TUTOR

Teachers' upskilling aiming at a holistic inclusivity in learning

Introduction to Inclusive Education

Strand Two - The Power of Language

Contents

Introduction

Welcome to the unit 'The Power of Language' which focuses on how language constructs the inclusivity of the learning space. You will explore how forms of communication - whether through words or through the environment - can impact on learner agency and reflect on how inclusive language use can stimulate and support learning environments.

This unit is designed as a combination of face-to-face sessions and practice-oriented reflection through a series of asynchronous activities. Working in groups, you will discuss the impact of inclusive and non-inclusive language using real-world examples.

In order to deepen this, you will deal with various materials and methods:

- **Core reading:** Reading on a supportive environment versus a disabling environment; political aspects of language;

- **Case studies:** Use cases for identifying inclusive practices;

- **Interactive exercises:** Reflect on the way you use language and find ways to improve your teaching situation. This unit will help you discover the full potential of language to create an inclusive space.

0.1.1 Unit One: The Power of Language

What is inclusive education?

This reading examines the importance of inclusive education and the role of language in this context. It looks at different perspectives on the power of language in the educational environment - from its function as an instrument of resistance to its potential as an expression of solidarity. It also highlights the importance of the linguistic context, particularly in terms of choosing terminology that promotes an inclusive learning environment for all learners.

What is inclusive education?
The TUTOR project defines inclusive education as follows: *Inclusive education is a comprehensive approach that aims to create a learning environment in which all people, regardless of external characteristics, gender identity, sexual orientation, origin, socio-economic status or cultural background, can grow together.* *(TUTOR, 2023, P.49)*

What is meant by "inclusive language"?

The use of inclusive language can be seen as part of the pedagogical environment. When creating an inclusive, supportive, and educational environment, it is therefore important to use inclusive language. The word "*environment*" therefore does not only mean the physical classroom or educational institution but also includes social and emotional aspects. The individual modules of the TUTOR course will familiarize you with inclusive terms and show you that the classroom and the school/educational institution are political spaces and why. The introduction of inclusive language can be a positive experience for those who are marginalized in this political space, the community and society in general.

Relevant terms:
Disabling environment: An environment that has conditions, procedures and practices or physical circumstances that prevent a person from participating and engaging fully and meaningfully. **Enabling environment:** An environment that has frameworks, procedures and practices or physical conditions that enable a person to participate and engage as fully and meaningfully as possible.

Marginalization: Exclusion or classification as insignificant to society and displacement to the margins of society and power, based solely on personal characteristics.

Oppression: Unfair treatment by a powerful group or system with extensive powerlessness due to personal characteristics.

Power: The ability to exert influence over people or structures simply by virtue of belonging to a powerful group or system.

Social barrier: An obstacle created by society (community or nation) that prevents a person from gaining access to a particular thing or resource. Barriers can be physical or value-based (beliefs, attitudes, prejudices, stereotypes, etc.).

Systemic barriers: Systemic barriers are discriminatory or unfair practices, laws, policies, or procedures that prevent a person from fully participating in society.

The importance of inclusive language in the classroom

Inclusive language helps all students feel included and supports those who have experienced marginalization in particular. It creates an environment that empowers and encourages. If inclusive language practice is lacking, there is a risk that individual pupils will be excluded or disadvantaged.

Language is a powerful tool that both speakers and listeners can use to recognize existing barriers and systems of oppression in schools, communities, and society. It can uphold structures of power and discrimination, but it can also challenge and break through them. While language can reinforce exclusion, it also has the potential to break down barriers and create a more inclusive learning environment.

Criticism of inclusive language

People who use inclusive language are sometimes accused of doing so only to present themselves as morally or socially conscious - without any real commitment to the cause. This behaviour is referred to as "virtue signalling". The term describes the public display of moral or political convictions, which often serves the purpose of self-promotion rather than actual change.

Such accusations often come from people who are more critical of the existing social structures and reject change. They are often those who benefit from these systems and fear losing influence or status if other groups gain more equality.

