

Guidance on the COVID-aware Language Classroom

From September 2020 many schools (and other institutions) welcomed back full classes of pupils, and of older students, and ALL members are aware (along with their colleagues in Senior Leadership and other areas of the curriculum) that the context will be difficult to manage, and may well be different in different establishments.

The priority for all of us must be considerations of maintaining good health: Schools cannot do without their teachers (especially true of Language teachers because of your unique role in modelling the target language, so you must avoid risk yourself.

You will also have concerns about the potential of carrying infection back into your homes and families, and so you will be determined to offset that risk.

And of course you are in a position of loco parentis and are concerned for the well-being of all of your students / pupils in all of your classes.

Families will need reassuring that schools and individual classrooms are not exposing young people to risk. They may also need guidance about how to speak to their children about behaviours and expectations when in and around school.

ALL is collating Languages-specific information and advice to support you in your planning and communications. Clearly we should respect any UK Government advice that is forthcoming, as there is a bigger picture of which we are all part. At the same time, as professionals we have concerns which we share with language teachers around the world about possible impact on our practice (e.g. speaking activities, exchanges, visitors, travel abroad), and ALL is already exploring with international partners what advice we can usefully share. We have a focus on our learners' progression – in the four Language Skills as well as other dimensions (e.g. cultural understanding) and will be looking for strategies that allow them to progress as well as possible, in what is likely to be a physically constrained classroom context. Current DfE advice (1) mentions as risky classroom behaviour – singing (a mainstay of many Primary Language lessons) and there are discussions of managing singing activities out of doors, or with pupils all facing the front and well-spaced out. These are clearly difficult parameters to maintain in some classrooms, and with some ages of learners. The generic DfE advice may seem to envisage teacher-led classrooms dominated by Reading and Writing activities. These constitute, of course, only half of the work we would usually plan for, so ALL will be gathering from members, and others, strategies and suggestions for maintaining the profile and role of Listening and Speaking as part of the learning process. This may involve individual activities outside the classroom, and suggestions could exploit technological solutions (although we must also bear in mind questions of equity

between learners who will not all have the same access). Listening activities of the quiz or test type may be low risk (in respect of the potential for spreading the virus) but may need broadening into less formal approaches to maintain motivation.

One thing which is worth consideration even now is the standing of Target Language use by the teacher; in order to give learners the most access to hearing and responding to the Language they are learning (for development of Phonics knowledge, vocabulary, memorisation and grammatical patterns) without the learners necessarily having to respond in speech themselves. Teachers may well be considering enhancing or prioritising their own use of the Language in speech.

(1) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>