages of auditory transmission;</li> <li>- Pronunciation and rhetorics;</li> <li>- Principles of practical stylistics;</li> <li>- Conducting a conversation and participating in a discussion;</li> <li>- Forming and asking questions of different types and complexity;</li> <li>- Reading and writing of formal texts (e.g. correspondence with the ministry and parents);</li> <li>- Characteristics of scientific and popular science texts;</li> <li>- Writing a professional text;</li> <li>- Language manuals, corpora and other electronic resources and their use;</li> <li>- Active listening strategies;</li> <li>- Teaching reading strategies;</li> <li>- Guiding students in preparation of oral presentations and for participation in discussion;</li> <li>- Guiding students in the writing of a professional text.</li> </ul>

**Table 3: Module ‘Slovene for teachers’, University of Ljubljana**

Course title	Profession-specific language competences
Course aims	The aim of the module is to encourage teacher trainees to use language professionally and consciously in job-related contexts, so that they in turn can support their students in gaining awareness about the importance and use of language and communication in and beyond the schooling contexts.
Course description	The module addresses three perspectives to language in the classroom:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Language competences in the language of schooling (here German) which serve the teacher to perform their profession</li> <li>○ Language-sensitive teaching of all subjects</li> <li>○ The language of schooling as a reflection tool available to all students</li> </ul> <p>The course consists of the following five sub-modules, which are primarily based on the most common discourse functions performed by teachers and (eventually) learners in the classroom:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teachers' language skills needed specifically for teaching German as a second language</li> <li>2. Providing definitions and <b>giving explanations</b> [exemplified below]</li> <li>3. Naming and describing, reporting and narrating</li> <li>4. Arguing, judging and evaluating</li> <li>5. Simulating and modelling</li> </ol> <p>The learning aims can be acquired asynchronously, i.e. the sub-modules can be taught to different study groups in any given order.</p>
Transfer to other modules	<p>This module is an exemplification of a course which can be transferred to various other teaching contexts and adapted accordingly, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Adaptation to teacher education for primary or even tertiary level</li> <li>· Adaptation to contexts with different languages of schooling (other than German)</li> </ul>
Specific example: Giving explanations	<p>In the sub-module 'providing definitions and giving explanations', students learn amongst other things to describe the importance and functioning of explanatory processes in teaching and adapt and apply quality features of explanations to subject-specific contexts. As part of this focus, they are given the task to prepare a 3-minute explanation on any topic of interest from any subject matter. In the following session, they engage in an intensive group work in which each student presents their definition to the other group members, and they give each other critical feedback as to whether they could follow the explanation, whether the chosen topic becomes clear and what they could improve. In a second step, the groups study criteria of good explanations as provided by Leisen (2013, p. 29, "Kriterien guten Erklärens") and then re-assess the explanations according to such criteria. These criteria include for instance, providing orientation at the beginning of the explanation, well structured, simple language avoiding vagueness. This group exercise allows students to reflect on which aspects they naturally embed in their explanations and for which elements they must gain increased awareness.</p> <p>Source:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leisen, J. (2013). Trägst du noch vor oder erklärst du schon? <i>Naturwissenschaften im Unterricht. Physik</i>, 24(135/136), 26-32.</li> </ul>



**Table 4: Module on ‘Profession-specific language competences’, St. Gallen University of Teacher Education**

Course title	Introduction to Linguistics
Course aims	The aim of the course is to familiarise students with key areas of linguistics that are most relevant for a language-sensitive approach to foreign language teaching. These include aspects such as language structure (e.g. phonetics and phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics) as well as language use (e.g. pragmatics and discourse analysis). The course highlights relevance of linguistics for language teaching methodology, especially for the pluralistic approaches described in the <i>Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches</i> ) such as awakening to languages, intercomprehension, the intercultural approach, and the integrated didactic approach.
Course description	Basic skills in a range of linguistic sub-disciplines are developed with a focus on multi- and plurilingualism and cross-linguistic phenomena as well as phenomena relevant to teaching or language learning. The introduction to areas such as morphology/syntax, pragmatics and discourse analysis focuses on examples from French, English, Italian and further languages (especially prominent home languages in the local context) and on language use in intercultural contexts.
Transfer to other modules	First and foremost, this course is targeted at future teachers of foreign languages. The subject matter is also of interest to immersive or CLIL teaching of other subjects.
Specific example: Intercomprehension and morphology	Amongst other aspects, the course introduces the concept of “intercomprehension”, specifically focusing how our knowledge of set-up of words (morphology) can support us in our aims to understand related languages. For example, acknowledging frequent endings of nouns in one language (bound morphemes, suffixes) such as the English <i>-ity</i> as in <i>sensitivity, ability</i> , etc. may assist the process of not only understanding related patterns in French ( <i>-ité</i> in nouns such <i>normalité, continuité</i> , etc.) but also other languages. Recognizing linguistic regularities on all levels of languages (language structure, but also language use) is a special resource which students should be made aware of.

**Table 5: ‘Introduction to Linguistics’, St.Gallen University of Teacher Education**

You are also invited to refer to [Building block 3](#) for further examples of teacher education modules.

**C. Reviewing a module to incorporate or strengthen language-sensitive elements:  
Questions for a quick start**

*The following questions aim to guide the practical process of reviewing and/or creating a module (or a course) based on language-specific contents. Think of the detailed program for one of the courses you (co-)teach, or are involved in planning:*

- a) *What is the main topic of the module?*
- b) *Where would the module fit into Table 1 above?*
- c) *Who is responsible for the module? Who will be involved in the review and the redesign?*
- d) *Which parts of the module already contain elements relevant to language-sensitive education? If so, what aspects are addressed and for what purpose?*
- e) *In what way do you need to adapt your module to increase the attention to language-sensitive education?*
- f) *What help and advice would you need from your colleagues for this review?*

*For further activities related to reviewing and/or creating teacher education modules for language-sensitive education, you can refer to [Building block 6](#) and the [List of elements for language-sensitive teacher education](#).*

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## References

Shulman, Lee S. (1987). Knowledge and Teaching. Foundations of the New Reform. Harvard Educational Review, 57, 1-22.



[www.ecml.at/languagesensitiveteachereducation](http://www.ecml.at/languagesensitiveteachereducation)

**[www.ecml.at](http://www.ecml.at)**

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**[www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)**

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