

Internationalisation within international and bilingual education in the Netherlands: Using the theme of Immigration and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*.

MA Thesis

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Esmé Deppe 3290425

Supervised by dr. P.J.C.M. Franssen and prof. dr. D.A. Pascoe.

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Introduction

Independent educational expert, Erik Kwakernaak, states that mastery of a foreign language is a means, rather than a goal, that enables and facilitates international and intercultural contacts.¹ He believes that every school subject ought to contribute to the transformation of learners into competent citizens in our democratic society. A society that is no longer merely nationally, but rather European or even internationally oriented. Citizens of such an internationally focussed society should be able to come into contact with foreign societies and cultures and maintain these contacts.

Despite the claimed importance of knowledge of languages *and* cultures in the key aims and examination programmes of the Dutch educational system, culture is primarily discussed within literature lessons.² In my view, however, the culture of the target language should also be an integral part of the educational process. Culture in this sense should not be limited to the arts and music, but also encompass street, food, behavioural and corporate culture, among others. In the case of English language and culture, there is plenty of choice as to which country to focus on, as English is spoken within many countries as a native tongue. However, in this thesis the focus will be on British society and literature, because Britain is the nearest English speaking country to the Netherlands. Due to the close proximity of the countries, it is likely that more European values and ideas are shared by the two peoples. This common ground will allow Dutch learners to connect more readily or easily with the British culture.

Britain's colonial past has contributed greatly to its rich culture leading to its present multicultural society. Not surprisingly, the wealth of classroom material resulting from such a multicultural society is ideally suited for classroom discussion. In my limited experience as a

¹ Erik Kwakernaak, *Didaktiek van het Vreemdetalenonderwijs* (Bussum: Uitgeverij Coutinho, 2009), 373.

² *Ibid.* 378.

teacher at several schools,³ I have noticed that it is very common to discuss *white* English culture within the classroom. I thought it would be interesting to focus on the cultures of minorities within Britain; more specifically those of immigrants. By focusing on these alternative cultures within the classroom, learners will gain perspective and learn to apply nuances when talking about a nation. The British are no longer an overall homogenous group, but include people of many different backgrounds and traditions, in short: cultures.

This leads us to the book I have chosen to discuss: *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith. The novel is written from the perspective of several immigrants, from different generations. I believe that it could be useful to discuss this novel within a bilingual or international environment at the upper secondary level (5 VWO). Learners at this level are teenagers between sixteen and eighteen years old, which means they are at a point in life where they are discovering who they are and starting to realize that there is more to life than their own school or community. Also, Ford observed that: “providing a multitude of perspectives through literature at this point in students’ development is an effective way to help facilitate their engagement in self and social understanding.”⁴ I believe *White Teeth* has plenty to offer students in this regard.

In Chapter 1, I will briefly sketch the current situation of the international and bilingual educational requirements and key aims of the Dutch educational system that claim to contribute to internationalisation, in order to understand what a lesson activity or exercise ought to be based on. In Chapter 2, I will clarify the reasons for shedding light on the international cultures through the teaching of literature. Moreover, I will elaborate on the kinds of activities and exercises which help to achieve this goal within the classroom environment. Chapter 3 will contain a brief analysis of the novel and relevant themes, which may be used within the classroom. Based on

³ I have completed two internships in The Netherlands and one in South Africa.

⁴ Ford, Tyson, Howard and Harris, 2000, quoted in Susan M. Landt, “Multicultural literature and young adolescents: A kaleidoscope of opportunity,” *Journal of adolescent and adult literacy* (2006), 691.

this analysis I will devise activities and exercises specifically about *White Teeth* that can be used in the classroom. These activities will comply with the key aims and CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) teaching methodology. This will be dealt with in Chapter 4.

In the process I hope immigration will come up as an interesting and important topic for classroom discussion. *White Teeth* can stimulate this discussion by using it as a platform rather than approaching it from a specific literary perspective. This does not mean I do not encourage such an approach, but I simply do not focus on this within the scope of my thesis.

Chapter 1: Bilingual and international educational requirements in The Netherlands

1.1. Bilingual education in The Netherlands

Within the Dutch Educational System learners are divided into three separate levels of achievement at the start of their secondary school education. This takes place at the relatively early age of twelve. Each level leads a learner to a different educational future. The level of the learner is determined by the scores of a learner's final primary education test (CITO Eindtoets Basisonderwijs) and/or recommendations from the primary school. The levels are called VMBO, HAVO and VWO. VMBO is vocational training, HAVO prepares a learner for universities of applied sciences (Hoger Beroepsonderwijs) and VWO prepares a learner for research universities (Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek).

In the Netherlands approximately 97 schools offer bilingual education (TTO) with Dutch as the first language and English, or occasionally German, as the second language. According to the European Platform, TTO is the most prevalent in VWO, which is another reason I will focus on VWO level in this thesis.

In bilingual education, at least half of the subjects are taught in English. These are called CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) subjects. CLIL refers to a teaching approach in which learners acquire knowledge, skills and competences by using the foreign language as the language of instruction.

According to the European platform, the aim of bilingual education is to prepare learners for an increasingly international society. This means that TTO has two important goals: acquiring good language skills and providing learners with an international perspective.

1.2. International education in The Netherlands

In addition to bilingual schools, there are 47 international schools in the Netherlands.⁵ An international school teaches in a foreign language, usually English. The schools that are not dependent on a foreign government and are recognized and funded by the Dutch government (the Dutch International Secondary Schools) have an international curriculum which complies with the educational needs of expat children. This means that the schools are concerned with language and culture differentiation and do not favour any country above another. The Dutch International Secondary Schools (tDISS) submit to voluntary supervision of international accreditation bodies, such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme. Programmes like these ensure the quality of education and comply with several European and International Orientation (EIO) requirements.

1.3. European and International Orientation requirements

The European and international orientation (EIO) requirements are standards set by the European Platform. These standards have been developed in cooperation with a network of TTO-schools in order to promote internationalisation and to guarantee the quality of bilingual education.

Students at the end of the third year in secondary education are required to have gained EIO knowledge within at least the subjects History, Geography and Economics, must have participated in internationalisation projects and have collaborated internationally. At the end of their bilingual education programme the learners demonstrate their knowledge of a theme relating to European or international development through an essay, presentation, report and/or conversation in English. The learner must also understand the role of English as a lingua franca

⁵ Stichting Internationaal Onderwijs, *List of all schools*.

and in different kinds of international contact. Finally, the learner should demonstrate a contemporary view of the world in general and Europe in particular. Based on this knowledge, the learners can explain phenomena and developments in their own social or physical environment, in this case The Netherlands. In studying these areas social, cultural, physical, political and/ or personal issues are addressed, because they can now place these issues in a wider context.

The schools are required to use the Common Framework for European Competence (CEFR) when shaping their EIO program and ample use should be made of English (educational) material and resources. It is important that authentic and topical material is used as it reflects the international orientation that the bilingual learner is supposed to develop. When developing authentic material, it is important to keep the following in mind:

Authenticity resides in the teacher-student relationship and in how materials are worked with. Therefore, materials need to incorporate ways of using both the content and language in authentic ways through, for example, assignments that seek to personalise the content and make connections with the student's world.⁶

Using such material will make it easier for the teacher to discuss current international events in the lesson.

1.4. International Baccalaureate programme

Literature plays an important part in the curriculum for the IB subject English Language A⁷. The subject outline of the International Baccalaureate programme mentions that the language and literature course “is not simply a language acquisition course, [but rather] aims to ensure the

⁶ Peeter Mehisto, “Criteria for producing CLIL learning material,” *Encuentro*, 21 (2012), 15-33.