Recently, marginalized groups have also increasingly criticized the fact that "virtue signalling" often serves to make companies, politicians or individuals look good without actually changing anything. Examples include companies that use rainbow logos during Pride month but do not create inclusive working conditions, or celebrities who show solidarity on social media but do not take concrete action. Despite the criticism, it is recognized that the intention behind an action matters. There is a difference between pure "virtue signalling" (e.g. symbolism without real commitment) and genuine solidarity (e.g. companies that not only advertise diversity but actively promote it). Even if a campaign appears superficial, a good intention can lead to real change in the long term. It is crucial that good intentions are translated into concrete action.

Against this background, it is also understandable that many people shy away from using inclusive language. They do not want to make mistakes or expose themselves to the risk of "virtue signalling" and possible negative consequences. A large number of participants in the TUTOR field research stated that they were afraid of making mistakes when teaching. One of the aims of this course module is to promote your ability to reflect on yourself and your own practice to avoid virtue signalling.

Different perspectives on language

Language is a set of sounds, symbols, signs, gestures, etc. that a group or community of people has agreed upon and that enables them to communicate with each other. However, it is not only spoken or written, but can also be expressed visually, in the environment, in architecture, etc. Language is not a neutral phenomenon; it can be used positively or negatively. The types of language we use and the way we use it can differ from medium to medium and from society to society. For example, when we write in CAPITAL LETTERS on social media, it means that the person sending the message is shouting at the recipient (Willingham, 2018). Looking someone in the eye when speaking is considered respectful in many European or Anglo-American cultures. An inclusive view of language can help to remain open to other interpretations and meanings - in some Asian cultures, for example, it is considered impolite to look someone (especially an older person) in the eye, and averting one's gaze is a sign of respect (Uono & Hietanen, 2015).

Inclusive language in learning environments

Hanging a Christian cross and no other religious symbols prominently in a learning environment that may have once been part of a monastery can be seen as a sign of respect for the history of the building, but could also signal that the space is only open to students and teachers with Christian beliefs. Posters, books and educational resources with images that only show *white* or non-disabled people may be used 'because they have always been used' or because it would cost a lot of money to replace them, but at the same time these same posters, books and resources may communicate to Black people or people of colour that this learning environment is not for people who look like them. Students and teachers are not only addressed by the spoken and written language, but also continuously perceive the language of the environment - it tells them who they are and what kind of learning environment they are in.

Inclusive language is closely linked to identity, as it can be an expression of belonging and self-determination. For example, the **Traveller** community in Ireland prefers a capital "T" to emphasize their cultural identity. Similarly, many Black people use a capital "B" in **Black** to make their ethnic and cultural identity visible.

Another example of the importance of inclusive language is the use of names. If a person is given a "locally adapted" version of their name instead of their actual birth or family name, this can send the message that their name is not valued or is perceived as "too different". This can create pressure to conform to the majority culture or to assimilate, rather than seeing their own identity recognized in its original form.

Terms used to describe ethnic groups are also culturally and historically influenced and can have different meanings depending on the region. In South Africa, the term *coloured* is used as an acceptable term for people of mixed heritage (Adhikari, 2005). In the US, however, *coloured* is considered outdated and can be offensive in some contexts.

As language reflects identities, it is not rigid, but changes across time, place, and social context. Inclusive language is therefore a dynamic process that requires cultural sensitivity and an awareness of different perspectives.

Reflection
What messages are conveyed to students in your classroom environment, materials, books, posters, body language, and teaching? Are there certain messages that you disagree with or that you would not want students to hear from you?

The power of language

A conscious and reflective use of inclusive language enables teachers and leaders to create spaces of solidarity and resistance. Language is not only a means of communication, but also an instrument for expressing belonging, recognition, and respect.

An inclusive learning environment can be promoted at various levels. For example, educational institutions can provide important documents, website advertisements or welcome signs in several languages to ensure that the dominant regional language is not used exclusively. **LGBTQI+ flags and flags representing the cultural diversity and nationalities of the school community** can be visibly displayed in classrooms and communal areas. Teachers and staff can - if they feel comfortable doing so - include their **pronouns in email signatures** to raise awareness of gender diversity. **Unisex and accessible restrooms** and **multi-denominational spaces** for prayer, meditation or mindfulness exercises also help to ensure that all students feel welcome and respected.

