



BUILDING BLOCKS FOR PLANNING LANGUAGE-SENSITIVE TEACHER EDUCATION:

5 - HOW CAN TEACHING PRACTICE AND LESSON OBSERVATION BE MADE MORE LANGUAGE-SENSITIVE?

ENG

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AND THE PROJECT TEAM



Building block 5

HOW CAN TEACHING PRACTICE AND LESSON OBSERVATION BE MADE MORE LANGUAGE-SENSITIVE?

What is the purpose of this Building block?

This Building block is aimed at those responsible for creating, reviewing, adapting, implementing and supervising the design of practical elements of teacher education courses and professional development. These elements usually include lesson observation, microteaching and teaching practice assignments. It is especially important that the requirements in teacher education curricula regarding these elements should be strengthened in order to help ensure that the classroom teaching done by pre-service and in-service teachers is language-sensitive and that it consistently meets the language-related needs of their students.

As stated in Building block 1, we use the following definition of language-sensitive education:

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.

This definition, which you may want to adapt to your own needs and professional context, makes it clear that all teachers have a responsibility to take account of specific features of language in their teaching. These aspects might include the differences between everyday language and academic language and the higher language demands of their subject across the years of schooling, such as the need to gradually include more formal language and more specific terms in different learning situations (e.g. writing, reading, discussions, games, drama-based activities, presentations, peer-teaching, projects, etc.).

This Building block focuses on the importance of paying attention to and incorporating language-sensitive teaching and learning in lesson observation assignments, microteaching assignments and in teaching practice in schools (practicum).

Who is the Building block for?

- teacher educators and other responsible stakeholders
- those responsible for observing lessons and establishing criteria for the observation of lessons

The main objectives:

- to offer guidance on reviewing the objectives and procedures related to the lesson observation and microteaching and/or school-based teaching practice which is done by pre-service teachers as part of their course or by in-service teachers as part of their Continuing Professional Development (CPD);

- to incorporate explicit focuses on language-sensitive aspects of teaching and learning into lesson observation assignments, microteaching assignments and teaching practice in schools (practicum);
- to indicate how the assessment of teaching practice and observation of classroom teaching of in-service teachers can be strengthened by including lesson observation criteria which support learning and focus specifically on language-sensitive aspects of teaching.

CONTENTS

- A. Looking at classroom teaching:** viewing video recordings of teaching with a focus on the teacher's use of language and language sensitivity when addressing learners' language-related and subject-related needs. This can also be applied to peer lesson observation.
 - B. Reviewing lesson observation assignments:** examining whether and in what ways pre-service and in-service teachers are asked to reflect on how the teachers they observe use language during their lessons, and to comment on this in their reports.
 - C. A vignette:** stimulating pre-service or in-service teachers to discuss, formulate and use some lesson observation criteria for identifying and/or reflecting on aspects of language sensitivity in the classroom teaching that they observe.
 - D. A selection of language-sensitive lesson observation criteria:** based on the Guidance for Language-oriented Vocational Education (Herder, A., Pleumeekers, J., 2022; Van Eerde et al., 2006), a selection of criteria for language-sensitive lesson observation in the areas of interaction and language support is offered. Pre-service teachers are asked to compare the suggested criteria with those which they have developed themselves. They could also add additional criteria. These criteria can also be used for learner feedback, including all kinds of written or oral feedback that learners give to their teachers.
 - E. Further questions for reflection:** they focus on the ways in which lesson observation assignments and teaching practice could be redesigned in a teacher education context.
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A. Looking at classroom teaching

Watch a video, if available, of subject teaching in the language of schooling in your context.

If none is available, the following samples may be useful:

- an example in English, which shows some maths teaching and some discussion with an expert observer, can be found [here](#)
- an example in German showing learners working on biology tasks can be found [here](#)
- examples of lessons in French about language with a multilingual group can be found [here](#)

a) Make a few notes on the video clip that you watched, taking as orientation the topics below:

- the aims of the lesson
- the teacher's approach and teaching style
- something you found interesting or surprising about this teacher's work
- something you would have done differently (and why)
- etc.

Use the first viewing to familiarise yourself with the objectives of the lesson, the content, the teacher's approach and so on. If you are working with colleagues who have watched different videos, exchange descriptions and opinions with them.

b) Now watch the video again, focusing on the way the teacher uses language in interacting with the learners. List four or five examples of language used by the teacher: What did the teacher say/write? What do you think was the purpose? How did the learners react? If someone else has watched the same video, compare and discuss your notes and reflections.

c) Read again the definition of 'language-sensitive teaching' given in the introduction. In what ways is the teacher's approach language-sensitive? What opportunities for taking such an approach (if any) are missed, and what opportunities for taking such an approach could have been created by the teacher?