⁷ Language “A” English is taught to native speakers of English.

continuing development of a student’s powers of expression and understanding in a variety of language domains.”⁸

The focus of literature teaching is on both the languages and cultures that are present in the literary material.⁹ There must be a balance in the types of texts (genres) that learners read.¹⁰ The students are required to write an essay, or a piece of creative writing in response to a literary work they have studied.¹¹ Additionally, at least one “component” of world literature, “literature from different parts of the world, cross-cultural works and/or works in translation, each of which clearly shows diverse cultures,”¹² must be studied by the learners in this program.

⁸ International Baccalaureate Organization, *Language A: language and literature subject outline* (2011).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² International Baccalaureate Organization, *Middle Years Programme: Language A Assessment Criteria* (Cardiff: 2010), 10.

Chapter 2: Teaching cultures through English literature

The European Platform advocates an internationally oriented education communicated through authentic English material and resources. Authentic material consists of resources that are written or spoken by native speakers of the target language and have not been specifically developed for language learners use. Students need to broaden their experiences and perspective and are encouraged to increase their cultural awareness by studying a large range of texts from different cultures, times and places. Literature can serve this purpose.

2.1. Witte and CEFR levels

In the English department at secondary schools the choice of authentic literary material depends not only on its cultural content, but also on the level of difficulty that is suitable for the learners. In bilingual education learners are supposed to be at B2 English reading level on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) at the end of the third year,¹³ which is the required level for learners at a regular Dutch secondary school in the final sixth grade. The CEFR has established six levels for each skill,¹⁴ with the lowest level being A1 and the highest C2. Besides the CEFR levels to indicate a learner's English fluency in separate sub-skills (including literature), schools within the Netherlands use Witte's levels to indicate the "difficulty" of literature, in regard to the grades and aims of the national curriculum. In 2008, Witte created a frame of reference for Dutch literature. This frame of reference contains six levels which describe the literary competence of learners at each level, the main interests of learners at a

¹³ Europees Platform, *Rapport: B2 als tussenstation aan het einde van klas 2 tto.*

¹⁴ The skills are reading, writing, listening, speaking and conversational speech.

certain stage and suggestions for exercises to process a novel. This should make it easier for teachers and learners to choose suitable books and appropriate exercises to advance further understanding of the book. According to Witte, learners at a regular Dutch school are supposed to be at level 4 in their final year (VWO), whilst they are supposed to be at CEFR level B2.¹⁵ As mentioned before, B2 is the targeted level of learners at the end of their 3rd year at a bilingual or international school. Witte's level 4 could be considered the target level for the start of the 4th year of bilingual and international education as well. The CEFR deals with language competence, but also includes literary competence in the description of the common reference levels. It suggests that in developing language competence literature should play a key role. The description of the CEFR for B2 level includes the following for reading: "I can understand contemporary literary prose."¹⁶ Another example is the descriptor of the C1 level: "I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts."¹⁷ These criteria tie in with Witte's levels. Learners should be offered literature which adheres to their sophistication as readers of literature and to their language competence in the target language.

According to Witte, Level 4 focuses on the meaning of the text and the structure of the story.¹⁸ The main aim is to identify connections within the texts, to find meaning within specific structural elements and to reflect on the message of the text. The learners are invited to communicate their interpretations and to develop an appreciation for literature. The number of pages should no longer be an issue for learners, and they are interested in understanding complex situations, events and emotions of adults which are distant to a learner's environment.

¹⁵ Theo Witte, *Het oog van de meester: De literaire ontwikkeling van havo- en vwo-leerlingen in de tweede fase van het voortgezet onderwijs* (Delft: Eburon, 2008), 11.

¹⁶ B2 common reference levels reading descriptor, *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (2010), 27.

¹⁷ C1 common reference levels reading descriptor, *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (2010), 27.

¹⁸ T. Witte, *Het oog van de meester: De literaire ontwikkeling van havo- en vwo-leerlingen in de tweede fase van het voortgezet onderwijs* (Delft: Eburon, 2008), 22.

The novel may contain unreliable perspectives, several layers of meaning, implicit time jumps, metaphorical style figures, and so on. As a result, the reader is compelled to interpret the text. The types of novels which learners read at this level, do not only contain characters and themes that might be far removed from their own environment and experience, but can be very different, in terms of language use and literary conventions, from what they are used to. These cultural, linguistic and stylistic differences help a learner to become acquainted with different cultures in this way.

The CEFR and Witte's levels require a level 4 or B2 novel to address certain international events, emotions and environments, which are not necessarily familiar to the learner's direct life experiences. These aspects, as well as time jumps and (unreliable) perspective changes are typical for Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, as the novel narrates the life of several immigrants, from different generations and backgrounds.

2.2. Teaching multicultural literature

Besides the fact that learners are supposed to have reached a certain level of empathy and understanding for different cultures as part of the school's goals, there are a few other reasons for teaching multicultural literature. Gerard Westhoff, an independent educational consultant, mentions the following: the input should be rich and lifelike, should have emotional and social relevance and should stimulate a focus on form.¹⁹ Susan Landt, Doctor of Philosophy in Instructional Systems, adds: "exposing students to a broader view of the world [,] reducing

¹⁹ Gerard Westhoff, *Een 'schijf van vijf' voor het vreemdetalenonderwijs (revisited)* (Deventer: 2008).

prejudice and misunderstanding”²⁰ and finding a reflection of themselves in the novel is essential in teaching literature. Let us briefly examine each of these reasons.

Rich and lifelike input: Literature often plays an important part in a learner’s cultural development. Learners are offered new insights and ideas into other cultures. However, in order for the learners to connect to the text it ought to be *lifelike*. This means that the text must contain pragmatic elements of social contacts that are likely to occur in speaking and writing in real life. This kind of input offers learners appropriate language for any social situation the learners may find themselves in speaking the foreign language. Therefore, the text should also be *rich*. This means that many different social situations should be addressed. In other words, the input should encompass every aspect of the foreign language that a learner is likely to encounter in the foreign country where this language is spoken.

Emotional relevance: Within an international environment, novels could also function as a mirror to those who do not belong to the minority, or as Landt quotes:²¹

Students need to be able to make connections between literature and their everyday lives.

Children need to receive affirmation of themselves and their cultures through literature.

Learners who do not find a reflection of themselves in the novels they read at school can

“activate feelings of marginalization and cause students to question their place within society.”²²

Multicultural literature has emotional relevance, as it helps to enhance learners’ self-concept and pride of heritage and creates a greater understanding and respect for individuals from other (minority) cultures.

²⁰ Susan M. Landt, “Multicultural literature and young adolescents: A kaleidoscope of opportunity,” *Journal of adolescent and adult literacy* (2006), 694.

²¹ Colby & Lyon (2004), quoted in S.M. Landt, “Multicultural literature and young adolescents: A kaleidoscope of opportunity,” *Journal of adolescent and adult literacy* (2006), 694.

²² S.M. Landt, “Multicultural literature and young adolescents: A kaleidoscope of opportunity,” *Journal of adolescent and adult literacy* (2006), 694.

Social relevance: By focusing on literature about or by immigrants within the British society, learners are prepared for an increasingly international society. The learners understand the role of English in various kinds of international contact. Studying literature in which immigrant English is used, offers learners a contemporary view of Britain as well as an insight into the country's colonial past and its consequences.