Furthermore, it is important to encourage teachers, managers, and students to use **consciously inclusive terminology**. This not only helps to develop a greater awareness of language but also enables them to correct themselves and others when terms are used thoughtlessly or incorrectly. Such measures may not seem directly related to language, but they send strong messages to the whole school community. They signal that diversity is valued and that language is not just spoken or written words but is also reflected in the structures and symbols of the school environment. These messages can be crucial in determining whether students and teachers feel included or excluded.

Enabling conversations instead of preventing them

Inclusive language goes beyond the choice of individual terms. Often a lack of information or awareness of appropriate terminology leads to conversations being avoided or not held. This happens especially when people are afraid of making mistakes or unintentionally hurting someone. But silence can be just as exclusionary as a thoughtless choice of words.

If dominant or influential group members, such as educators or leadership, signal through their use of language that certain topics are unpleasant or taboo, this can lead to an atmosphere in which students or colleagues do not dare to talk about important social or societal issues. This can affect the quality of the learning environment and prevent students from actively engaging with social and linguistic dynamics.

It is therefore crucial to **have conversations, even at the risk of making linguistic mistakes**. It is often more important to facilitate an open dialog than to avoid a conversation out of insecurity or fear of making mistakes. Teachers and managers who familiarize themselves with inclusive language can actively contribute to ensuring that all participants feel respected and included in conversations.

Throughout the programme, specific terminology and concepts related to LGBTQI+ communities, migrants, ethnic minorities, and socio-economic disadvantage will be explored in depth to further strengthen your linguistic and pedagogical skills.

Context, intention, and goodwill

Consciously using inclusive language and the right terminology can make a significant contribution to creating a respectful and supportive classroom environment. Yet many teachers feel unsure whether they are using the correct terms and fear making mistakes that could have a negative impact on students, the school or even their own careers. In an age of debates about "cancel culture" and social sensitivity, many do not know exactly how to behave linguistically correctly.

Mistakes are an inherent part of learning processes. The **context** in which conversations are held is crucial, as is the **intention and willingness to learn**. When educators speak in an open and supportive environment where it is possible to make mistakes, apologize and actively ask for the correct terminology, this can pave the way for an inclusive atmosphere conducive to

learning. The key is that the **intention is recognizable: to learn, become more inclusive and avoid potential harm**. In such an environment, honest mistakes are usually not only forgiven but also seen as part of a shared learning process.

However, an inclusive classroom should not result in individual students from marginalized groups having to take sole responsibility for clarification and correction. Educators have a central role in **establishing a supportive culture of conversation** in which everyone speaks with good will and positive intent. By setting an example of how to deal with linguistic errors - apologizing, asking for the correct terminology and then using it consciously - they show that learning and inclusion are a dynamic process.

In the next unit, we will look at the power of silence - both as a potential barrier to inclusion and as a form of resistance, reflection, and consolidation of information in the learning process. Other aspects of an inclusive environment are covered in the following parts of the introductory module.

For further reading on the importance of inclusive language and the role of language as a barrier or enabler, please see the references below.

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0.1.2 Unit Two: Silence

"On the blank sensory slate of silence, the mind can conduct its own symphonies. But it's also a reminder that even in the absence of a sensory input like sound, the brain remains active and dynamic."

This Is Your Brain On Silence" – Daniel Gross

Language is a central component of education, as it not only shapes interactions, but can also create or break down barriers. In this context, silence can be both a valuable resource and a challenge.

