Exposition and modelling

Exposition or Teachers’ Talk

• Refer to the trainee teacher webpage on Geography exposition.

This teaching strategy is often described as the ‘bread and butter’ skill of effective teaching and one that a trainee teacher needs to develop early. Although it is a basic teaching skill, some trainees find it particularly difficult to master well.

Points to consider

• Exposition requires good subject knowledge. Encourage trainees to use notes or prompt sheets if they need them, but these must not detract from them engaging students.
• Exposition has many potential stumbling blocks; clarity, structure, length, language and exemplification. You may have to deal with them consecutively - not all at once.
• Trainees find it helpful to use a good supporting visual resource such as an image or map projected on a large screen, or even props such as objects. Encourage them to use the resource imaginatively to stimulate interest.
• A good early activity for a trainee to explain a technique or skill to students, such as a map skill or drawing a climate graph. This could be part of a collaboratively taught lesson.
• Look for suitable opportunities for trainees to practise their ‘exposition’ skills with a range of classes. This could well include post-16 classes where a trainee’s degree study can be used profitably as a visiting 'expert' and there are unlikely to be any behaviour problems.
• Plan with trainees some analogies that they could use to illustrate their explanations.
• Margaret Roberts (2013) refers to ‘presentational talk’ that uses a personal experience or anecdote. If a trainee has an interesting geographical ‘story’ give them the opportunity to present this to students.

At first trainees will contribute to only parts of lessons, but as their confidence and competence grows they will gradually extend their involvement to plan and use student activities to follow up their exposition or explanation. At this stage, they need to begin to think about how the students are responding to their presentation. Are they thinking about challenging students to think geographically?

Heed the warning given in Biddulph et al (2015) about beginning teachers who rely too heavily on PowerPoint presentations to do the talking for them, resulting in dull and lifeless teaching!

When you observe trainees using exposition and explanations, the above points can provide you with guidance for feedback on its effectiveness. Discuss with them whether the students could recall the content afterwards and the different strategies they could use to check students’ understanding. Pay particular attention to trainees’ subject knowledge and the accuracy and language used in their exposition.
Developing trainees' communication skills

Some trainees are 'naturals' at presenting information. Others need to work hard on developing these skills. They will often be preoccupied with what they have to say and fail to realize the importance of how they say it and do not pay attention to the art of communication. For such trainees, work with them on techniques they can master to help them teach more effectively; discuss with them aspects such as the use of analogy, the effectiveness of summary and their use of vocabulary. A useful strategy to use with trainees is to video a short section of their explanation and review the play-back with them.

Microteaching can be a useful approach; a trainee’s short presentation is video-recorded and what they need to work on is discussed. This helps an ITE trainer give an honest evaluation - but it is a good idea to let them view the recording in private first! Video helps them to pick up on any aspects of presentation they need to work on; pace, clarity of communication, the use of body language and mannerisms which are particularly obvious. If a trainee has particular difficulties with communication, ask a drama teacher to help improve their use of voice, pose, pause and expression.

Encourage trainees to practise how they talk to students and a good exercise is to read aloud to students, so they explore the use of expression and how to engage students to listen. Some of the thinking skills strategies involve teacher talk of this type which they could use, such as Mind Movies and Story Telling; both depend on students listening to a teacher reading a text.

How much geography is there in trainee teachers' talk?

Margaret Roberts emphasises the importance of students getting used to hearing the vocabulary of geography and how geographical ideas are expressed. This requires trainee teachers paying particular attention to how they present geography to students. She also notes how many trainee teachers she observes spend more time in ‘management talk’ during lessons than geographical talk. She identifies three categories of classroom talk - related to behaviour, activity and geography. Monitor this when observing trainees teach, and discuss with them the messages they convey to the students.

Activities with trainee teachers

- Consider the repertoires of classroom talk as outlined in Roberts (2013) in Fig 10.1 on p 95. What opportunities can you identify for a trainee teacher to observe and/or try out each of these?
- Try out the activity suggested in Roberts (2013) on p 96 to identify the amount of geographical talk in a lesson. This could be a focus for one of your observations of the trainee’s lessons or it could be used when they observe another teacher.
- Discuss the different forms of presentational talk that the trainee teacher uses, referring to Roberts (2013) p 97.

Reference for the ITE trainer (in addition to the trainee teacher readings)

- Pedagogy and Practice: Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools: Unit 8 Explaining, Department for Education and Skills, 2004
Modelling or demonstration

Refer to the trainee teacher webpage on Modelling and demonstration.

This is a particular form of exposition. The trainees’ web page lists several examples of topics where teachers model or demonstrate processes and skills in geography lessons. Suggest opportunities for a trainee to introduce use modelling or demonstration when they are teaching lessons - it is often not the first approach they think about.

When observing trainee teachers modelling or demonstrating, look for:

- Is the trainee teacher proficient in the skills, processes or procedures being modelled?
- Did they break down the demonstration into appropriate steps?
- Was their explanation clear? Were any visual aids appropriately used?
- How were the students involved? Could they all see the demonstration?
- How did the teacher check they understood?
- After the teacher had explained, what did the students do?
- Were the transitions handled well?
- How did the students respond throughout the session?

References for the ITE trainer (in addition to the trainee teacher readings)


(Last updated February 2019)

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