English literature and literature written in English has a rich history of authors with different backgrounds, from Polish (Joseph Conrad), Trinidadian (V.S. Naipaul) to Indian (Salman Rushdie). Such literature is as diverse as the many dialects and varieties of English that are spoken across the world. It offers readers the opportunity to get acquainted with the language used and the country it originates from, including its social, cultural and historical background. Not only older novels provide us with information about a country's past, but contemporary novels can serve this purpose as well. Pike quotes several authors who even advocate contemporary novels, as a way to understand the historical context better than through studying the "facts" written from a nationalistic point of view:

Benton (2000) notes, there is an alliance of those [...] who recommend a more diverse and multicultural canon in the belief that the dominance of dead, white, male writers perpetuates social and cultural injustice (O'Donnell 1984, Blackledge 1994). While ethnocentric and gender considerations result in calls for a more inclusive and culturally representative canon that reflects the diverse identities and cultural backgrounds of readers [...].²³

Focus on form: The processing of rich and lifelike input with the occasional focus on the grammatical and lexical form of the work under discussion, will create awareness among

²³ M.A. Pike, "The Canon in the classroom: student's experiences of texts from other times", *J. curriculum studies*, 35 (2002), 356.

learners of the existence and the possible meaning of grammatical and lexical structures, this is also known as “awareness-raising.” As long as teachers continue to familiarize the learners with the target language the learners are bound to improve their grammar and vocabulary. When reading multicultural literature, articles or other texts, a learner is brought into contact with a “wide range of lifelike examples of real language in use [which] makes it suitable for focusing on grammatical form as well, especially for more advanced learners of a foreign language.”²⁴

According to Lotte Jager, a graduate of the Language and Communication Master degree: “literature has more value for more advanced learners because ‘it represents language in use’ and is therefore likely to require a deeper processing of different aspects of form.”

Also, the creative language may include “abnormal” structures, which will guide the learners’ attention to focus on form and reminds them of the original, or formal, rule. *White Teeth* contains quite some of these “abnormalities” in language, as it includes language of the London streets, called Raggistani, and other forms of the English language that are not as familiar to the average Dutch (or even many British) learners. Additionally, specific linguistic aspects of (immigrant) English can be analysed.

In the Netherlands, an increasingly multicultural country, immigration has become a hot topic during the past few years. By looking at a similar situation, in another country, learners can form a personal and perhaps more objective view on the matter. This view may help them to explain phenomena and developments in their own (social) environment. The teacher can stimulate this process by discussing current (inter)national events in the lesson, whilst using authentic material in the target language. Immigration is an issue many countries face, which can be discussed in

²⁴ Lotte Jager, *Language through Literature: Benefits of using literature for foreign language acquisition, with practical suggestions for the English language classroom in Dutch secondary education* (2008), 35.

several different subjects. An interdisciplinary approach to this topic would also make this lesson CLIL-worthy, as well as meet another requirement, which reads:

The student learns to place current tensions, conflicts and wars in the world against their background and learns the effects upon individuals and society (national, European and international), the great interdependence in the world, the importance of human rights and comes to see the significance of international cooperation.²⁵

Whilst bilingual education focuses more on the use of English, Dutch international education focuses on multiculturalism and international culture. The participants in such an international education are foreign students or Dutch students who have lived abroad. These expat children can be considered to belong to the upper-end of the spectrum of migrants. Based on this, the topic of immigrant literature can be perceived as a mirror for such learners, as well as a source for interesting discussions and developing points of view. Also, by its very nature immigrant literature covers many multicultural topics and obviously provides pleasure or, even more importantly, should be made to give pleasure to learners from diverse backgrounds. It offers the reader the possibility to recognize, recreate, (re)live situations which the average learner will perhaps never encounter. The experience if only within the imagination of the reader provides insight about life and living. A greater understanding and appreciation of the human experience provides (intellectual) joy, or as Francis Bacon once said: “Reading maketh a full man.”²⁶ The teacher plays an important role in achieving this goal.

²⁵ Europees Platform, *Internationaliseringseisen binnen de Kerndoelen*, 2. My translation.

²⁶ Francis Bacon, “Of Studies,” *Essays or Counsels: Civil and Moral* (1597).

2.3. Approaches to teaching literature

Carter and Long name three possible approaches to teaching literature: the Cultural Model, the Language Model and the Personal Growth Model. According to Carter and Long:

These three approaches to teaching literature differ in terms of their focus on the text: firstly, the text is seen as a cultural artefact; secondly, the text is used as a focus for grammatical and structural analysis; and thirdly, the text is the stimulus for personal growth activities. What is needed is an approach to teaching literature in the EFL classroom which attempts to integrate these elements in a way that makes literature accessible to learners and beneficial for their linguistic development.²⁷

When studying a work of literature, it is important to understand its cultural background, meanings and layers. It is also the key to starting to understand a language more completely and using it to its full potential. Bedi states: “It is [...] apparent that EFL speakers still have difficulties in comprehending the nuances, creativity and versatility which characterize even standard and transaction forms of English.”²⁸ I believe studying literature can help our learners to understand and appreciate nuances of the English language.

At a bilingual school, few learners are native speakers of English, in fact, most learners have been brought up in the Netherlands. Such learners may be proficient in English but their knowledge of the cultural background of English is less so.

Carter and Long’s Cultural Model “requires learners to explore and interpret the social, political, literary and historical context of a specific text.”²⁹ By allowing learners to study

²⁷ R. Carter & M. Long. *Teaching Literature* (Longman: 1991).

²⁸ K.K. Bedi, “Language Acquisition Through Literature Promotes Creativity and Thinking Skill,” *The Criterion: An International Journal in English* (2011), 1.

²⁹ C. Savvidou, “An Integrated Approach to Teaching Literature in the EFL Classroom,” *The Internet TESL Journal* (2004).

material and topics that show the differences and similarities between cultures, a teacher “encourages learners to understand different cultures and ideologies in relation to their own.”³⁰

This focus on similarities and differences between the learner’s personal and social environment and that of Britain, directly takes us to Carter and Long’s third approach, the Personal Growth Model, in which “readers are able to interpret text and construct meaning on the basis of their own experience.”³¹ By offering learners a choice in activities, they may feel more connected to the topic, allowing them to add a personal touch to their work. The Language Model criteria are met in the most simplistic form through the activities chosen and the fact that learners are expected to work with different kinds of texts. In upper-secondary education, it is desirable that learners learn to tackle difficult texts, and come to realise that they are capable of understanding these, with some guidance and/or scaffolding. Learners are offered a choice of material that is slightly above their level of comprehension. This material is made accessible through guiding questions or a series of exercises that help a learner to break it down. Through scaffolding, learners are guided to reach a higher level of understanding by applying new strategies or methods of thinking. It prepares learners for the future, in which they will often be presented with difficult texts (think of business papers, academic or newspaper articles about subjects they are unfamiliar with) which they will be able to read by using the acquired reading strategies.

Together these models are helpful in making English accessible to learners and beneficial for their linguistic development.³² Apart from stimulating personal growth, offering a more in-

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² C. Savvidou, “An Integrated Approach to Teaching Literature in the EFL Classroom,” *The Internet TESL Journal* (2004).

depth view on reality and demonstrating that reading can be fun, they will also stimulate learners to rise to a higher level of reading comprehension.³³

2.4. Language acquisition components

In order to implement these approaches within the classroom, it is necessary to understand how to offer the material to learners in the most effective way. Based on the following language acquisition components, I will create lesson activities to teach Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* through the aforementioned teaching approaches.

