

Key Stage 3 Strategy, Foundation Subjects strand: key messages about teaching repertoire

This leaflet provides information for teachers about the 'Teaching repertoire' section of the training materials for foundation subjects.

Why is teaching repertoire important?

There is a range of teaching skills which comprise a teacher's repertoire. These include questioning, explaining and modelling. A teacher's repertoire, particularly the purposeful use of different types of teacher talk, is vital in:

- presenting key concepts and ideas;
- demonstrating skills and processes;
- engaging and supporting pupils in active learning and higher order thinking;
- establishing an interactive, well-paced dialogue with the class in which teacher and pupils articulate ideas, express opinions, and build on each other's ideas to develop knowledge and understanding;
- creating the right level of challenge and moving learning forward so that pupils can make good progress and reach high standards.

The 'Teaching repertoire' modules make explicit the different purposes of these skills for both direct, whole-class teaching and for intervening in and supporting group and individual work. They provide a language for focused discussion and build a foundation for planning so that teachers can work collaboratively to share, evaluate and improve their practice.

The three 'Teaching repertoire' modules each take one aspect of teacher repertoire and provide a description of the principles underpinning effective practice, with practical examples and suggestions for trying things out in the classroom.

Which modules focus on teaching repertoire?

The three modules in this section are:

- Questioning;
- Explaining;
- Modelling.

Each module can be used as 'stand alone' training and will fit into a typical session during a training day or twilight event. Alternatively, the modules can be linked to address a broader range of issues and professional development needs.



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Questioning (module 4)

This module provides support for teachers wishing to improve their questioning techniques, particularly with a view to developing pupils' higher order thinking.

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Questioning plays a vital role in all parts of a lesson so this module can be linked with the **Starters** and **Plenaries** modules.

Its key messages are listed below.

- Questions need to be planned in a sequence that guides pupils towards key learning objectives. They need to reinforce and revisit these objectives.
- Certain types of question have inbuilt challenge and require pupils to think deeply. These include:
 - open-ended questions which have no one obvious answer;
 - questions that demand and develop higher order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation;
 - questions which encourage pupils to speculate and take risks.
- Teachers should build in 'wait time' so that pupils can reflect on a challenging question before answering it.
- Questions can be used to promote active listening and engagement, especially when the 'no hands rule' is used. Active listening skills can be further developed by building variety into teacher questions and expecting pupils to generate their own questions.
- Teachers can encourage pupils to give extended answers through the use of questions and alternative strategies, such as inviting pupils to elaborate or speculate on a topic.

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This point links this module to the 'Knowing and learning' section and to the **Challenge** module.

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Handout 4.2 has a useful list of alternatives to questions.

Explaining (module 5)

Explaining can be defined as 'giving understanding to another'. This module aims to help teachers improve their skills by identifying types of explanations and some techniques for presenting them.

Its key messages are listed below.

- Many things, such as abstract concepts, events outside pupils' experience, principles, rules and important ideas, are difficult or impossible for pupils to understand without explanation.
- Common types of explanation deal with:
 - concepts;
 - similarities and differences;
 - cause and effect;
 - purposes;
 - processes.
- Explanations contribute to pupils' learning when they enable pupils to connect new information to the framework of what they already know.
- Teachers can improve explanations through planning and deploying a range of techniques, such as the use of props or voice and body, which can contribute to improved pupil engagement and understanding.

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You could take this point further by using the **Big concepts and skills** module.

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Handout 5.4 lists and describes some useful techniques for explanations.

Modelling (module 6)

Modelling is a powerful strategy that can be used to teach a range of skills and processes. It involves the teacher as 'an expert' demonstrating how to do something and making the process explicit by thinking aloud.

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You can also see modelling writing in history in the video **LAC: writing non-fiction**.

Its key messages are listed below.

- Modelling helps make explicit the thinking behind important skills, decisions and processes.
- Modelling plays a significant role in helping pupils to learn independently.
- Modelling is most effective when the teacher:
 - is specific;
 - explains underlying principles;
 - shares thinking;
 - involves pupils increasingly in the process, encouraging them to ask questions;
 - provides opportunities for pupils to practise the new skill or process while it is fresh;
 - supports first attempts with prompts and scaffolds in order to build pupils' confidence and expertise;
 - builds in time for pupils to reflect on what they have learned.

Where Next?

How you go about using the foundation subjects training materials to help you to develop your repertoire of teaching skills depends, to a considerable extent, on your starting point, your aims and your current level of expertise. Here are some suggestions for getting started.

If you are in the early stages of improving your questioning, explaining or modelling you could consider the following.

- If you are concerned that pupil responses to your questions are short and lack depth then the **Questioning** module may provide a starting point for tackling this issue.
- If some pupils tend to 'switch off' when you are explaining how to tackle a new skill or process, or some find it difficult to get started on the task, you might consider modelling. Participate in training using the **Modelling** module then select a skill or technique from your subject that pupils find difficult and plan to model it in a lesson. You may find it helpful to plan it with a colleague or consultant.
- If there are concepts or ideas that pupils find difficult to grasp or handle poorly in assessments then perhaps they need explaining more clearly. The **Explaining** module provides insight which can enable you to plan, evaluate and share good explanations with departmental colleagues.

If you already have considerable experience in developing questioning, explaining and modelling you could try the following.

- Work with departmental colleagues to identify aspects of your scheme of work which pupils find challenging. Decide whether the planned use of questioning, explaining or modelling (or various combinations) might lead to improved pupil outcomes. Consider setting up a coaching programme to support colleagues in developing these aspects of their teaching repertoire.
- Use modelling to improve your teaching of thinking skills. Because thinking is usually invisible, modelling can be very powerful as it allows the teacher to make explicit specific types and patterns of thinking to pupils. Consider the video extract showing Karen modelling the thinking necessary to build a concept map. Identify other types of thinking, such as classifying and prioritising, or 'big concepts' which are important in your subject and plan to model them. You may find it helpful to participate in training based on the [Principles for teaching thinking, Reflection and Big concepts and skills](#) first.

... and finally

There are three further foundation subjects key messages leaflets on 'Assessment for learning' (DfES 0045/2003), 'Structuring learning' (DfES 0044/2003) and 'Teaching thinking' (DfES 0046/2003). These can be found on the website at www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/keystage3

All training modules referred to in this leaflet can be found in the 'Training materials for the foundation subjects' folder (DfES 0350/2002) unless otherwise stated. LAC refers to 'Literacy across the curriculum' (DfEE 0235/2001). There is also an accompanying LAC video (DfEE 0122/2001).