



# Improving students' writing skills in the course *Introduction to Epidemiology*

**Presentation at CIP SYMPOSIUM 2015**  
**'Academic literacies: Writing in the Disciplines'**  
**by Katja Årosin Laursen (CIP)**  
**October 29, 2015**

# Outline

1. Background for the pilot project
2. Development and implementation
3. Challenges
4. Discussion

## 1. Background for the pilot project

### ***The Language Strategy – more languages for more students***

is a research-supported project (2013-2018) aimed at improving the language skills of the students across the University of Copenhagen.

#### **Objectives:**

- To enable students to individually organize and complete their specific courses of study
- To contribute to improving graduates' opportunities in the national and international job markets
- To contribute to improving the quality of education at the University of Copenhagen

<http://cip.ku.dk/english/strategicinitiatives/languagestrategy/>



# Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

## CLIL Models in Higher Education

### **Model 1: Plurilingual education**

- More than one language is used through CLIL during different years in related content programs.

### **Model 2: Adjunct CLIL**

- Language teaching runs parallel to content teaching with specific focus on developing the knowledge and skills to use the language so as to achieve higher-order thinking.

### **Model 3: Language-embedded content courses**

- Content programs are designed from the outset with language development objectives. Teaching is carried out by content and language specialists.

(Coyle, et. al., 2010, p. 25)



## Language-embedded content courses

Language development objectives have been integrated into the content course Introduction to Epidemiology as a collaboration between Mads Kamper-Jørgensen (Associate professor and content teacher) and Katja Årosin Laursen (Academic language consultant).



## It and Health

Interdisciplinary BSc programme in collaboration between the University of Copenhagen (UCPH) and Technical University of Denmark (DTU)

Language of instruction: Danish

### Requirements

“Dansk gymnasial eksamen” equivalent to upper-secondary leaving certificate

- Danish A
- English B
- Maths A

One of the following combinations:

- Physics B and Chemistry B
- Physics B and BioTechnology A
- Chemistry B and GeoScience A



## The target group

### The course *Introduction to Epidemiology*

- 2nd semester of their BSc programme
- Written exam
- 52 students in 2014, 48 students in 2015

### Danish as L1 and L2

*Which language was the primary spoken language in your childhood home (you may mention several, if several was spoken)?* (Questionnaire 2014, 28 respondents):

Languages spoken in the childhood home:	Number of respondents
Danish	17
Danish and English	4
Danish and German	1
Danish and Urdu	1
Danish and Arabic	1
Danish, French and Lingala	1
Arabic, English and Somali	1
Not possible to categorize	2

## Initiative 1

Spring 2014	Spring 2014	Summer 2014
Development of initiative 1	Implementation of initiative 1	Evaluation of initiative 1

## Initiative 2

Spring 2015	Spring 2015	Summer 2015
Development of initiative 2	Implementation of initiative 2	Evaluation of initiative 2

## 2. Development and implementation of the pilot project

### **Initiative 1: *Stronger Academic Danish (2014)***

Developed on the basis of:

- Content teachers' experiences with the students' writing
- Language teacher's evaluation of examples of student writing
- Inspiration from CIP colleague teaching Academic English
- Classroom observation

... and the assumptions that:

1. Content and language are inextricably linked (Magnusson 2008, Krogh 2010, Laursen 2013).
2. Language awareness is a joint responsibility between teacher and students (Laursen 2013).

## Initiative 1: *Stronger Academic Danish*

### Obejctives for the initiative:

- to help the students improve their academic writing through formative feedback on a written assignment
- to make the students aware of the importance of communicating their intended meaning precisely
- to make the students aware of the importance of distinguishing between different academic language functions ('skrivehandlinger', Krogh 2010), e.g. calculate, describe, explain, discuss

## Initiative 1: *Stronger Academic Danish* - implementation

April 22	May 14	May 22	May 25	June 3	June
Presentation of the initiative in the introductory lecture	Lecture on academic writing  Students start writing their assignment in class	Writing workshop	Students hand in their assignment	Feedback session	Evaluation

## The students' evaluation of initiative 1, 2014

Only 6 out of 52 students handed in their assignment.

### **Overall evaluation:**

29 students answered a questionnaire evaluating the initiative.

Some students found the lecture on academic writing too general.

“I participated in the first language course where I found the outcome minimal. The teaching was too general and did not contain anything new to me. But I cannot say whether others in the class found the language teaching useful.” (student 1, my translation)

“It was okay to have that workshop but at an exam I would not think about it. I would just concentrate on writing something sensible and then language comes second.” (student 2, my translation)

**Question:** 'Do you think it would be a good idea to implement the language initiative in the course Introduction to Epidemiology?'

