

BZL¹

at the business faculty of the Hasselt University (B)

With three important international languages, the business faculty at the Hasselt University has always privileged the status of foreign languages in its curricula. An increased policy of internationalisation by means of work placements and exchanges has always been its natural compliment.

In 2002, a new and overall strategic plan for teaching and learning has been implemented with the explicit intention of orienting students toward a future of lifelong learning and this for several reasons. The basic principle: to give students the full responsibility of their own learning process by granting them a maximum of autonomy. This objective has contributed to a profound questioning of the customary practices in foreign language courses and has led to BZL, a system of semi-autonomous (foreign language) learning.

The present contribution will develop a three-stage description of BZL as it functions for French Foreign Language, including its key-principles as well as the prerequisites for its implementation and an evaluation after two years functioning.

Once having established the basic principles, we will see how they have been translated into practice. First to be mentioned is the creation of a favourable environment (the preparation of its launch through the generalized introduction of a learning management system (LMS) and by the production of multimedia modules specifically aimed at the acquisition of foreign languages, that is, Gr@mvoc, www.olyfran.org, Plurilingua). Secondly, there is the introduction of new work formats with a decreasing number of plenary sessions and formal lectures in combination with an increasing amount of question-response sessions and training sessions. Thirdly, we have teaching staff being confronted with a change of attitude on the one hand and with a modification of tasks to be executed (operating as consultant or as “coach”) on the other. In addition, there is a series of infrastructural prerequisites asking for considerable investments. Finally, we have the combination of a computer environment with multimedia modules for foreign language learning.

An evaluation of the current situation will end this contribution. More specifically, we will focus on the students’ evaluation and the teachers’ appreciation.

As a conclusion it will be argued that, although asking for a considerable financial and human investment at the beginning, a great challenge for all partners involved is being offered here. In the meanwhile, the initial scepticism from students as well as from teachers has been replaced by a reasonable enthusiasm.

¹ (Dutch) Begeleid Zelfstandig Leren = Semi-autonomous Learning