B. Reviewing lesson observation assignments

a) In the context of teacher education or teachers' professional development where you work, what are the kinds of observation that pre-service teachers / in-service teachers are expected to do?

- i. Live observation of lessons given by experienced teachers;
- ii. Observation of video-recordings of lessons by experienced teachers;
- iii. Peer observation of fellow students (e.g. in microteaching) or teacher colleagues;
- iv. Self-observation: reflection on recordings or diaries of their own teaching;
- v. Other kinds of observations – which?

b) If descriptions of the observation module given to pre-service teachers (or the observation tasks that in-service teachers are asked to carry out) are available to you, read them and reflect on the following questions:

- **What are the main purposes of the lesson observation that pre-service teachers / in-service teachers are asked to do?**
- **Do they use checklists or make reports of the lessons they observe? If so, what kind(s) of checklists and reports?**
- **Do they have a discussion with the teachers whom they observe?**
- **Are they asked to comment on or assess the ways in which the teachers being observed use language?**
- **If they are asked to consider in some detail how teachers use the language of instruction, what aspects of language use are they asked to reflect on or comment on?**
 - i. the quality and clarity of instructions
 - ii. the correctness of the language used
 - iii. the choice and variety of questions
 - iv. the language used to mediate new concepts or information
 - v. the verbal feedback or corrections given to learners when they answer
 - vi. the support given to learners who have difficulty understanding or expressing themselves (some examples are provided [here](#))
 - vii. the language used to react to learner behaviour that is problematic
 - viii. other aspects of language

c) In what form are pre-service and in-service teachers asked to reflect on their lesson observation, and how are they assessed by teacher educators or mentors? What kind of feedback do they get from teacher educators or mentors?

C. Vignette

The purpose of the vignette below is to stimulate pre-service or in-service teachers to discuss and to formulate lesson observation criteria for identifying and/or reflecting on aspects of language sensitivity in the classroom teaching that they observe.

A teacher educator working on a course for future subject teachers which is quite similar to the one that you are involved in has organised a discussion with her students about their first six observations of real teaching in two different subject areas. The students have mentioned several aspects of the teaching that interested and surprised them.

- Some of the classes are very diverse and involve learners whose first languages are different from the language of schooling.
- Also, some of those learners whose first language is the language of schooling seem to have difficulties in understanding instructions and expressing themselves.
- One or two of the teachers they have observed speak quite quickly most of the time. Others use complex language that some learners find hard to follow. Still others speak more slowly and repeat or rephrase questions, instructions etc.
- Some do not seem to respond to the language and communication problems of these learners but focus instead on the learners who do not have language problems. Other teachers spend time working with individuals who are having difficulty, but sometimes other learners get bored waiting.
- Some of the concepts that teachers introduce and the materials they use are quite complex. It seems that learners in some classes who are unable immediately to understand these concepts and materials are expected to work things out for themselves between lessons, for example with the help of their parents or other learners.

The teacher educator decides to respond to the concerns of their in-service teachers by getting them to discuss and work out some criteria for language-sensitive teaching that could be used in their future observations, and in the planning of their teaching practice lessons.

- a. Suggest some aspects of teaching that you would expect pre-service teachers to consider when developing their own criteria for language-sensitive teaching (e.g. clarity of instructions, speed of delivery, way of speaking to the class, dealing with learners' special requirements, ways of introducing new concepts).**
- b. Could you run a similar discussion and reflection activity with your own pre-service teachers? If so:**
 - **how would you organise it?**
 - **how would you suggest pre-service teachers use the criteria they have developed (for example, as points to note during the observation, as questions to discuss in the reports on their observations, for planning their own teaching practice etc.)?**

D. A selection of lesson observation criteria for language-sensitive teaching

This section contains a selection of criteria in the form of observable teacher behaviours which can be used for the observation, reflection and discussion of language-sensitive element during lesson observation. The criteria below have been selected and translated into English from a Dutch framework for language-oriented vocational education (Herder & Pleumeekers, 2022; based on Van Eerde et al., 2006).