YES = 60 %  
NO = 20 %  
DON'T KNOW = 20 %

Comments:

"(Yes), but place it differently or make the assignment obligatory"  
(student 3, my translation)

"Yes, it seems natural to include in this course. You could argue that it is better to have it even earlier in the programme so you would gain more from it" (student 4, my translation)

## ***Initiative 2: Improved writing skills in the course Introduction to Epidemiology***

Spring 2015: development and implementation

Developed on the basis of:

- Experiences with initiative 1
- Students' feedback on initiative 1 used as a needs assessment/  
formative feedback

## Initiative 2: *Improved writing skills in the course Introduction to Epidemiology* - implementation

April 9	April 21	April 23	April 30	May 19	May 21	May 26	May
Presentation of the initiative in the introductory lecture <b>and introduction to writing guide</b>	Students start writing their <b>1st assignment in class</b>	Students hand in their 1st assignment	Feedback session 1	Students start writing their <b>2nd assignment in class</b>	Students hand in their 2nd assignment	<b>Feed-back session 2</b>	Evaluation

## Example of feedback – assignment 1, question 9 (student 14)

### '9. Hvad vil du konkludere ud fra undersøgelsen?':

"Når børn kommer i pleje bliver de eksponeret (1) men med tiden og (2) derved modnes immunforsvaret. Vi kan sammentidlig (3) se, at børn der passes ude, er mere eksponeret for ARI tilfældene end dem der passes hjemme (4)" (student 14).

(1) Vær specifik – eksponeret for hvad?

***Be specific – exposed to what?***

(2) Sætningen er ikke fuldstændig – med tiden sker der hvad?

***The sentence is not complete – what happens with time?***

(3) Tjek stavning

***Check the spelling***

(4) Dit svar på spørgsmål 9 skal gerne være længere og mere uddybet

***Your answer to question 9 could be longer and more developed***

## Example of feedback – assignment 1, question 6 (student 11)

6. Er der overensstemmelse mellem det, du ser i grafen og det overordnede IRR?

Det er ikke umiddelbart ingen sammenhængen, da den overordnede IRR fortæller os at der er mere end 5% større risiko for infektion ved når tilfældet er at børn bliver passet ude. Men tværtimod fortæller vores graf os at de som bliver passet hjemme er tilfældene med ARI meget hyppigere.

UKLART  
TILMISLIDT

KUN BLIKT DE YNGSTE

Mads' comments

6. Er der overensstemmelse mellem det, du ser i grafen og det overordnede IRR?

Det er ikke umiddelbart ingen sammenhængen (1), da den overordnede IRR fortæller os at der er mere end 5% større risiko for infektion ved når tilfældet er at børn bliver passet ude (2). Men tværtimod fortæller vores graf os at de (3) som bliver passet hjemme er tilfældene med ARI meget hyppigere.

Katja's comments

- (1) Denne sætning er meget uklar, fordi der er to negationer (ikke og ingen). Skriv mere præcist.  
**This sentence is very unclear, because there are two negations (ikke and ingen). Be more precise.**
- (2) Gør sætningen mere klar, fx ved at skrive "i de tilfælde hvor børnene passes ude end de tilfælde, hvor de passes hjemme"  
**Make then sentence more clear, for example by writing "i de tilfælde hvor børnene passes ude end de tilfælde, hvor de passes hjemme"**
- (3) Skriv hellere: "at hos dem der passes hjemme er ..."  
**It is better to write: "at hos dem der passes hjemme er ..."**

## Feedback grid

1. Overall impression
2. Comments to the different aspects of the writing  
(structure, critical thinking, language use)
3. Points to be aware of in future writing



## Kommentarer til opgavens forskellige aspekter

<b>Kommentarer til opgavens forskellige aspekter</b>	<b>Ja</b>	<b>Delvist – kræver forbedringer</b>	<b>Nej</b>
<b>Besvarelse af spørgsmålene</b> - Alle de stillede spørgsmål besvares			
<b>Klar og logisk opgavestruktur</b> - Logisk opbygning med tydelig markering af hvilket spørgsmål, der besvares			
<b>Korrekt besvarelse af skriveordrerne</b> - Skriveordrerne, som fx at definere, beskrive, beregne, begrunde, diskutere og konkludere besvares korrekt			
<b>Opgaven er videnskabelig</b> - Anvendelse af fagterminologi, kritisk stillingtagen til litteratur og data, korrekt kildehenvisning			
<b>Sproget er hensigtsmæssigt</b> - De sproglige formuleringer er klare og præcise og overholder reglerne for retstavning			

## The students' evaluation of initiative 2

40 out of 48 students handed in assignment 1.