Westhoff³⁴ mentions five components of second language acquisition: 1. exposure to input, 2. meaning-focussed processing, 3. form-focussed processing, 4. production of output and 5. use of strategies. The execution of each component is necessary for achieving a successful outcome on language acquisition. According to Westhoff learners need to be presented with various activities at different stages in order to store knowledge efficiently. It will provide the learners several links to recall the knowledge from their memory. The five components are described as follows:

1. *Exposure to input* means that the learners receive rich input in the target language. The input ought to be authentic material that is connected to everyday situations. By connecting input to an emotional or social meaning, the learners are not only motivated to learn more, but the knowledge tends to settle deeper in the brain. It is necessary to offer learners input based on the learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), or *interlanguage* + 1 ($i+1$),³⁵ which guides them to a higher level of understanding by applying new strategies or methods of thinking. The

³³ E. Kwakernaak, *Didaktiek van het Vreemdetalenonderwijs* (Bussum: 2009), 395-409.

³⁴ G.J. Westhoff, *Een 'schijf van vijf' voor het vreemdetalenonderwijs (revisited)* (Deventer: 2008).

³⁵ Liz Dale, Wibo van der Es and Rosie Tanner, *CLIL Skills* (Haarlem: Europees Platform, 2010), 48.

teacher is encouraged to offer a great variety of texts in the target language but make sure they are at the right level.

2. *Meaning-focused processing* is based on content or the meaning of the input. By processing the input, learners can add personal value to the topic, which increases the chances of the knowledge sticking. It is important that the activities to process the input connect to their personal environment and interests.

3. *Form-focussed processing* offers grammatical structures within the lesson. Through being offered plenty of input, and the occasional grammatical instruction, a learner learns fastest. It is the teacher's task to direct the learner's attention to the form, which is not limited to grammar instruction. This method allows learners to acquire the set of grammar rules through noticing patterns at their own speed.

4. *The production of (pushed) output* helps learners to use their (newly) acquired knowledge, in order to create new and original material. By doing this, learners learn to apply the knowledge they have learnt in form-focused processing. This also makes them aware of their (in)abilities or gaps in their language knowledge, which can motivate them to work and focus on their language acquisition. Based on the produced output, it is also possible for the teacher to give "corrective feedback", which helps learners to improve their language skills.

5. *Use of strategies* enables learners to deal with gaps in their language use. There are two types of strategies: receptive and productive strategies. The former requires filling in gaps in knowledge, by guessing unfamiliar words or activating prior knowledge. The latter is used to disguise any gaps in knowledge (avoidance strategies), or to compensate for this by describing words or concepts in order to communicate a message.

Chapter 3: The novel *White Teeth*, by Zadie Smith

3.1. An approach

Landt lays down a few requirements she feels a book that focuses on non-mainstream cultures should comply with. Besides novels that contain “developmental appropriateness, quality of writing,”³⁶ relevant themes for students, “general accuracy, believability of characters,”³⁷ and an interesting story, Landt mentions that “there are other important characteristics to consider when choosing books that focus on nonmainstream cultures.”³⁸ Such a book should show relationships between people in regards to their culture, instead of being limited to stereotypical aspects such as physical appearances. It should portray individuals instead of mere representatives of a culture. These individuals are capable of solving their own problems and taking control of their own lives. They are not subservient and do not support (leading) white characters. Another characteristic is the use of authentic language or dialogue, representing real oral traditions, used in a correct way. As someone who grew up in the Caribbean, I recognize many of the non-standard English, or “bruck-up” English, expressions used in the novel. Furthermore, “realistic social issues and problems are depicted frankly and accurately without oversimplification”.³⁹

Zadie Smith’s novel *White Teeth* focuses on the multicultural aspects of London, a city that has seen many changes in its composition of ethnicities. To the question how Zadie Smith has tried to approach multiracial London she replied:

³⁶ S.M. Landt, “Multicultural literature and young adolescents: A kaleidoscope of opportunity,” *Journal of adolescent and adult literacy* (2006), 695.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

I was just trying to approach London. I don't think of it as a theme, or even a significant thing about the city. This is what modern life is like. If I were to write a book about London in which there were only white people, I think that would be kind of bizarre. People do write books like that, which I find bizarre because it's patently not what London is, nor has been for fifty years.⁴⁰

In her novel, Zadie Smith portrays the life of two generations of immigrants and a British family, in a humorous and slightly satirical way. These immigrants come from Jamaica and Bangladesh, and have moved to London for varying reasons. The second generation of immigrants grow up in London, and deal with their “lack of roots” throughout the novel in several different ways. One turns to religion, another to science and yet another to the “home country.” The characters in this novel also use languages that deviate from Standard English, such as Jamaican English or the language of the streets of London (Raggistani). In the novel we also encounter a white British family, who try to boss around these immigrants. The novel encompasses themes such as race, gender, ethnicity, language, ability, age, social class, religion and spirituality. However, due to the space limitations of this thesis, I will only focus on a few of these themes in order to provide an in-depth analysis. In this analysis I will focus on similarities and dissimilarities between the three families in the novel. Within these two categories I will discuss issues that are most dominant within those families: cross-culture/-class relationships and the concept of “in-betweenness” concerning the different generations.

⁴⁰ Z. Smith, *An interview with Zadie Smith* (WGBH, Boston: 2002).

3.2. *A short history of multicultural Britain*

A brief history of Britain's colonial background, with relevance to this novel, shall be given.

Dasenbrock explains why this is necessary:

No utterance or written text is ever fully explicit, completely freestanding. To be understood, any text must be read in the light of prior knowledge, background information, expectations about genre and about sequence - all the aspects often considered together as "context."⁴¹

In 1713, Britain and several European powers signed treaties that gave the United Kingdom access to resources in the New World, including slaves. In 1834, slavery was abolished in the United Kingdom, but this did not stop the influx of black immigrants. Between 1830 and 1850, many Irish immigrants also came to Britain. As there were no official rules on immigration, a total of 1.3 million Indian immigrants, from the sub-continent and Bangladesh, came to Britain during the First World War and remained there. In 1919, a series of infamous race riots broke out, testifying to the increase of racial tensions.

During and after the Second World War, Britain needed workers to help end labour shortage. Poles, Italians and West Indians were encouraged to immigrate to Britain. In 1948, a ship called the *Empire Windrush* was the first of many to arrive in London with hundreds of West Indian men (mainly Jamaicans) aboard. This new rush of immigrants increased racial tension, which forced the British government to implement immigration rules against non-whites, which only became stricter during the 1980s. Despite the efforts of the British government to decrease latent hostility by establishing anti-racism committees, racial prejudice remained very much alive.

⁴¹ Reed Way Dasenbrock, "Intelligibility and Meaningfulness in Multicultural Literature in English," *PMLA* (Modern Language Association: 1987), 10.

According to Salman Rushdie, *White Teeth* is “about how we all got here—from the Caribbean, from the Indian subcontinent... and about what ‘here’ turned out to be.”⁴²

Currently, London can be deemed a multicultural society made up by people from all kinds of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Unfortunately, Britain is still often portrayed as a predominantly white country.⁴³ However, there is a slow movement towards referring to Britain more often as a multi-racial society. Zadie Smith’s novel is clear evidence of this trend.

3.3. Cross-culture and cross-race relationships: first generation

Zadie Smith believes that racism is still all too present. However, in her novel she mainly wanted to show “that there are communities that function well [and who make] an effort to understand each other, despite their cultural differences [even though] tradition is fading away.”⁴⁴ This brings us to the cross-culture and cross-class relationships depicted in her novel.