What is silence?
Bosacki (*The Culture of Classroom Silence, 2005*) defines silence as the absence of vocalizations. In the school context, however, students' silence encompasses more than just the absence of audible contributions - it can also mean that they do not express certain content or do not say what is expected of them by the teachers. Within the classroom, silence can be interpreted as an expression of conformity to class rules or as a sign of respect towards teachers.
Granger (*Silence in Second Language Learning: A Psychoanalytic Reading, 2004*), on the other hand, sees silence as a potential source of disobedience, conflict, misbehaviour and even deception, as it is often assumed that students are listening without this being verifiable. Since silence in the classroom can mean that neither teachers nor classmates can assess students' learning progress or understanding, it can also serve as a protective mechanism - be it out of insecurity, fear of making mistakes or a desire to avoid certain expectations.

Silence as a pedagogical tool: meaning and challenges

In educational institutions, silence is often underestimated as a didactic tool because it is difficult to measure and is often interpreted as passive behaviour. Yet it is an integral part of the interaction between students and teachers and can influence the learning environment in many ways. The term student voice was introduced to capture both spoken and unspoken expressions of students. However, the full significance of silence in educational processes has not yet been fully explored.

Proponents of critical pedagogy often emphasize that students' agency is fostered through verbal participation, and silence is often seen as a lack of engagement. As a result, teachers often tend to encourage quieter students to contribute orally.

The complexity of silence in the classroom

The meaning of silence is complex and context dependent. Bosacki (*The Culture of Classroom Silence, 2005*) describes it as the absence of vocalizations and sees various forms of expression in it - from submissiveness and respect to disregard for authority and self-protection. Granger (*Silence in Second Language Learning, 2004*), on the other hand, sees silence as a possible expression of disobedience and conflict and points out that it can make the assessment of academic performance more difficult.

Silence can bring both benefits and challenges to the educational process. It can act as a barrier to inclusion, but it can also provide space for reflection and the processing of information. At the same time, it can serve as a form of resistance or - if enforced by teachers or institutions - act as a means of oppression. Despite these complex dynamics, the strategic use of silence is often overlooked in research and tends to be viewed as a disruptive practice that negatively impacts academic success and classroom participation.

Silence in a cultural context and its effects on students

Silence has different connotations in diverse cultures and can range from respect to insecurity or resistance. While in Western education systems it is often equated with a lack of participation, in many non-Western cultures it is seen as a sign of politeness or humility. In the classroom, silence can therefore be perceived as both a protective mechanism and a form of empowerment.

Silence can be particularly prevalent among students with a migrant background, especially when cultural differences and social exclusion play a role. In non-Western cultures, for example, it can be a sign of respect for authority figures, while in Western education systems it is interpreted as a lack of commitment. This can lead to affected students participating less actively in class, which can lead to poorer academic performance and social isolation in the long term.

The role of teachers: understanding and responding appropriately to silence

To create an inclusive and equitable learning environment, it is essential for teachers to recognize the distinct functions and contexts of silence. This means not merely interpreting silence as passive behaviour but consciously paying attention to when it is used as a protective mechanism, a sign of respect or an expression of resistance.

By reflecting on the multiple meanings of silence and incorporating them into lessons, teachers can help to improve the educational experiences of all students. This requires an open attitude towards different communication styles and the ability to integrate alternative forms of expression - be it through written contributions, creative tasks, or quiet reflection phases - into the classroom.

Silence as a barrier to inclusion

Silence can make inclusion much more difficult, especially in classrooms with diverse student groups. The reasons for silence vary and can include language and cultural differences, insecurity or fear of judgment, emotional self-protection, or conscious resistance to authority.

When students remain silent, there is a risk that their perspectives will not be heard or integrated into the classroom. Not only can this affect their individual educational experience, but it can also limit the collective learning process and the diversity of classroom discussions, reducing the overall richness of education.

Linguistic

Language plays a central role in education, as it not only shapes interactions, but also enables access to knowledge and active participation in the learning process. However, language differences can present significant barriers - be it through insufficient language skills, culturally different communication styles or the fear of mispronouncing oneself. These challenges can lead to students remaining silent, withdrawing, and participating less actively in the classroom.

