

INTERNATIONALISING

Teaching English in the Netherlands

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It is September 2, 2002. A new school year has just started. It is always a surprise which classes you will teach this year. So far we are happy with the classes and the students.

The school we both teach at is called the Libanon Lyceum Rotterdam. The Libanon Lyceum Rotterdam is situated in former upper class area of Rotterdam, called Kralingen. Our school's population consists of students from the above-mentioned area as well as from other parts of Rotterdam, the world's largest harbour, and even from outside of Rotterdam. This year our entry population consists of 70% minority students; quite a jump from last year's 40%.

Libanon Lyceum Rotterdam is a Comprehensive School. Students start at the age of 12 after Primary School. Whatever level students end up, taking English is compulsory in all forms up until

their Finals. Our school has got 3 levels of teaching:

- MAVO (lower general secondary education)
- HAVO (higher general secondary education)
- VWO (pre-university education)

Libanon Lyceum Rotterdam is housed in 3 buildings of which one has just been erected. The other 2 are old monumental buildings. Some students even say that seeing these buildings made them decide to come to the Libanon Lyceum.

At our school the students will get either 2 or 3 hours of English per week depending on which year they are in. Each year and often also each level has got its own textbook and workbook. Each year we try to improve the 4 basic skills:

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

The assignments in the workbook will focus on various aspects of these 4 skills. Within our curriculum reading is the most important skill. Apart from the texts in the textbook they, the students, also have to find a number of recent (newspaper)

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articles, which they have to read in order to summarize. The students choose these articles from the Internet or from magazines, which they either buy themselves (very seldom) or which they can find at school.

In order to practice their listening skills, the students have to watch the BBC News and a documentary on the BBC. After watching a programme they answer several questions on the programme in order to prove if they understood the programme. These 2 assignments that we call extensive reading and extensive listening are to improve their listening and reading skills. This is also a way to keep them informed about what is going on in the English-speaking countries.

Speaking English is for some students still an unpleasant experience, but we try to encourage the student speak English as much as possible. The assignments we use to practice to speaking are so-called role-plays. The students work in pairs: each one is assigned a role, which is written out on a role-card. After preparing their role they must act out the situation.

For writing the students write formal and informal letters. In one of our classes our students are preparing a letter to students in England who asked us some information. This is a great assignment for the students because now they realise that they are writing to a real person and not for their teacher. These kinds of projects are really something we would like to encourage within our school.

Apart from these 4 skills the students also have to acquire a lot of vocabulary and learn and practice grammar. The tests that are given to grade their improvement are almost always written tests. The speaking test (the role-play) is the only oral test.

We hope to have given you a brief account of our work at the Libanon Lyceum Rotterdam.

Literature

Our students have to read 3 books in their 3rd year, 2 books in their 4th year and 1 book in their 5th year. To make sure that they read those books appropriate for their level, not too difficult but more especially not too easy, we give them a list from which they can choose. As teachers we are free to choose the books we feel they should read. Here are some examples of the books they can read:

3rd year:

- The Pearl – John Steinbeck
- Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde – R.L. Stevenson
- The Hooded man – Jay Bennet

4th year:

- A Kiss before dying – I. Levin
- One flew over the Cuckoo's nest – K. Kesey
- Rosemary's Baby – I. Levin

5th year:

- About a boy – Nick Hornby
- Little Women – Louisa M. Alcott
- The Boys from Brazil – Ira Levin

Of course if the students want to read a book which is not on the list we will allow that if they show us beforehand which book they want to read.

After reading the book, the students have to make a bookreport. In this report they have to give a short summary of the book, describe the various characters in the book, by using quotations. There are also assignments in which they have to rewrite the ending of the book or they have to think

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of 3 different titles and of course say why they think these titles will be appropriate. For English there is never an oral exam on the books they have to read. The Ministry of Education did away with this about 3 years ago. It used to be that the students were given a grade during this exam for literature but also for their fluency in English. It was thought to be unfair to do

this. Because if English literature was not your strong point, it is likely that you would be less fluent in your English on that subject. That is why it was felt that a written report would be best as proof that you read the book.

We are glad to say that there are still a lot of kids who enjoy reading English literature. ♦



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