The novel is made up of multiple narratives, which allows us to form ideas about what most characters think and feel about themselves and others. In the novel the main characters are white, Jamaican, Bengali and mixed, which offers plenty of material to discuss cross-cultural, racial and immigration issues, like the experiences of first generation immigrants Clara, Alsana and Samad within their new (British) environment. These characters serve as an example of the struggle between assimilation into the new culture and preservation of their native cultures. It also allows us to see the different degrees of assimilation, which can be anywhere between complete or non-existent. The degree of the assimilation of the characters depends greatly on

⁴² Stade, Karbiener & Krueger, eds. “Zadie Smith,” *Encyclopedia of British Writers* (Book Builders LLC: 2003), 455.

⁴³ Z. Smith, *An interview with Zadie Smith* (WGBH, Boston: 2002).

⁴⁴ Stade, Karbiener & Krueger, eds. “Zadie Smith,” *Encyclopedia of British Writers* (Book Builders LLC: 2003), 348.

their age, background, circumstances and, of course, the generation of immigrants they belong to. Therefore it is worthwhile to study each generation separately.

We will now briefly study some of the novel's main characters of the first generation:

Clara: Clara was born in Jamaica, but moved to Lambeth as a teen. She was “gangly, buck-toothed, a Jehovah’s Witness”⁴⁵ and an outcast at her high-school. She was neither a Roman Catholic, nor Irish, which lead her to become the scapegoat for all her peers and teachers at St. Jude’s. Because she could not connect with her peers, nor did they attempt to connect with her due to their differences, Clara felt attracted to another outsider: a boy named Ryan Topps. Ryan was an outsider, because he had red hair, lived in the past and was also not Irish or Catholic. Clara and Ryan did not have a lot in common; in fact the closest they came to any similarity is described as follows: “Ryan was as red as a beetroot. And Clara was as black as yer boot”⁴⁶. However, they connect for a short period while dating. It appears that their underdog position has connected both outcasts and made them forget their (racial) differences. This first crush is the beginning of Clara’s self-exploration within her new country, to which she eventually adapts by blending in. She walks away from her faith as a Jehovah’s Witness and marries a white man. This “blending” is a common coping mechanism of immigrants, as Graham & Thurston state: “the process of migrating allow[s] women to examine differences between cultures as manifest in their own behaviour and attitudes, which [is] one form of self-exploration.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*, 28.

⁴⁶ Z. Smith, *White Teeth*, 29.

⁴⁷ J. Graham, W. Thurston, “Overcoming Adversity: Resilience & Coping Mechanisms Developed by Recent Immigrant Women Living in the Inner City of Calgary, Alberta,” *Women’s Health and Urban Life* (2005), 71.

At a certain point Clara believes for a brief moment that whites are superior in intellect. When Clara thanks Joyce, a British white woman, for her help with tutoring her daughter, Joyce in her turn openly wonders where Irie got her intellect from, as it could not have been from her mother. Clara suggests that it might have been passed down by her white grandfather, Captain Charlie Durham. Clara regrets this the moment she tells Joyce, because she knows that her grandfather had been a rather foolish man. However, by giving in to Joyce's assumptions, it becomes clear that Clara has some underlying doubts about her own intellectual background.

Alsana: Not only whites are sometimes racially prejudiced, but some members of the immigrant groups also discriminate against other minorities. Alsana, a daughter from a highly respected Bengal family, has her first encounter with British society in the wrong side of Whitechapel. She starts working as a seamstress, though she had a good education. Her husband works as a waiter in a restaurant. Her only friends are Samad's best friend Archie and his new black wife, Clara. She complains about them to Samad: "These are the people my child will grow up around? Their children – half blacky-white?"⁴⁸ and makes mental pro and con lists when encountering a "specimen" from a minority: "Black people are often friendly, though Alsana, [...] adding this fact subconsciously to the short 'pro' side [...] From every minority she disliked, Alsana liked to single out one specimen for spiritual forgiveness."⁴⁹ Alsana meets several more minorities whom she grants her forgiveness, and with whom she gets along quite well.

⁴⁸ Z. Smith, *White Teeth*, 61.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 65.

Alsana is also confronted with her *own* ethnicity in British society, and receives looks that convey a “piteous, saddened smile” which are “reserved for subjugated Muslim women.”⁵⁰

According to Graham and Thurston, people who migrate:

are faced with living in a different society with different norms and mores, some vastly different and others slightly different from their own depending on where they came from [...]. Women who migrated seemed to be increasingly aware of the cultural construction of their identities. Roles and redefining roles within the family and within society were salient aspects of identity. Migration was not only a process of change but also a process of increasing self-awareness on many levels.⁵¹

Becoming a member of a minority group herself did not rid Alsana of her own racial prejudice. In time, as a result of having become a part of a minority group, Alsana comes into contact with more and different minorities and, ironically, grants them “forgiveness” subconsciously. In turn, she is also treated sympathetically by the white women who view her as a cultural stereotype rather than an individual in her own right. This reverses her position as someone who can grant forgiveness to one who ought to receive it, in the process placing white culture above her own against her will, as she is forced to reinvent or revalue her identity.

Samad: Samad’s conflict with British society is described extensively in the novel, as he seems to have the hardest time adapting to the English ways. Throughout the novel he becomes more radical in holding on to his traditional Muslim beliefs and traditions. He also becomes more hostile to Western society: “I don’t wish to be a modern man! I wish to live as I was always meant to! I wish to return to the East!”⁵² Samad’s wife, Alsana, regards this yearning for the past

⁵⁰ Ibid. 131.

⁵¹ J. Graham and W. Thurston, “Overcoming Adversity: Resilience & Coping Mechanisms Developed by Recent Immigrant Women Living in the Inner City of Calgary, Alberta,” *Women’s Health and Urban Life* (2005), 71.

⁵² Z. Smith, *White Teeth*, 145.

old-fashioned and she calls him names such as “Samad Iqbal the traditionalist!”⁵³ and comments: “Why don’t I just squat in the street over a bucket and wash clothes? Eh?”⁵⁴ Samad’s struggles with English society are first mentioned in the novel when he fantasises about wearing a sign at work, which would state his true value:

I am not a waiter. I have been a student, a scientist, a soldier, my wife is called Alsana, we live in East London but we would like to move North. I am a Muslim but Allah has forsaken me or I have forsaken Allah, I’m not sure. I have a friend – Archie – and others. I am forty-nine but women still turn in the street. Sometimes.⁵⁵

As no such sign exists, Samad has to fight the urge to constantly explain to his customers that he is more than meets the eye.

All Samad has left is his religion to remind him of who he was, and to define who he is. However, he has trouble being a good Muslim, for which he blames the corrupt British society. Throughout the novel Samad makes deals with Allah, like when he promises to stop drinking he may keep on masturbating, or vice versa. He has an affair with an English white woman, Poppy Burt-Jones, which he also blames on Western society. A friend, whom Samad confides in, replies that he believes such a combination of races could never work out, as there is “too much bloody history.”⁵⁶ This “history” is demonstrated, or rubbed into Samad’s face, when Poppy shows up at his restaurant after he has broken off the affair. She demands to be served by the head waiter, Samad. She then places him in a vulnerable position, as he must now serve her against his will. Samad experiences first hand that white people still dominate other races.

⁵³ Ibid. 62.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 62.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 58.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 146.