29 out of 48 students handed in assignment 2.

Questionnaire about initiative 2: 23 respondents

**The initiative has made it more clear to me how I can improve my writing:**

Answer	Number of respondents
To a high degree	6
To some degree	14
Neutral	1
To a low degree	2

## Question 1: 'What did you gain from the initiative Improved writing skills?'

Answer	Number of respondents
I am more aware of the way I formulate my sentences	7
How important it is to be precise/specific	4
It has prepared me for the exam	3
I have learnt how to structure my writing	2
I have learnt that I have to name tables	1
It has improved my writing	1
Best feedback so far	1
Good idea, nice with grammatical focus	1
Good idea, but I didn't gain a lot from it	1
No answer	2

## Comment examples from question 1:

“I gained a lot from the initiative Improved writing skills. I have learnt how to communicate precisely and how to answer the different exercises/questions which I have handed in. I can use everything from Improved writing skills when I answer my exams” (student 4, my translation)

“Really good feedback. Best response in the study programme so far” (student 18, my translation)

## Question 4: 'What did you gain from giving feedback on your fellow students' writing?' (my translation)

Answer	Number of respondents
I learnt from others' mistakes and am more aware of possible mistakes now	1
I have learnt how to communicate precisely and thoroughly and how I can answer some questions better:	1
Nice to know you're not alone and to get inspiration from others	1
Nice way to go through possible mistakes	1
Better knowledge of the language and the way to use it	1
We spent too much time on it	1
A waste of time, it is enough to get feedback on your own writing	1
Nothing	1
Not much	1
Not much, there was too much focus on grammar and extreme cases	3
No answer	4



## Future implementation?

A format similar to initiative 2, but

- Assignments are obligatory
- Assignments are part of the final exam
- A focus on language will be embedded in the curriculum for the programme
- Only peer feedback during the first feedback session

## Recommendation from the Feedback Task Force at UCPH 2015

“Learning-oriented feedback can be defined as a reaction to work produced by a student that is designed to help them learn more” (Rienecker et al. 2013: 259).

“The Task Force recommends that the Rector’s Office, faculty management and study boards ensure that students on all courses are offered feedback.” (Jørgensen et al. 2015: 4)

**“Summative evaluation:  
evaluation OF learning**

Corrections, grade

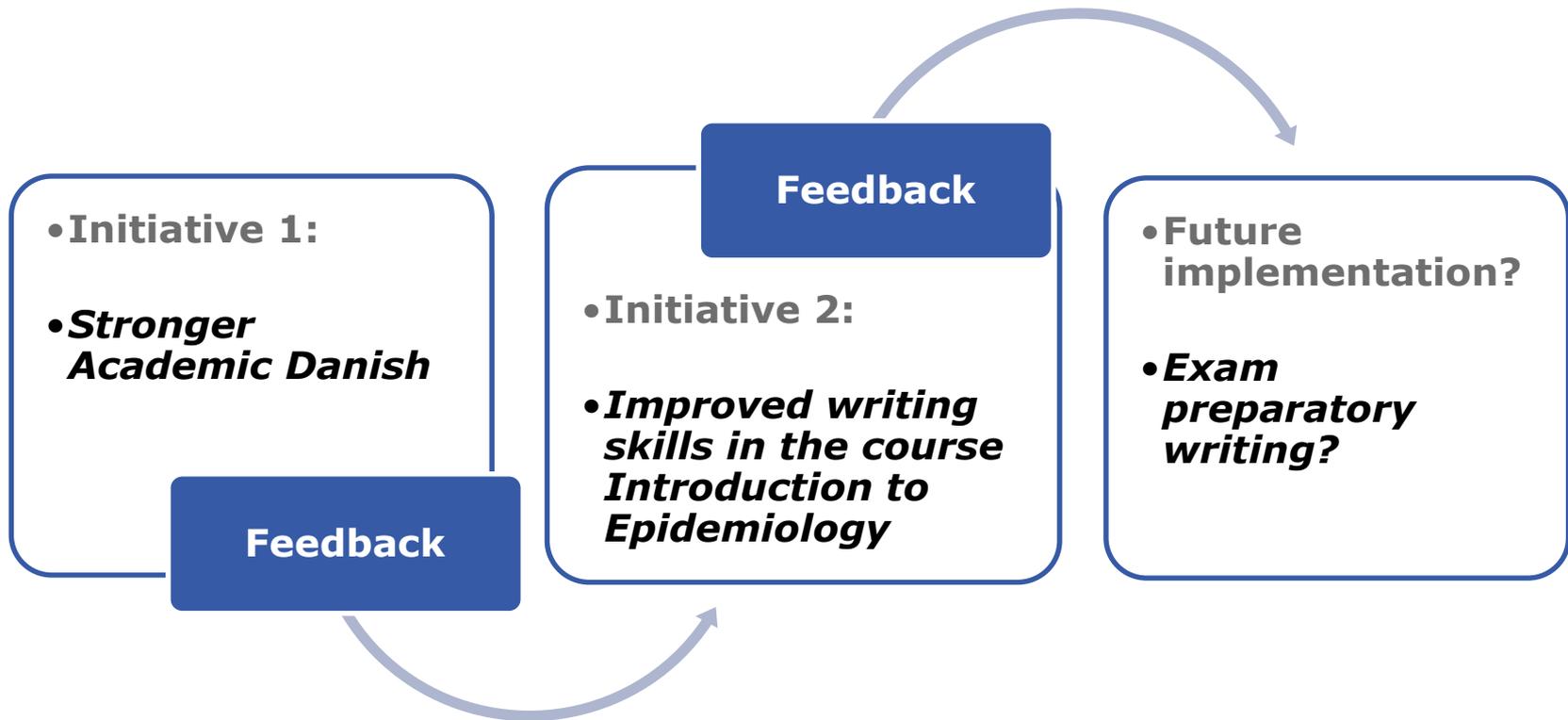
vs.

