

TKT: Module 3 – Teachers' classroom language

Overview: These practice materials by Russell Whitehead are designed to help with the Module 3 exam, in particular with the 'Classroom management' section. In these materials trainees will think about how they use language when teaching and will consider appropriate ways of communicating with learners.

Part of exam: Module 3 ('Managing the teaching and learning process'): 'Classroom management'

Materials: one copy of the worksheet per student

Time: 30–60 mins

Notes for teacher trainers

- One way to demonstrate some of the issues raised in these materials – and to have a lively session – is to start off your lesson (without explanation) in ways that 'break the rules': issue instructions that are unclear, overly complex, etc. Appear to elicit, but don't wait for answers, and so on. Then you can discuss what you were doing wrong and how the trainees felt as a result.
- Set up micro lessons. Get the trainees to set up fairly complex learning situations. Have the other trainees observe, and make notes of exactly what the presenter says. Then have a discussion to review findings.
- Gather a collection of examples of teachers' classroom language. Try to include a range of functions and some good and bad attempts. Each one could be put on a separate slip of paper. Have poster-sized grids on the walls with columns for each function. Trainees mingle and attach the slips of paper to the relevant columns. The result should be quite a few multiple headings and overlaps. In discussion you can then focus on the importance of context, etc.
- Give trainees a series of scenarios – define the type of class and the functions to be expressed. Then get them to come up with lots of ways of achieving them.

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Stage 1: Considering

- a) Trainee's own answers
- b) Trainee's own answers
- c) Trainee's own answers
- d) Trainee's own answers
- e)
 - When we invite the learners to give us information (rather than giving it to them), either in answer to specific questions or in more general ways. (4)
 - When we show what a word or phrase means, perhaps with realia (real things) or mime (silent acting). (2)
 - When we introduce new language to the learners, before they study it more closely, practise it, etc. (8)
 - When we tell learners about something, for example how a certain grammar rule works or how a particular activity will help to practise new vocabulary. (5)
 - When we show learners that they have made a mistake of some kind. (3)
 - When we say or do something to help the learners say what they want, either to remember a word, for example, or to set about doing an activity or task in an effective way. (9)
 - When we tell learners what to do in the classroom. (6)
 - When we ask learners to say things which will show whether or not they have understood something you want them to have learnt. (10)
 - When we find out if learners have understood what we have tried to teach. (1)
 - When we tell stories, describe experiences, etc. to the learners. (7)
- f) Trainee's own answers
- g)
 1. B – This is Explaining. The teacher is giving the learners a reason for doing the exercise and saying why this is a useful thing to do. An explanation like this may often follow an instruction to do an exercise.
 2. C – This is Instructing. The teacher is telling the learners what to do and is organising the learners so that they can do an activity. Other ways to express this instruction might include, 'I want you to do ...', 'Please do ...' or 'Get into pairs and do ...'
 3. A – This is Eliciting. The teacher is trying to get the learners to provide information. The learners will practise speaking, and the teacher will be able to check how much the learners know. This might be a way to see if the learners can use the present tenses correctly.
 4. A – This is Eliciting. The teacher is trying to get the learners to produce the language they know. This might be a way to see if the learners are able to ask polite questions on the street – 'Excuse me, could you tell me the time, please?'

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Stage 1: Considering



Think about:

There are lots of ways we use language during the course of an average day. Think about all the people you meet in a normal day – friends, family members, strangers, colleagues, students, etc. What encounters do you have with them? What functions does language have in these meetings?

- a) **Shut your eyes and think of a recent lesson you taught, or were taught, or observed. Try to recall all the different things the teacher did and the different ways language was used during that lesson.**
- b) **Look at a lesson plan you've used, or a coursebook unit, or a lesson from onestopenglish. Go through it carefully. What does the teacher need to do at different points? Tell the learners to do things? Tell the learners about language points? Ask the learners questions?**
- c) **How many different ways of using language are there for a teacher? Make a list.**

- d) **Here are some terms for ways that teachers can use language. They are often called 'functions'. Are you familiar with these terms?**
 - 1. Checking learning
 - 2. Conveying meaning
 - 3. Correcting
 - 4. Eliciting
 - 5. Explaining
 - 6. Instructing
 - 7. Narrating
 - 8. Presenting
 - 9. Prompting
 - 10. Asking concept questions

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e) Below are some basic definitions of these functions. Match the terms above to these definitions.