Because of his growing aversion to British society Samad places his great-grandfather Mangal Pande on a pedestal. Mangal Pande was an Indian mutineer who made a stand against the oppressing British ruler. He is considered a freedom fighter in India. Samad admires the strength of his forefather and wishes he had the courage to do the same. However, due to his inability to fight off the influence of the “West”, he tries to impose his Islamic beliefs wherever possible, at his children’s school, at the pub and within his home. He goes as far as to send one child to Bangladesh, in order to take out the “West” and introduce him to traditional Muslim ways.

Clara, Alsana and Samad are three first generation immigrants, having to deal with adapting to a new environment, culture and the way they are viewed. The three characters deal with this situation in different ways. Their personal coping mechanisms are influenced by the amount of cultural baggage the characters have taken with them. This cultural baggage can be linked to the ages of the characters at the time of immigration. Clara is a teenager, Alsana in her early twenties and Samad is already in his late forties/early fifties.

Clara absorbs the new culture wholly by marrying into it and neglecting her roots, which may have to do with her being quite young when she is exposed to White English society through school and marriage. Alsana accepts the new culture but with reservations, which can be a result of the fact that she has fewer opportunities to get in touch with the majority of English white people. Samad rejects or even fights the British culture by holding on to the past and by preserving his identity, which might have to do with his advanced age when arriving in England and his sudden loss of identity that had been so clear previously.

3.4. *In-betweenness: second generation*

The novel's prologue reads: "What is past is prologue." The way the parents of second generation immigrants in Britain have tried to cope with assimilation has defined their place within British society. Similar coping mechanisms can be found within this generation in *White Teeth*, amongst Irie, Millat and Magid however this generation also has to deal with a common phenomenon dubbed *in-betweenness*.

Unlike their parents, the second generation does not have firsthand experience of their native cultures. This lack of experience and cultural baggage, but also the feeling of being different in a country they have known all their lives, makes it difficult, if not impossible, for these children to define an identity.

This problem of not quite fully belonging to one culture or another, or this "in-betweenness", leads the second generation to go searching for an identity, which can lead to radical choices. Whereas some revert to their parents' roots, others choose the exact opposite. One might even get stuck right in the middle, for example Millat "was neither one thing nor the other, this or that, Muslim or Christian, Englishman or Bengali; he lived for the in between, he lived up to his middle name, *Zulfikar*, the clashing of two swords."⁵⁷

Irie: Irie is Clara's daughter, a child from a racially mixed marriage. She has inherited her grandmother's curves. As Irie has not been in touch with her grandmother since a very young age and as there are no other black curvaceous women in her surroundings, she can only compare her body with her English peers; often girls with curveless, slim figures. The only conclusion she can draw is that she is different, thus unattractive. Besides being curvaceous, she also has kinky hair and buck teeth. Irie lacks the availability of role-models, which creates a sense of not belonging. She is the daughter of a black woman and a white man, and seems unable

⁵⁷ Ibid. 351.

to find another person who she can relate to. Her own mother has immersed herself in the English world by losing her Jamaican accent and by avoiding engagement with black people, including her own mother. In the end, Irie decides to go back to her “roots”, in search of this connection. In Jamaica she will raise a son that has an even more racially mixed background; being afro-Caribbean, white English and Bengali.

Magid: Magid grows up in England ashamed of his Bengali parents. He calls himself Mark at school and befriends only white boys. It is this Anglicization that convinces Samad to send Magid to Bangladesh to understand the Muslim traditions and lifestyle. However, Magid comes back as a young adult and convinced of the benefits of science and Western society. Though Magid is a second generation child, he shows the least troubles with adapting to British society, a choice he made at an early age.

Millat: Though initially refusing to follow his father’s religion, Millat converts to Islam. Millat first grows up as a rebel, who drinks a lot and has sex with many different, mainly white, girls. He probably does so to punish his parents for sending his brother off to Bangladesh, but also to get their attention as his brother takes up all the limelight through his obvious absence. He longs to become part of a family that accepts and values him. After having explored Raggistani culture, which fights against all British authority, Millat turns to indulge in “proper British whiteness” through a pseudo-intellectual white British family: The Chalfens. This family thinks that they can influence Millat by providing him with a, in their opinion, normal and healthy family environment. However, it turns out that Millat is the one that has an effect on the Chalfens. By playing his cards right, he manages to dominate over the mother: Joyce Chalfen. He barges into her home at any given time and verbally abuses her: “Get off my fucking back,

Joyce”⁵⁸ and “Shut the fuck up, Joyce”⁵⁹ whilst she still attends to his needs. Hereby he turns the tables on the previously mentioned “white oppressors”. Finally, this new found power leads Millat to connect more directly with his Islamic roots and drives him right into the arms of KEVIN, a radical Islamic organisation.

The choices Irie, Millat and Magid make, alienate them from their parents in different ways. Magid disappoints his father by choosing a path away from to his religious and moral background, whilst Irie and Millat seem incapable or even refuse to be assimilated by British society. They try to come to terms with their cultural heritage, but do not completely succeed at this either. This keeps them locked in between both cultures. However, both the first and second generations find ways of coping with being a minority within a dominant white culture. These ways basically entail holding on to one’s roots or fleeing them. If both options are not possible, a person ends up in limbo, or in-betweenness, which seems to be a temporary state. The way an immigrant assimilates has many reasons, though in the novel these can be linked to age and exposure to the white culture of the first generation. The second-generation assimilation process is more complex, as their exposure to their so-called native culture is limited, whilst that to the white culture has been abundant. Being brought up with different values from their peers, the second generation tries to make both cultures meet, though with varying degrees of success.

The topics discussed demonstrate a problem immigrants face, not only in Britain, but all over the world. The importance of belonging plays a predominant role in the novel, and offers the readers an insight into another world. At the same time they are engaged with a text from different times, places, cultures, geographical regions, historical periods and perspectives. *White Teeth* also deals

⁵⁸ Ibid. 332.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 333.

with the non-mainstream cultures, by depicting the characters' relationships in regards to their culture and language and by portraying individuals who tempt to solve their problems and evolve through trial and error. As Zadie Smith manages to depict "realistic social issues [...] frankly and accurately without oversimplification,"⁶⁰ I believe that her novel is particularly suitable for use in the classroom. Through proper classroom activities and guidance, learners can use this input to create a bridge between their environment and the characters' environments and learn to explain social phenomena based on this. By studying the reaction of immigrants to their surroundings, the learners will be exposed to a broader view of the world, reducing prejudice and misunderstanding in the process.

⁶⁰ S.M. Landt, "Multicultural literature and young adolescents: A kaleidoscope of opportunity," *Journal of adolescent and adult literacy* (2006), 695.

Chapter 4: Ways of using of the novel within the classroom

4.1. Structure

In *White Teeth* we find mixed cultures, fundamentalism, family values and frequent change of narrators, which make this a level 5 novel on Witte's level of literary competence. At this level learners are capable of reading, naming and analysing texts which contain different themes, layers of meaning and narrative techniques. The learners are capable of expressing their personal preferences and reading experience, but can also appreciate texts within a literary, cultural or historical context and background. Furthermore, the novel is suited for level B2 of the CEFR, as it is written in contemporary (literary) English, which makes it easier to understand for English second-language learners. However Zadie Smith occasionally uses non-standard features of Jamaican English, which may require extra explanation from the teacher.

Based on the previously mentioned Cultural Model, Language Model and Personal Growth Model, the theories of Witte, CEFR and the requirements, I have devised the tasks below. Teachers can use these assignments and exercises, although the specifics (such as length, duration, rules, etc.) may be decided upon within the actual classroom situation. The assignments and exercises have been structured according to the CLIL philosophy, though it is not a strict set-up. In these exercises I have assumed that the classes are taught in English, that the activities will become part of a larger literature lesson plan on the novel and that the learners have read the complete novel.