**Formative evaluation:  
evaluation FOR learning**

Comments, guidance”

(Dolin 2015 (my translation)).





## Arguments for keeping the initiative

### **Argument I:**

We will see a bigger study progress in line with the Study Progress Reform (Fremdriftsreformen) because the initiative will improve the students' writing and academic understanding in all courses.

### **Argument II:**

The initiative follows the recommendation from the Feedback Task Force.

### **Argument III:**

There is now a link between class teaching and the type of exam.

Fremdrift  
Feedback

...



### 3. Challenges

- The students' understanding of language
- Language awareness as a joint responsibility
- Responsibility for own learning

## 4. Discussion

How can we make students understand the relevance and importance of language and language feedback in content courses?

**Questions and comments are welcome**



## Contact details

You are very welcome to contact me with questions and comments to the project:

Katja Årosin Laursen - [aarosin@hum.ku.dk](mailto:aarosin@hum.ku.dk)

## References

Coyle, Do, Philip Hood and David Marsch 2010: *CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press

Dolin, Jens 2015, Institut for Naturfagenes Didaktik, slide no. 5 from powerpoint presentation at UCPH Uddannelsesdag September 22, 2015.

Jørgensen et. al. 2015, *Feedback at UCPH Report by the Task Force for Feedback to Students, UCPH*: [http://uddannelseskvalitet.ku.dk/udviklingsinitiativer/feedback/dokumenter/Report\\_on\\_Feedback\\_at\\_UCPH\\_20.05.15.pdf](http://uddannelseskvalitet.ku.dk/udviklingsinitiativer/feedback/dokumenter/Report_on_Feedback_at_UCPH_20.05.15.pdf)

Krogh, Ellen (red.) 2010: Videnskabsretorik og skriveidaktik. Rapport om et forsknings- og udviklingsprojekt med deltagelse af Avedøre Gymnasium, Kongsholm Gymnasium & HF samt Syddansk Universitet. I: *Gymnasiepædagogik*, nr. 77. Odense: Syddansk Universitet

Laursen, Katja Årosin 2013: *Det er sprogligt – selv hvor du ikke lægger mærke til det – en empirisk undersøgelse af sproglige og faglige vanskeligheder hos farmaceutstuderende med dansk som andetsprog på Københavns Universitet*, Københavnerstudier i Tosprogethed Studier i Parallelsproglighed, Bind C4, Københavns Universitet, Det Humanistiske Fakultet

Magnusson, Ulrika 2008: *Språk i ämnet*, intern rapport fra Institutionen för svenska språket. Göteborg: Göteborgs Universitet

Kamper-Jørgensen, Mads 2015: Website for the course 'Introduction to Epidemiology': <http://www.madskamper.dk/>

Rienecker, Lotte et al. 2013: *Universitetspædagogik*, Samfundslitteratur 2013

