CLIL in the North: finding true north?
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Published in:
CLIL Magazine

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Publication date:
2016

Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database

Citation for published version (APA):
CLIL teaching in the Netherlands is very popular: roughly 130 secondary schools offer CLIL education. But did you know that only nine secondary schools in the north of the Netherlands are specialized in CLIL teaching? One of these schools is Dollard College.

By Nienke Smit

CLIL at Dollard College

One of the newest kids on the CLIL block is Dollard College in Winschoten. After she finished her master’s degree in teaching English in 2013, Betty Bos was determined to set up a programme for CLIL education at her school. During her MA research project Betty had learnt how to design CLIL lessons in tandem with PE and geography colleagues. She and her colleagues had tried out their CLIL lessons and evaluated them. They immediately realized that CLIL teaching offered possibilities to activate students, encourage them to think and to use the English language in a different way. “It made more sense to learn English this way”, says Betty, “the school needed a boost and we really wanted to offer a programme for excellent students.” Very soon she found colleagues who were keen to help her set up a CLIL programme. The team convinced the school management that they would be able to pull this off in Winschoten, a small town in the north-east of the Netherlands, where population decline is noticeable. The hands-on school team of experienced teachers is on a mission to make a difference in Winschoten and to develop their English language teaching skills.

Meanwhile, at the University of Groningen, we also felt that CLIL needed a boost in the north. Together with Marjolijn Vesperop (professor of English as a second language), Jasmijn Blomert (EFL teacher educator) and Deniz Haydar (marine biologist and teacher educator) we set up a professional development course for new and experienced CLIL teachers. Because we aim to teach what we preach, we followed a backward design approach to develop our curriculum and formulated guiding questions such as:

- What can you learn concepts through in a single sentence or paragraph?
- How can you learn concepts through in a multi-disciplinary way?
- How can you evaluate the level of content and language awareness over time for different people / animals / countries / places etc.?
- What is scientific thinking? And what is the role of visualisation?
- How can you motivate students to learn concepts through in a multi-disciplinary way?

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http://www.rug.nl/education/lerarenopleiding/professionele-ervaring/studiedagen/ito-clil/ or email ito@rug.nl

Box 1 - Task:

You all know the saying “a picture paints a thousand words”. But that does not only go for art or photos, we can also apply this principle to infographics, figures and charts. Someone who nicely illustrates how much we can say about a graphical representation of figures and numbers is Hans Rosling. As a non-native speaker of English, Hans Rosling shows how you can explain figures in effective and simple language. This is of course not as easy as it seems, but it is something you can practice. If you do not know him, watch his TED talk online: https://www.ted.com/talks/hans_rosling_show_the_best_stats_you_ve_ever_seen?language=en

Box 2 - Checklist:

Use this checklist to guide your thinking.

1. Examine the graph (observing & looking: the silent phase)
   - What is the title/topic of the chart?
   - What sort of graph / chart are we looking at?
   - What kind of information can we find in a chart / graph like this?

2. Describe the graph / chart
   - Read (off)/ interpret the graph
   - Read the accompanying questions / Formulate questions about the graph

3. Focus on the information you want to / need to get from the chart / graph
   - Read (off)/ interpret the graph
   - Formulate questions about the graph

4. Identify the trend / process
   - What is happening / what happened?
   - What was measured? What kind of data does the graph represent?
   - Identify the variables, independent variables? Dependent variables?
   - Can you spot one of the four basic trends: upward movement / downward movement / no movement / change in direction
   - Main change over time?
   - What is the pattern over time / for different people / animals / countries / places etc.

5. Use the following production scaffolds in order to talk to the chart:
   - Analyze
   - Plot
   - Graph
   - Diagram
   -iny
   - Sad
   - Joy
   - Sharp
   - Slow
   - Smooth
   - Sharp
   - Slow
   - Smooth
   - Sharp
   - Slow
   - Smooth
   - Sharp
   - Slow
   - Smooth
   - Sharp
   - Slow
   - Smooth
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   - Sharp
   - Slow
   - Smooth
   - Sharp
   - Slow
   - Smooth

‘In a relatively short period of time they have really learnt how to motivate each other’

Dropbox for online collaboration, YouTube clips for authentic input, EdPuzzle for listening activities, voice and video recording tools for oral presentations and lots more.

‘We find a lot of motivation and inspiration in multi-disciplinary collaboration’

CLIL teaching is not just about revisiting the same educational projects. It is about integrating ideas and existing educational projects. They have been brainstorming to integrate ideas, to explore each other’s subjects and to sit down and do the work together. A shared vision of what they want to achieve, building a strong CLIL department at their school in Winschoten, is their driving force. In a relatively short period of time they have really learnt how to motivate each other.

Backward designing a CLIL course

‘Answers to these questions cannot be given in a single sentence or paragraph’

The teachers experience it takes a lot of time to talk things through, to elaborate on new ideas, to explore each other’s subjects and to sit down and do the work together. A shared vision of what they want to achieve, building a strong CLIL department at their school in Winschoten, is their driving force. In a relatively short period of time they have really learnt how to motivate each other.

When working together can be a challenge, the teachers experience it takes a lot of time to talk things through, to elaborate on new ideas, to explore each other’s subjects and to sit down and do the work together. A shared vision of what they want to achieve, building a strong CLIL department at their school in Winschoten, is their driving force. In a relatively short period of time they have really learnt how to motivate each other.

Talk the talk activity

To give you a flavour of our course we will share an activity in which content and language are truly intertwined. The activity is called “get the scientific picture and talk the talk”. Talking about graphs forms the starting point for this activity. In order to do this you need a graph, chart, figure or infographic from a popular science article or from the popular science section of a general newspaper. The activity aims to foster language and content awareness, focusing on scientific thinking, the role of visualisation and explaining graphs (see boxes 1 and 2 for the instructions).

Are CLIL teachers and CLIL teacher educators finding true north? Time will tell, but we can definitely say that we find a lot of motivation and inspiration in multi-disciplinary collaboration. As CLIL students, teachers and teacher educators and researchers, we are learning a lot from each other and having a really good time.

https://www.ted.com/talks/hans_rosling_show_the_best_stats_you_ve_ever_seen?language=en