4.2. Material

When selecting material for a classroom discussion, it is important to choose a current issue as this improves the authenticity of the material. One such issue could be immigration. A present-

day example could be the discussion on “Zwarte Piet”, the black helper of Saint Nicholas (Sinterklaas). During my internship at the Amsterdam International Community School, with a culturally diverse population of learners, I decided to discuss this topic, as it was a timely issue at the school I was teaching. The school had in fact decided to ban Zwarte Piet from the holiday festivities that year, because many parents had complained about the allegedly racist aspect of the holiday. Little did I know that on the day I was to teach the lesson (4th of December 2012), a discussion would erupt in the teachers’ room on this subject. Zwarte Piet’s picture made the front page of that day’s *NRC Next* with the question whether this would be his last year. An American staff member took the liberty to gather all these newspapers and throw them in the bin. Many of the Dutch teachers felt victimized, black teachers agreed with the action and foreign teachers were divided on completely opposite ends of the issue. The Zwarte Piet problem proved fertile material for a group discussion within MYP1 (Middle Years Programme, year 1) and debate in DP1 (Diploma Programme, year 6). Both were very interesting lessons. There was a large diversity of cultures in each class and Dutch pupils did not make up the majority. For such lessons news articles on current topics should be used.

Besides using current issues to discuss immigration, there is more material that can be used within the classroom to make Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* more accessible. For instance, the BBC series that was made of the novel could be useful. The series is divided into four episodes, which coincide with the four parts of the novel. Each episode lasts approximately 50 minutes. This adaptation for the screen can be offered to engage learners into the story, to clarify aspects of the novel but also to demonstrate that a novel can be interpreted in different ways. Additionally, YouTube offers a plethora of material discussing immigration.

Finally, when choosing exercises to go along with the chosen material, it is important to keep in mind whether you are teaching at an international or bilingual school. Certain exercises that I will describe in the following paragraphs work better in an international environment, whilst others may be more suitable for bilingual classes.

4.3. Activating

When approaching a new topic, it is advisable to start with an activating exercise. The teacher helps the learners to become aware of what they already know about the topic. This will stimulate the learners to learn more as they become aware of a possible gap in their knowledge and it can help the teacher to assess the learners' starting position.

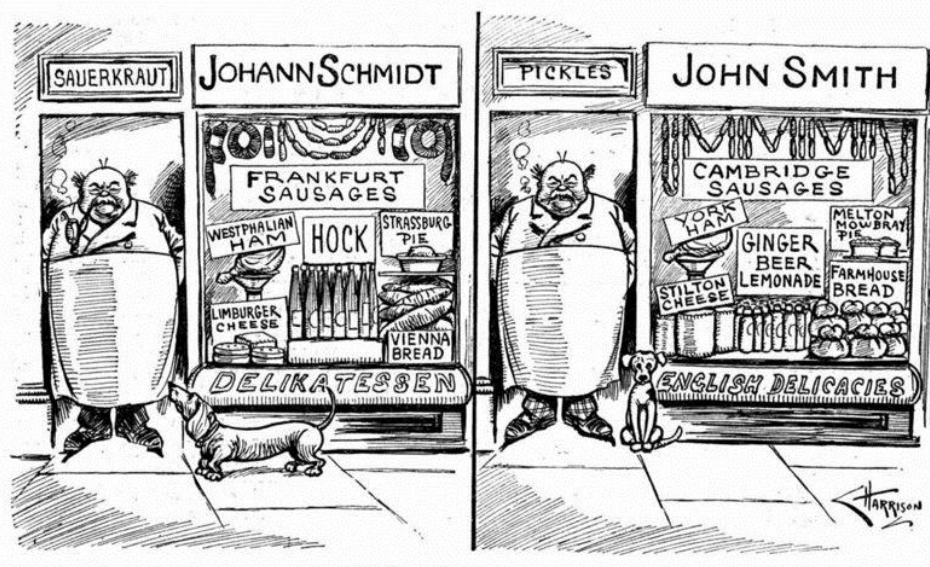
Activity 1: Show a video clip or images of immigration and ask questions.



1. Where do you think this is? (Why do you think so?)
2. Where are these people from? (What in the picture makes that clear?)

⁶¹ Immigration, original source unknown <<http://www.melvindurai.com/images/Immigration.jpg>>.

3. What are they thinking? (Why do you think so?)
4. Have you experienced anything similar? Please explain.



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1. What do you see in the left picture?
2. Describe the differences you see between both images.
3. What do these images tell you about immigration?



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1. Which countries are involved in this image? Name them.

⁶² C. Harrison, 1921.

⁶³ Steve Kelley, "Reclaim America," *San Diego Union Tribune*, 1994.

2. How many types of immigrants are depicted in this image? Name them.
(Mention the racial backgrounds of these immigrants)
3. Does this image tell you anything about assimilation?

The previous activity also appeals to visually-spatially inclined learners and focuses on activating knowledge about each other and their experiences. In the case of an international school, many learners have different backgrounds and experiences with migration:

Activating helps these differences to become visible to the teacher, so that the teacher knows how to link in to what different learners know. Moreover, it makes the differences visible to the learners, revealing to them that they can gather both information and alternative ways of learning from each other.⁶⁴

This activity requires effective questioning. Questions that demand a more complex answer in terms of content and language (fat questions)⁶⁵ than a simple yes/no or one word answer (skinny questions).⁶⁶ Effective questioning “encourages transfer, since such questions lead to learners using information and language in new situations and in different contexts.”⁶⁷

Activity 2: Read out statements about immigration within the Netherlands, to which learners must agree or disagree and explain their opinion. Example statements:

1. Having a variety of cultures and languages has made the Dutch language more colourful and therefore better.
2. Everyone who lives in Holland should be required to learn Dutch.

⁶⁴ Liz Dale, Wibo van der Es and Rosie Tanner, *CLIL Skills* (Haarlem: Europees Platform, 2010), 18.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 92.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 92.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 124.

3. Second generation immigrants are more religious than their parents.
4. Immigrants should only come to the Netherlands if they have had a proper education.
5. Immigrants are taking away jobs from the native (Dutch) people.

Such exercises can be used well as a refresher within the lecture series, or to help learners focus on the topic. The activities chosen to activate learners can create an expectation for that specific lesson and the next “big” assignment that will be done within the lesson series. The first two questions of activity 2 refer to language use, the third to in-betweenness and the fourth and fifth questions to cross-culture and cross-class relationships. By using these questions to jumpstart a lesson, the learners are helped to focus on the topic. This specific activity can even be body-kinaesthetically oriented, by making learners who agree walk to the left side of the room, and those who disagree to the right side. It is also possible to do this with green or red paper, which should be held in the air to show a learner’s opinion. These exercises will help learners to become more actively involved and require them to form an opinion on the spot.

Other activities which could help activating the learners are word webs, mind maps or a Venn diagram. The latter can be used later in a lesson when learners are more aware of the Dutch and English immigrant issues (such as cross-culture/-class relationships, the concept of “in-betweenness” and other problems immigrants face in their new country). Within the Venn circles they can place similarities and differences between both, which should encourage learners to understand different cultures and ideologies in relation to their own.

4.4. Input & scaffolding

Input is information offered to learners to help them understand ideas and to construct meaning.⁶⁸ This input is received by means of listening, seeing or reading. The input gives learners information which enables them to carry out tasks and activities. A mix of different kinds of input, or multimodal media, is advised because it keeps the information dynamic and interesting but also caters to different learning styles among learners.

