

## Talking teaching



### Jeffrey Park

This month, we talk to a teacher from Maryland, in the US. Since 2011, he has worked as an English language assistant at the Obermenzinger Gymnasium in Munich, Germany.

#### How did you get into teaching?

I was planning on becoming a teacher back when I was at university, but as I had a young family at the time, I ended up going into retail and then IT for about 15 years instead. Eventually, though, I felt called to go into education.

I left my IT job to pursue a master's degree in teaching and became a middle school English teacher in Maryland. When my wife (a Munich native) and I moved back to Germany, I found that my business background and teaching experience had positioned me very well to work here as a freelance English trainer, which is what I did from 2005 to 2011.

#### What are you currently doing?

I joined the staff at the Obermenzinger Gymnasium as their first English language assistant in 2011, as they were planning their new bilingual CLIL (content and language integrated learning) programme. It will go into full swing in the 2013–14 school year. I'll be working with maths, science and social studies teachers who will be teaching their subjects in English for the first time. At the moment, I'm involved in planning curricula and methodology, and I'm coaching the teachers in English.

#### What's the biggest challenge in your job?

Trying to help my colleagues learn the new skills and methods that they'll need to teach their subjects in English. They're all experienced, exceptional educators, but they're not language teachers. Among other things, they'll need to make their lessons more interactive and more accessible to pupils with varied learning styles. We've already taught a number of modules in English so far this year, and I'm happy to say that they went very well indeed.

#### What are some benefits of CLIL?

The pupils have much more contact with the English language — four to five times as many hours per week. And they aren't just "learning English to learn English" anymore. They're using English to learn other content. The language becomes a means to an end, which is really what communication is all about. Additionally, research shows CLIL also has far-reaching cognitive benefits — by engaging the language-learning part of the brain in other contexts, CLIL instruction actually leads to improved content learning as well.

#### What gives you a buzz in coaching teachers?

We all share the same commitment to helping our pupils develop, both as learners and as human beings, so we always have plenty to talk about. And — contrary to popular belief — teachers almost always have a fantastic sense of humour. We have a lot of fun.

#### Is there one book that has particularly influenced your teaching?

The one that really springs to mind is *Teacher Man*, Frank McCourt's memoir of his 30 years as an English teacher in the New York City public school system. Again, it all comes back to two things: caring about kids and never losing your sense of humour.

#### Any future plans or dreams?

With our new bilingual programme just getting started, I'm bursting with plans, dreams, ideas and mad fantasies. There's so much shared energy that it feels like we can do almost anything. One of my passions outside of teaching is writing poetry (I've had over 150 pieces published in the past few years), and I'm hoping to start a literary journal at school next year — bilingual, of course!

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