- When we invite the learners to give us information (rather than giving it to them), either in answer to specific questions or in more general ways.
- When we show what a word or phrase means, perhaps with realia (real things) or mime (silent acting).
- When we introduce new language to the learners, before they study it more closely, practise it, etc.
- When we tell learners about something, for example how a certain grammar rule works or how a particular activity will help to practise new vocabulary.
- When we show learners that they have made a mistake of some kind.
- When we say or do something to help the learners say what they want, either to remember a word, for example, or to set about doing an activity or task in an effective way.
- When we tell learners what to do in the classroom.
- When we ask learners to say things which will show whether or not they have understood something you want them to have learnt.
- When we find out if learners have understood what we have tried to teach.
- When we tell stories, describe experiences, etc to the learners.

f) Look through the list of functions. Have you used some or all of them in your teaching? When? Try to remember specific examples of each one, from either your own teaching or a colleague's teaching that you have observed.



Think about:

Be as clear and helpful to your students as possible. You might want to write out the main typical examples of teachers' classroom language and display it on the walls of your classroom. Learners should be familiar and confident with this.

Stage 2: Experimenting

g) Now that you have considered ten important functions of a teacher's language in the classroom, it's time to think about how you would perform that function: what actual words would you use with your learners?

Try this part of a sample exam task. Match each of the teachers' statements to one of the functions in the box.

Functions:

- A Eliciting
- B Explaining
- C Instructing

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Teachers' language:

- 1 *Doing this exercise will check that you have understood the difference between countable and uncountable nouns.*
- 2 *OK, now you should do this next part of the activity in pairs.*
- 3 *Look at the woman in the picture. What is she doing?*
- 4 *I want to know what time it is. I haven't got a watch. What can I say?*

h) Remember that each class is different. As a teacher, you have to choose how to express functions. Do you think the following comments are acceptable?

- *Work alone. Be silent.*
- *You are wrong. Your answer is wrong.*

You probably agree that these comments are rude and disrespectful. You wouldn't like it if someone talked to you in this way. But there are other, less obvious ways to speak inappropriately to learners. Here are some comments by teacher trainers about trainee teachers they have observed:

- *The teacher's instructions were too complicated for the elementary learners to understand.*
- *The learners are all responsible adults, but the teacher spoke to them as if they were children.*
- *The teacher used very formal language. The atmosphere seemed very serious and quiet.*

**Think about:**

Should teachers use L1 (the students' first language) or L2 (the target language – English) in class?

Some teachers work with multilingual classes. For them, English must be used: it is the only language everyone has in common. The majority of English teaching in the world is, however, done with classes of learners who share the same mother tongue. Teachers of these classes can choose which language to speak to the learners in.

Everything you say in English is useful input and provides useful practice. But it is important that the learners understand you. If you have a low level class, you may choose to explain some things in the learners' L1, to make sure that the learners feel clear (and therefore confident and motivated) about what is happening and what they are supposed to do.

If you want or need to express a wide range of functions in class in English to low level students, then you need to be particularly careful with the issues raised in these materials.

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Stage 3: Reflecting

- i) Teachers' language functions in the classroom are extremely important. It's no good being a great teacher 'on the inside' if the learners in your classroom feel you are rude or hard to understand.

Experienced teachers express language functions automatically – it becomes natural to them. When you are new to the process – just as when you are learning to drive – you need to think carefully about each step. When you are writing a lesson plan, decide exactly how you will perform each function. For example: If your lesson plan says 'pairwork activity', what will you say? 'Work in pairs?' 'I'd like you to do this exercise in pairs?' 'Clara, work with Cheng, Greg, work with Sonia', etc?

What you choose to say will depend on many factors, so you may want to consider the following questions: How well do the learners know each other? Have they worked in pairs before? Is it important who is in each pair? If you are performing these functions in L2, you may feel that everything you say represents some kind of useful listening practice. If you are using L1, you may feel you should say as little as possible.

Always remember

Different learners will need to be spoken to differently. Small differences in ways of expressing things can significantly affect the success of your classes.

Set yourself a target

Ask colleagues if you can observe their lessons, and invite them to observe yours. Focus on the issue of teachers' classroom language. Make notes of exactly what you and your colleagues say to the learners. Discuss the best ways of expressing these functions.

Come back to this later

Read through these materials in a few weeks' time. See if you can remember all ten functions. Can you add any more to the list?

Read more

Other materials on this subject can be found on onestopenglish.

www.onestopenglish.com/methodology/teaching-tips/ask-the-experts/professional-development-questions/professional-development-adapting-your-language-for-the-learner/146413.article

www.onestopenglish.com/methodology/teaching-articles/teaching-approaches/teaching-approaches-translation-as-a-language-learning-tool/146504.article

Suggestions for independent learning

For the next few weeks, pay close attention to teacher's language functions. Write down exactly what you intend to say to your students. Check carefully whether this is what you actually say. Ask colleagues for ideas about how to say these things.

**Don't forget:**

Language teaching is very special. A maths teacher, for example, uses language to talk about numbers. But you use language to talk about language. Everything you do is a dynamic part of the learning process. This is wonderful – but it also carries responsibilities. You have a duty to make sure you use your own language helpfully.