Within bilingual education the goal should be to offer learners appropriate input in the target language, in this case English. This input ought to be at a slightly higher level than the learners understand, in other words the Zone of Proximal Development is applicable here. In order for learners to master this and move on to more challenging texts, teachers must help them by scaffolding the input. This scaffolding helps to “guide learners to understand and process the input [in English].”⁶⁹ Scaffolding may take the form of multimodal media input, but can also make difficult input more comprehensible through exercises such as the following:

Activity 3: Offer learners texts about immigrants and their lives prior to moving and becoming immigrants. These can be examples from the novel or articles from different sources. Learners must group together the characters that have left the country for similar reasons and must elaborate on these reasons.

This activity focuses on the non-linguistic and linguistic issue of immigration. The content aim of this activity is for learners to divide the immigrants in groups – and come to understand the different reasons for immigrants to migrate. The linguistic aim is for learners to scan texts for

⁶⁸ Ibid. 37.

⁶⁹ Liz Dale, Wibo van der Es, Rosie Tanner, *CLIL Skills*, 39.

specific information and understand words related to immigration. For this, it is important to choose texts that are at the appropriate level of a learner. At 5 VWO level these texts can be found in news articles in quality English (online) newspapers. Furthermore, this activity can be done within a group or in pairs, which offers learners an interpersonal work environment.

Another way to scaffold this exercise would be to offer the learners a table in which they can organise different illustrations/pictures and stories beneath specific headings. Learners are not required to come up with the reasons for immigration, but are given these so they are capable of sorting the information appropriately. Also, they are required to be specific, and re-organise the texts, which “helps [...] to gain a greater overall understanding of these resources.”⁷⁰

Additional and increasingly more challenging activities to work with the headings separately will allow the learners to use the information in different ways and thus gain a deeper understanding of the topic.

As the novel has also been adapted into a BBC series, it is interesting to offer learners this as input as well. Learners often identify more easily with film while it also caters to the abilities of learners with auditory or visual intelligences:

Activity 4: After each chapter in the novel, watch an episode of the BBC series *White Teeth*, and discuss the differences between the novel and the series. For each episode, the focus can lie on a different theme, for example:

1. How many different English accents do you hear? Name them. Were they what you had expected when reading the novel?
2. Zadie Smith writes: “These days, it feels to me like you make a devil's pact when you walk into this country. You hand over your passport at the check-in, you get stamped,

⁷⁰ Ibid. 71.

you want to make a little money, get yourself started... but you mean to go back! Who would want to stay? Cold, wet, miserable; terrible food, dreadful newspapers - who would want to stay? In a place where you are never welcomed, only tolerated. Just tolerated. Like you are an animal finally house-trained.”

Who says this in the novel and how is this portrayed in the film version?

Is there anyone in the novel or film who shares these sentiments?

3. How does the film version portray and link Chalfen’s and Irie’s grandfather’s urge to bring education to the “underprivileged”?

Within the series dialogues from the novel are spoken, which allows learners to *hear* specific dialects and accents used in the novel. The first question focuses on this. The actual use of dialect in the film version may help learners’ comprehension or offer them an idea of how to read the next parts of the novel in light of what they have heard. This also broadens students’ conception of varieties of English, as being more than just Received Pronunciation English and General American.

The second question is about in-betweenness and the third question addresses the cross-cultural and racial issues that play a role in the novel and series.

By focusing on specific themes per episode and by asking questions beforehand, the learner is invited to pay attention to specific details. Discussing the questions will help the learners to process what they have seen and to evaluate the answers they have written. The initial questions can be sorted out in more detail by asking more and efficient “fat” questions. These require higher thinking skills and longer answers during the discussion or can be set as a further assignment. For this activity, it is important that the teacher is aware of the progress learners are making in reading the novel, and that they are not depending on the BBC series to understand the

story. Content-based exercises should be dealt with prior to watching the next episode, to test their active participation in reading.

4.5. Output

When learners have been given enough opportunity to obtain and understand the input they advance to the next step, which is to create output. By creating output, learners are required to *use* the input and turn it into a new product. By doing so, the learners actively make the material their own. It is also an opportunity to practise language skills such as speaking and writing. Output also enables teachers to check whether a learner has understood the information correctly. For a final product, after various aspects of immigration have been discussed, the following activity could be pursued:

Activity 5: Name your country of origin and explain why people have fled this country and/or moved to it. Then present yourself and your migration history. Explain how you have experienced this “new” culture.

In an international environment, it could be interesting to have learners present their background and reasons for migration (often children of expats). They can focus on migrants from their country and explain why people would flee *from* their country or immigrate *to* their country. This practises their oral communication skills, but also may lead to a discussion of “in-betweenness” or culture and class. Learners are required to interpret texts and construct meaning on the basis of their own experience and may feel more involved in the project if they can add a personal touch to it. This activity may also help learners look at their native country with a fresh look, and

hereby explore their identity at a deeper level. By this, I mean that expat children are often used to a privileged lifestyle, and by focusing on the immigrants from or in their (native) country, they learn how migration can be experienced by the less affluent classes. Dutch students could possibly discuss their background history as well, though they may have to look further back into their family history.

Learners can be prepared for such a presentation by presenting them with specific questions or allowing them to use video clips or a PowerPoint presentation. This activity, however, requires the teacher to create a safe environment in which learners dare to share personal stories as well as speak in public. Furthermore, the preparation of such a presentation requires intrapersonal work, which may appeal to yet another group of learners. In order to have learners actively participate during the presentation, they can be asked to write down a few questions based on the presentation or fill out an evaluation form on which a grade could be based. This evaluation could be taken into account when the teacher gives the final grade.

Activity 6: Learners write a travel brochure for immigrants from the Antilles or Turkey who want to move to The Netherlands. In this travel brochure they should mention the aspects that make the move appealing, but also possible pitfalls.

This activity focuses on the production of written output. With this activity it is important to have offered these learners, in previous lessons, the information they need to be able to write the brochure. It would also be beneficial to offer learners examples or template brochures. Creating this kind of output will help learners to formulate their ideas about immigration, including the

pros and cons from an immigrant's perspective. This is an activity that could best be done in pairs, as it creates an opportunity for learners to communicate in English.

Besides this activity, learners could also write an e-mail or record a video letter (as depicted in the series) to a friend or family member from the perspective of an immigrant, a poem on in-betweenness or a short story of the migration journey. If the opportunity arises and other subject teachers can be interested, an interdisciplinary project could be set up. Social studies, geography (India, Jamaica, Britain), history (World War II, Indian Mutiny, colonisation), religious studies (Islam, Fundamentalism, Judaism) and possibly the arts (immigrant art, Indian art, Jamaican art) could be involved within the general immigrant theme. This would make it possible to focus on other literary references made within the novel, such as quotes from Shakespeare, or on the language(s) used in the novel and how these have developed over time, generations and nationalities.

Language and culture are an integrated part of the society in which it is spoken. Through Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* it is possible to acquaint learners with different cultures of Britain that would otherwise remain relatively unnoticed. Her novel allows us to read about issues that first and second generation immigrants have to deal with. By discussing these issues within the classroom, learners become aware of the problems immigrants in Britain face, but are also challenged to think about the problems immigrants face within The Netherlands. By first reading about such topics from a distance and then applying their new understanding to issues closer at home, they can form their own opinion on Dutch issues as well, without being influenced (too much) by media or peers. This contributes to one of the key aims of the Dutch Educational System to create more international and tolerant citizens in an ever growing multicultural world.

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