

Main principles of CLIL

(Handout)

In different forms, and before the acronym 'CLIL' became popular, the teaching of content subjects through a second language has been going on for decades. Language is used not only as a channel of instruction but also as a tool for learning.

The CLIL Continuum

From immersion at one end of the spectrum to 'language showers' at the other, there are many ways of implementing CLIL. It varies from country to country, and even from school to school within the same educational authority. Factors which determine how it is implemented will include:

1. The status of the CLIL language in the community
2. The views of the education authority, managers, parents, etc
3. The competence of teachers and learners in the CLIL language
4. The extent to which the L1 is a viable lingua franca in an international setting
5. Entrance requirements established by local tertiary education institutions

The Four Cs

CLIL teaching attempts to integrate:

1. **Content:** the aspect of the subject that a particular lesson might deal with, such as the parts of the body
2. **Cognition:** thinking processes, and the use of language to learn and understand
3. **Communication:** not only the language but the interaction between teacher and learners and between learners themselves. In the classroom, learners communicate for different purposes, and we need to analyse why they are communicating to get a better idea of the specific language they need.
4. **Culture:** in this domain, the learners (particularly in primary classrooms) begin to understand that there are people who are not like them: they use a different language. This helps them to become aware of the wider world and their place in it.

Hard and Soft CLIL

As the quotation from Marsh states, the distinguishing feature of a CLIL lesson is that it has a dual focus – language and content. In order to understand the content, learners need to process it, and this they will do through language. They need to understand the language – of science, or geography, history etc – in order to understand the content, but they also need it in order to *learn* the content, to express and thus develop their understanding through interaction with other learners and the teacher.

CLIL and language learning

The CLIL classroom can recreate, to a certain extent, the conditions which enabled them to learn their mother tongue. What are these conditions?

- A secure environment.
- Exposure to the CLIL language
- Repetition in meaningful / varied contexts
- Tasks which are motivating, provide the right level of challenge and build on what is already known
- Scaffolding: learning support
- Language-mediated interaction, with each other and with the teacher
- The opportunity to make connections with other topics and with the personal life of the learner.

Apart from the focus on language, these conditions are what might typically be found in any primary classroom: there is already fertile ground for language learning. More specific language learning conditions might include:

1. Frequent opportunities for recycling language which appeal to different learning styles (visual, kinaesthetic, musical etc)
2. Allowing learners time to process, struggle with, and produce language rather than limiting them to a receptive role (although with very young learners, there should be no pressure to produce language).

Above all, however, the CLIL teacher will be:

- conscious of the demands the CLIL language makes on the learners
- aware of the strategies she can use to help them understand and produce appropriate language.

What are these demands, and how can the teacher help?

Language demands and language support

These can be broken down into skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and systems (grammar, vocabulary, functions).

The CLIL teacher has the training which enables her to identify the demands a particular piece of language may make, bearing in mind both the cognitive and linguistic difficulty. This will include consideration of the vocabulary, the grammar and the skill(s) the learners need to first of all understand, and then to display and develop their understanding. There will often be language which may be difficult for the learners but which the teacher will not choose to highlight if it is not essential to understanding the content or the lesson procedure. This exposure, however, can play a significant role in acquiring new language.

The CLIL teacher will always be sensitive to language in terms of:

- Her own use of language in managing and teaching the class – grading the grammar and vocabulary she uses according to the level of the learners
- The level of language difficulty (and any specific problems) inherent in any task or text learners have to deal with (language demands)

- The opportunities that arise during a lesson for the use of caretaker language – correcting learners during the course of an interaction in a ‘conversational’ manner, not explicitly – leading to opportunities for noticing.

The Role of the CLIL Teacher

There is, of course, considerable overlap between the methodology of geography, science, PE, etc. teaching, and those same subjects taught in the CLIL classroom. It is in the role of the teacher that the differences may be most visible. Because the teacher recognises the need for learners to use language, to interact through language, lessons are generally devised to allow this to happen: the procedure during the lesson will often cast the teacher in the role of facilitator, enabling learners to discuss and discover, rather than being the ‘donor of knowledge’ (Coyle et al, p.6). To summarise, CLIL lessons will tend to be more learner-centred.

Use of the Mother Tongue

The extent to which learners use their L1 is clearly dependent on their competence in the CLIL language and the parameters for L1 use the teacher has created. It is entirely understandable that young learners will use the L1 if what they are being asked to do is beyond their L2 competence, but even when this is not the case, they may often revert to the L1 to seek confirmation, reassurance, sympathy, or merely to comment on the lesson. During group work L1 may dominate, and it is only through continual monitoring, help and encouragement that the teacher can raise the level of L2 use. If, over time, learners come to regard a particular lesson, or lessons, as one in which L2 is the norm and not the exception, and if the room in which that lesson happens is rich in posters, diagrams, pictures and texts in L2, then the progress towards a ‘L2 only’ environment may be accelerated.

References

Cross-Curricular Resources for Young Learners, Calabrese & Rampone, OUP
How Languages are Learned, 4th edition, Spada & Lightbown, OUP
Coyle, D, et al, (2010), *CLIL Content and Language Integrated Learning*, CUP