To create an inclusive and supportive learning environment, it is therefore crucial to recognize and address language barriers. This means not only recognizing linguistic diversity but also developing strategies to encourage students to participate regardless of their language

abilities. This includes, for example, multilingual materials, alternative forms of expression (e.g. written contributions, visual or creative methods) and an awareness that silence does not always equate to a lack of knowledge but can often be due to linguistic or social insecurities.

Cultural differences

To correctly classify silence in the classroom, it is important to understand its meaning in diverse cultural contexts. Depending on the culture, silence can have vastly distinct functions: While in some societies it is seen as a sign of respect, thoughtfulness, or modesty, in others it is interpreted as an expression of disinterest, insecurity or even disobedience.

It is therefore crucial to consider in each individual case whether silence has a cultural significance, whether it is being used as an act of resistance, or whether it indicates cultural distance and social exclusion. The latter can lead to affected students withdrawing from the classroom, which can have a negative impact on both their academic performance and their social well-being. Teachers should therefore develop a sensitized attitude and pay specific attention to whether silence is due to cultural reasons or whether it indicates a lack of integration and participation.

Emotional protection

Silence can also serve as a protective mechanism, especially for students who feel insecure, or fear being criticized, misunderstood, or ostracized. This often concerns people who have had marginalized experiences or who lack confidence in their language skills, knowledge, or social skills.

However, such silence can lead to these students participating less actively in class, which in turn reduces their chances of learning. Teachers should therefore not only be aware of the silence but also develop strategies to gently encourage affected students and build confidence in their own voice. These include, for example, appreciative feedback, the opportunity for written or creative expression and a learning environment in which mistakes are accepted as part of the learning process.

Resistance to authority

Silence can also be a conscious form of resistance - for example, as a reaction to authoritarian teaching methods, restrictive learning environments or the feeling of not being heard. If students experience that their opinions are not taken seriously or are not valued, or that the classroom does not offer space for open discussion, they may consciously choose not to speak out of protest or self-protection.

In such cases, it is important to reflect on whether the learning environment is dialog-oriented, participative, and appreciative. Teachers can counteract this by actively promoting a culture of listening, participation, and open exchange. This includes giving students real opportunities to help shape the classroom, incorporating their perspectives into lessons and creating an environment in which their voices are not only heard, but also respected and taken seriously.

Recommendations for educators to promote inclusive teaching

- **Understand mistakes as a learning opportunity**: Create a classroom atmosphere in which mistakes are seen as a natural part of the learning process. This encourages students to participate without fear of negative consequences.

- **Value active participation**: Encourage all students to actively participate and reassure them that their contributions are heard and valued. This strengthens confidence in their own voice and promotes inclusive cooperation.

- **Use multiple communication channels**: Supplement verbal instructions with visual aids, gestures, and other non-verbal signals to make lessons easier to understand. This is particularly helpful for students with language barriers or different learning styles.

- **Provide language support**: Provide targeted language support to help students improve their language skills and gain more confidence to participate orally. This can be done, for example, through differentiated feedback, word lists or supporting materials.

- **Develop cultural sensitivity**: Participate in training to better understand the cultural backgrounds and communication styles of your students. This knowledge will help you to interpret silence appropriately and respond to it sensitively.

- **Create alternative opportunities for participation**: Consider that not all students will feel comfortable speaking in front of the whole class. Offer diverse ways to participate, such as written reflections, group work or creative projects, so that all students can contribute in a way that makes them feel safe.

- **Reflect on your own teaching methods**: Consider whether your teaching style is unintentionally contributing to student silence. Actively ask for feedback and adapt your methods to create a more inclusive and participatory learning environment.

Silence as a pause to consider

Silence is often perceived as an obstacle to teaching, but it can also be a valuable tool for reflection and deepening learning. A deliberate break in silence gives students the opportunity to process information, think about possible answers and engage more intensively with the subject matter.

As Schultz (2012) found, targeted silent periods can improve learning success by giving students time to think through new information. This leads to deeper understanding and especially supports those who need more time to actively participate in class.

