

## 5 Explaining and presenting

Giving a *short* lecture or presentation to the class can be very effective, but needs the self-discipline not to ramble and not to do it too often. If it is well planned and structured, with good visual images and interesting examples, and focused to the listeners, it can be one of the best ways of helping a class to gain information and see the connections. However, there is always a temptation to talk for too long.

### The role of whole-class presentation

It mainly serves the purpose of providing a single coherent explanation, whether of a theory, an event and its causes, a skill, or even a controversial issue. In different contexts, presentations can:

- bring together alternative explanations for pupils to consider
- show how knowledge can be applied
- compare the conclusions reached by different groups
- clarify information and ideas that learners have been struggling with.

A teacher can also model out different ways of thinking about a complex problem, e.g. what keeps the earth rotating? And how did it begin?

### Engaging the listener

Though both are ‘whole class’, a presentation is different from a question and answer session to check understanding. However presentations are not just a one-way process, as they build on pupils’ previously interactions with the teacher and invite a subsequent response.

Occasional questions are helpful, but too many can stop the flow and reduce coherence. Often a single challenging question (e.g. how will this end?) can be more provoking. To avoid assuming that a correct answer means everyone understands, ‘traffic lights’ feedback or similar could be used.

The key thing is to understand that a good presentation doesn’t necessarily lead to transfer of information or ideas; the learners must be stimulated to *want to* receive and make sense of it. Longer-term memory often depends on learners making use of the ideas.

It has become common to announce at the start of the lesson what pupils are expected to know by the end. This makes good sense, but it can also stifle curiosity, suspense and surprise. Alternatives include:

- a visual with gaps or question marks
- inviting pupils to make a prediction or form an hypothesis
- posing a challenging question and allowing a few minutes to discuss in groups or make individual notes
- presenting a short video extract or photograph

### **At what stage of the lesson?**

It is often assumed that a presentation is the best way to start a lesson, leading in to learner activities. For example, in maths lessons, the teacher will demonstrate how to do a calculation, and then the pupils practise examples individually.

Presentations can also be timed for later in the lesson. Good reasons for doing so include:

- waiting till problems begin to emerge, or it is clear that learners need more knowledge;
- using a whole-class presentation to share and compare the tentative solutions produced by different groups.

Instead of trying to say everything, a presentation might focus on pupil *mis*understandings and *mis*interpretations, to explore with pupils why they reached a particular conclusion or solution.

A presentation does not need to be to the whole class. For example, in a design and technology, music or art lesson, it can occur when one pupil has asked for help; others can then be invited to walk across to listen to an explanation, if they feel they need it too.

An explanation can also be stored as a powerpoint for individual viewing.

### **Style**

The following advice was written for beginner teachers. It doesn't suit everyone's style, every topic or occasion, but could provide a starting point for reflection and planning.

- Not too long! 5-10 minutes is often enough.
- Design some clear visuals to help your class follow the connections.
- Tell your listeners what to expect, e.g. 'I expect you to listen quietly for the next ten minutes, and at the end you can ask some questions.'
- Allow your class this period of relaxed and attentive listening, without the threat of sudden questions.
- Vary your speed and volume. Build in pauses.
- Keep eye contact.
- You can't make a presentation without simultaneously presenting yourself, so think of your clothing, posture, body language and facial expression.
- After a phase of quiet listening, the next part of the lesson should involve active learning. End with a question, problem or challenge to engage and stimulate your class.

## **Key visuals**

These provide a way of linking together information. They can take many forms, for different purposes, for example:

- a concept map or other pathways diagram to show a complexity of causes
- a timeline or other representation of the succession of events
- a map or spatial diagram
- a table, graph or pie chart to show proportions and relationships between quantities.

### **Suggestions for discussion**

- A) Think about one class, over the last fortnight. If you were only allowed to make one presentation, lasting 10-15 minutes, what would it be on? Explain your choice to other participants.
- B) In groups, participants should consider how they would use a visual to support this presentation? Explain its purpose and structure.
- C) Drawing on your experience, observation of others, and imagination, summarise several interesting ways to initiate a presentation.
- D) Think of some occasions when you have announced the main purpose to the class at the start of the lesson. Consider whether alternative ways might better engage pupils' thoughtful attention. This should lead to some discussion.