INTERACTION

Asking questions

1. *asks different kinds of questions (descriptive, ordering, explanatory, evaluating)*
2. *asks open questions*
3. *asks real questions*

Eliciting answers

4. *attends to turn-taking*
5. *gives learners time to think and to formulate their answers*
6. *listens attentively to the input [response]*

Instructions for assignments

7. *explains goals*
8. *indicates what learners should do in a task*
9. *explains how learners should carry out the task*

Guidance during the execution of assignments

10. *gives learners time to get going*
11. *invites questions*
12. *offers support with their formulation [of responses]*

Debriefing after assignments

13. *refers back to aims*
14. *evaluates the process*
15. *sums up outcomes*

Varying interaction

16. *varies the focus of class conversations, group work and individual conversations [in pairs]*
17. *switches between everyday language and academic or subject language*

LANGUAGE SUPPORT

Language resources

1. *makes the language goals explicit (at the beginning of the lesson)*
2. *gives attention to the language goals (during the lesson)*
3. *evaluates the language goals (at the end of the lesson)*

Use of understandable language

4. *speaks calmly and articulates clearly*
5. *encourages students to bring in their own words and expressions or concepts, including from other (first) languages*
6. *adapts language use to the learners' language level (shorter sentences, explaining words, putting emphasis, etc.)*
7. *pays attention to difficult words*

8. *gives support when learners are reading texts*
9. *checks own comprehensibility*
10. *checks whether learners understand textual material*
11. *provides visual support on a board, on paper or via audiovisual means (schematic diagrams, pictures, film, etc.)*

Feedback on language use

12. *provides corrective and explicit feedback on learners' language use*
13. *repeats examples of good language use by learners*
14. *helps the learners to formulate their language, and reformulates learners' language*
15. *gives examples of the intended use of language by demonstrating how to move from everyday language to academic and specialist language*

Support for language-rich tasks

16. *explains how to approach language tasks (language learning strategies)*
17. *points out linguistic features of the text type/genre (e.g. an instruction or a speech)*
18. *provides clues while learners are reading, listening, writing or speaking*
19. *offers learners language tools (e.g. a glossary, reading tips, a writing frame, a speaking frame)*

Help with language

20. *responds appropriately to learners with different language needs*
21. *helps individual learners with problems related to academic and/or subject language*
22. *asks learners to clarify what they have said or written*
23. *encourages plurilingual learners to use their first languages to learn and understand new material*

(Selected and translated from Herder, A., Pleumeekers, J. (2022). *Handreiking kijkwijzers taalgericht vakonderwijs (Observation Guidance for Language-oriented Vocational Education)* Amersfoort: SLO. Based on the earlier *Kijkwijzer voor taalgericht vakonderwijs* ('Observation guide for language-oriented content teaching') by van Eerde et al 2006.

Users can also refer to the following: Language-sensitive teaching of so-called non-language subjects: a checklist (Appendix 3 in Beacco et al. 2016, 133-138).

- a) Ask pre-service teachers / in-service teachers to compare the list of criteria with the criteria they formulated during the previous vignette-related task, asking themselves questions such as:**

What was missing in my/our criteria?

What is particularly important?

They can then identify some criteria or descriptors that they would like to add.

- b) In your context, would lists like the one above be useful to students in their lesson observation? Could they be adapted for peer observation or learner feedback? If so, how exactly?**
- c) In your context, would you suggest that pre-service teachers use criteria like these in preparing their lessons and in assessing their own teaching? If not, what alternative resources could be offered to pre-service teachers to help ensure that their own teaching practice is language-sensitive?**

E. Further questions for reflection

- a) *If there is an opportunity to do so, how would you reorganise the lesson observation and teaching practice module(s) in your institution to ensure that students pay more attention to language sensitivity in their practice? Who would be involved in the reorganisation process?*
- b) *On the basis of your experience of doing the tasks in the previous sections, which elements would you develop further or incorporate into your future work as a teacher educator?*
- *lesson observation criteria;*
 - *learner and peer feedback;*
 - *guided lesson / video observation;*
 - *focus points on language-sensitive teaching for the planning of teaching practice;*
 - *other relevant aspects, possibly including some aspects from the above list of criteria.*

References

- Beacco, J.-C., Fleming, M., Goullier, F., Thürmann, E., Vollmer, H., with contributions by J. Sheils. (2016). *The language dimension in all subjects - A handbook for curriculum development and teacher training*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. www.ecml.at/coe-docs/language-dimensions-subjects-EN.pdf
- Herder, A. & Pleumeekers, J. (2022). *Handreiking kijkwijzers taalgericht vakonderwijs* (Observation Guidance for Language-oriented Vocational Education) Amersfoort: SLO.
- Van Eerde, D., Hacquebord, H. I., Hajer, M., & Pulles, M. (2006). *Kijkwijzer voor taalgericht onderwijs*. SLO/Platform Taalgericht Vakonderwijs.



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