By consciously integrating moments of silence into their lessons, educators create an environment in which all students - even shy or insecure ones - can contribute without pressure. Especially after asking questions, a brief period of silence can help students to structure their thoughts and formulate thoughtful answers instead of feeling pressured to answer quickly.

Silence as a means of consolidating information

"Children in modern classrooms have virtually no time to simply daydream, wait, think, ponder or learn to be still." David Geoffrey Smith

Silence can also be used as a method for consolidating knowledge. Targeted moments of silence give students the opportunity to consciously absorb, process and reflect on information. After intensive learning phases, periods of silence can help to organize what has been learned and anchor it in the memory for the long term.

Lehtonen (2011) emphasizes that quiet periods in the classroom allow students to internalize information more effectively. This has both cognitive and psychological benefits:

- **Cognitive benefits**: Silence enables deeper processing of the learning material, improves concentration, and strengthens memory.
- **Psychological benefits**: Moments of silence can reduce stress, which has a positive effect on learning. As stress can impair cognitive performance, a quiet environment helps to relieve mental stress and makes it easier to absorb information.

Suggested activity: After a lesson, give the students a few minutes for silent reflection. They can then make a written summary of what they have learned. This method not only helps to consolidate knowledge but also provides space for individual thought processes and strengthens the ability for self-reflection.

Tips for educators - making targeted use of silence in the classroom

- **Silent contemplation of artworks**: Present artworks to students without immediate explanation and give them a deliberate silent period to engage with the content and meaning. This time allows them to grasp the works individually, develop personal associations and organize their thoughts before a discussion begins.

- **Raise awareness of the effect of silence:** Discuss in class how silence can promote focus and deeper concentration. Let the students experience this for themselves by giving them five minutes of silent work time to focus intensively on a creative task, for example. Important: Avoid interrupting them with your own voice so that the students can fully engage in the process.

- **Allow pauses to think about questions:** Give students enough time to think before responding to questions or expecting answers. This gives them the opportunity to formulate thoughtful and deeper answers instead of feeling pressured to respond immediately.

Silence in the classroom: resistance, reflection, or protection?

As Drujon d'Astros and Morales (2024) explain in their article *The Silent Resistance: An Ethnographic Study of the Use of Silence to Resist Accounting and Managerialization*, silence can serve both as a form of protest against existing power structures and as a space for alternative modes of action that can be reclaimed. In their study, the authors identified four different tactics in which silence is used as a resistance strategy:

1. Silence to avoid control and responsibility
2. Silence as a negotiating tool for alternatives
3. Silence as an objection to existing structures
4. Silence to preserve power and authority

Applied to the school context, silence can be a way for students to protest against injustice, oppressive practices or as an expression of frustration. In this sense, the four tactics mentioned above could be equated as follows:

- **Silence as an escape from responsibility and control**

Example: Students deliberately remain silent in discussions or group activities to avoid attracting attention or to avoid direct questioning by the educator. This can be a strategy to protect themselves from criticism or pressure, especially if they feel insecure or have had negative experiences with educators.

- **Silence to negotiate**

Example: When an educator introduces a new project or a new teaching method, students may react with silence. This can be a deliberate signal that they are considering alternatives or demanding more say in deadlines, methods or learning approaches. Silence can serve as a kind of passive negotiation.

- **Silence as an objection**

Example: If a student feels that a certain exercise or teaching method does not meet their individual learning needs, silence can be used as a non-verbal protest. It signals a desire for a more individualized approach or a change in the teaching process.

- **Silence to maintain power and authority**

Example: Students can deliberately remain silent to subtly challenge an educator's authority. They can do this, for example, by not responding to corrections or direct speech. In this way, they demonstrate their independence from the educator's control and send a signal of resistance.

By recognizing the multi-layered meanings of silence and understanding it as an active part of communication, educators can create an inclusive and supportive learning environment. This means not only evaluating verbal contributions but also recognizing and interpreting silent reactions. Educators should develop strategies that allow students to express themselves in diverse ways - be it verbally, in writing or through creative methods. A classroom that recognizes silence as a form of engagement rather than pure refusal can lead to a more dynamic and inclusive class discussion.

