CLIL in the North: finding true north?
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CLIL teaching in the Netherlands is something that has to change. Time to take action and navigate the CLIL path, because, who knows, a new group of enthusiastic people might find true north. Let us give you an update. By Nienke Smit

CLIL at Dordt College
One of the newest kids on the CLIL block is Dordt 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 head of this small team of experienced teachers is on a mission to make a difference in Winschoten and to develop their English language and teaching skills. The team went to Cumbria, took Janet Streetee’s course, came back energized and started teaching their CLIL group in August.

A team effort
The team spends a lot of time talking about and ruminating with their new roles. They get a lot of energy from exploring each other’s subjects and to sit down and do the work together. A shared vision of what they want to achieve, building a thriving 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
Meanwhile, at the University of Groningen, we also felt that CLIL needed a boost in the north. Together with Marjolin Verspoor (professor of English as a second language), Jasmin Ilker-mert (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:

- How can you foster learner language development?
- How can you evaluate the level of content and the level of language in CLIL teaching materials?
- What is scientific thinking? And what is cognitive academic language proficiency?
- How can you learn concepts through English? And what is the role of visualisation?
- How can you work together in a multi-disciplinary team when there is no (or very little) time?

During the training sessions these questions are discussed. Possible answers to these questions require extensive reading, discussion and practice. An important first step is exploring theoretical notions about for instance learner language development or scientific thinking that are relevant for CLIL teaching, the second step is putting theory into practice in for instance simulations, group work and materials development activities. The third step is to make teachers take it to implement their new ideas in their lessons.

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

GoFormative, Kahoot and Socrative for formative feedback, Classkick for authentic input, EdPuzzle for listening activities, voice and video recording tools for oral presentations and lots more.

Of course 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 thriving 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.

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

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).

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

Box 1 - Task:
We 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_shows_the_best_stats_you_ve_ever_seen?language=en

You are going write a paragraph for a popular science magazine / section in a newspaper. Write about your interpretation of the graph. Use at least 200 and a maximum of 300 words.

Box 2 - Checklist:
Use this checklist to guide your thinking.

1. Examine the graph (observing & looking: the silent phase)
2. Describe the graph / chart
3. Focus on the information you want to / need to get from the chart / graph
4. Identify the trend / process
5. Use the following production scaffolds in order to talk the talk:

• What is the title/topic of the chart?
• What is the title/topic of the chart?
• What kind of information can we find in a chart / graph like this?
• Focus on the information you want to / need to get from the chart / graph

http://www.rug.nl/education/lerarenopleiding/professionalisering/studiedagen/to/CLIL/ or email itto@rug.nl

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and existing educational projects such as EduScrum for project work, digital tools such as GoFormative, Kahoot and Socrative for formative assessment, Pinterest for moodboards, visualisation and inspiration in multi-disciplinary collaboration. 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:

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