If silence is respected as a conscious form of communication, it can not only help to reflect power relations in the classroom but also support students in developing self-confidence and their own voice - whether through words or through silence.

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Tips for activities

Role play:

Assign the students different roles that reflect different perspectives on silence in education. Possible roles are:

- An educator who consciously advocates a pedagogy of silence and emphasizes its advantages.
- A student who uses silence as resistance, e.g. to point out injustice or frustration.
- An educator who explores the cultural meanings of silence and tries to incorporate it into lesson design.

Create scenarios in which these roles come together, e.g.:

- A teaching situation in which a pupil remains silent, and an educator must react.
- A parents' evening at which silence is discussed as part of the learning culture.
- A workshop for educators to further develop methods for dealing with silence in the classroom.

The students should develop their arguments and points of view from the perspective of their assigned role and defend them in the interaction.

Written statement:

Start the lesson with a brief period of silence (5-10 minutes) during which the students can reflect in peace. Then ask them to write down their personal experiences with silence in the classroom or in other situations. They can reflect on this:

- When and why they themselves remain silent.
- How they feel when others around them remain silent.
- What positive or negative experiences they have had with silence.

This reflection can either be freely formulated or guided by specific questions and provides a valuable basis for a subsequent discussion about the role of silence in learning processes.

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0.1.3 Unit Three: Reflections on Language in Practice

Language is much more than just a means of communication. The way we communicate and what we convey through language influences our perception, interaction, and identity. Language allows us to connect with others, but also to define who we are and convey our culture. Language plays a fundamental role in the construction of identity, in education, in power structures or in cultural transmission.

Importance and function of reflection in the language learning process
Reflection is a conscious and purposeful thought process that focuses on how to react appropriately in certain situations - especially when teaching and learning languages. It is not just a matter of stringing together individual thoughts, but rather of organizing them into a logical structure that builds on one another.   Both teachers and learners draw on previously acquired knowledge or refer to it to gain new insights and improve their approach. Reflection thus serves as a central tool in the language learning process, as it enables learning strategies to be questioned, teaching methods to be optimized and effective ways of acquiring language to be identified.

Language, inclusion, and reflection in the classroom

The language used in the classroom has a direct impact on students' sense of belonging, relevance, and inclusion. Language use not only influences individual learning experiences, but also active participation and social interaction in the classroom.

Educators can reflect on their own use of language and make targeted adjustments to create an inclusive and equitable learning environment. Various theoretical approaches offer valuable tools for consciously using language and questioning its impact.

Some of these theoretical frameworks are examined in more detail below:

1. **Reflective practice**

The reflective practice approach encourages educators to critically question their own teaching practice and continuously develop their methods. Donald Schön introduced this concept in 1983 in *The Reflective Practitioner* and emphasized that reflection helps educators to be more aware of language and to better understand its effect on students.

There are two central forms of reflection:

- **Reflection in action**: The ability to think spontaneously during a teaching situation, adjust and respond to unexpected challenges.
- **Reflection on action**: The deliberate review of past teaching experiences to learn from them and improve future approaches.

By reflecting on their language and communication, educators can develop inclusive and supportive classroom practices that reduce barriers.

2. Critical pedagogy

Critical pedagogy, introduced by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), sees education as a tool for social change. It calls on educators to question existing power structures and inequalities in the education system and to empower students to actively participate in their own education.

Central features of critical pedagogy:

- **Dialogue and co-determination**: Educators and students should communicate as equals instead of following a strict hierarchical structure.
- **Uncovering prejudices**: Language can reinforce existing social inequalities. Critical pedagogy encourages us to consciously analyse these and develop alternative, fairer forms of communication.
- **Empowerment of the students**: Learners should not just passively absorb content but actively question the meaning of language and find their own forms of expression.

Through dialogue-oriented and participatory teaching, educators can create a learning environment that promotes critical thinking and social justice.

3. Culturally sensitive teaching

The concept of culturally sensitive teaching was developed in the mid-1990s by Gloria Ladson-Billings, particularly in her work *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* (1994).

The aim of this approach is to consciously integrate cultural diversity into the classroom by:

- the cultural backgrounds of the students are recognized and valued,

- inclusive language is used that appeals to all learners,
- Teaching methods should be adapted to the reality of students' lives in order to increase relevance and motivation.

Culturally sensitive teaching helps to strengthen students' sense of belonging, avoid discrimination and create a learning environment in which everyone feels respected and seen.

4. Critical analysis of documents or videos

Questioning documents and videos is an important skill for educators to improve their own teaching methods, promote students' media literacy and consciously reflect on language use, power dynamics and cultural representations.

The three most important methods for **analysing documents** include

- **Content analysis**: identifies patterns and biases in texts by categorizing data (Krippendorff, 2018).
- **Thematic analysis**: examines recurring themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- **Discourse analysis**: examines how language shapes social realities and influences power dynamics (Fairclough, 1995).

The methods for **analysing videos** include

- **Visual semiotics**: examines symbols, colours, images, and other visual elements to better understand their meaning (Chandler, 2017).
- **Multimodal discourse analysis**: examines the interplay of different communication modes, such as sound, image, language, and gestures (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).
- **Ethnographic content analysis**: Combines classical content analysis with ethnographic research in order to better understand cultural contexts (Altheide, 1987).

Educators who use these methods in a targeted manner can critically question their teaching materials, recognize conscious and unconscious messages in texts and media, and thus promote a fairer, more inclusive lesson design.

Case studies: application of the analysis methods to educational scenarios

The methods of content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis make it possible to critically examine real educational scenarios. Language and media play a decisive role in shaping learning experiences and influence whether students feel included or excluded.

For such an analysis, you can look at suitable teaching materials - in the form of documents or videos - together with your students and examine them systematically. Specific guiding questions can help you to reflect on the use of language:

- Does the language used promote or hinder an inclusive learning environment?
- How does language influence students' participation and self-image?
- Are stereotypes reinforced or challenged?
- How are different identities made visible or ignored?

A targeted examination of practical examples helps to identify problematic language patterns and develop alternatives for more inclusive communication.

Examples of discriminatory language

- **Stereotyping and prejudices:**
  - stereotypical descriptions such as *"Asians are good at math"* or *"girls are naturally more caring than boys"*, which unintentionally reinforce prejudices
  - Boys are consistently assigned leadership roles and girls caregiver roles, which reproduces gender stereotypes

- **Exclusionary language**
  - *"Mothers and fathers"* are regularly addressed in school newsletters, which excludes family constellations such as single parents or same sex parents
  - An educator says: *"Have your mother or father sign this"*, which can exclude students from non-traditional families

- **Microaggressions**
  - Statement *"But you speak very good German for someone with this background"*, which subliminally expresses expectations or prejudices
  - In a discussion, an educator unintentionally downplays the identity of a student by saying: *"I don't see any skin colour, we are all the same,"* thus ignoring the student's lived experiences of racism

Examples of inclusive language

- **Culturally sensitive language**
    - a class reading contains stories from diverse cultures so that all pupils relate to each other
    - an educator recognizes diverse cultural celebrations and encourages students to share their traditions with the class

- **Gender-equitable language**
    - Instead of using exclusively masculine or feminine forms ("every pupil"), a gender-neutral form is used, e.g. "all pupils" or "the learners", to include all genders
    - An educator greets the class with "Good morning, everyone!" instead of "Good morning, ladies and gents!" to take gender diversity into account linguistically

- **Strengthening identity**
    - A teaching resource uses appreciative language when talking about LGBTQI+ students and emphasizes the right to a safe learning environment.
    - An educator consistently uses students' correct names and pronouns and encourages others to do the same, creating an atmosphere of respect and acceptance

Where can I find videos and documents?
In principle, you can analyse all teaching materials that you have been provided with or use anyway. Here is one example of fly on the wall documentary of a school in Manchester, England, called *Educating Greater Manchester*:   • https://youtu.be/HqYFyoWk2ik

Recommended reading and resources

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