

Theoretical insight into CLIL

What is CLIL?

Working in the immersion programme with primary students, I have understood how much they are interested in finding out something new about the World, painting, counting and making experiments in English. That was my first experience in CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning). I was teaching children elements of Math, Science, and Arts in English using authentic materials – course books from Britain. However, I faced the difficulty that these books did not fit our school Curriculum and they were too difficult for young learners. I started to look for materials on the Internet, designed my own materials for CLIL lessons and conducted a research about speaking skill development through CLIL at my groups of students. That is how CLIL became the most important part of my professional life and my favourite method in EFL teaching. Amongst numerous definitions of CLIL I have chosen three, which emphasize the most important aspects of this method.

- Coyle et al. (2010) describe CLIL as a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for learning and teaching of both – content and language.
- “An approach...that may concern languages; intercultural knowledge, understanding and skills; preparation for internationalisation and improvement of education itself.” (Marsh, 2006 in Bentley, 2010)
- “There is no doubt that CLIL as a global project will prosper. Arguments will be sought to back it, and counter- arguments will be brushed off as “teasing problems”.” (Andrews, 2006: 52)

The most significant aspect is that in CLIL the subjects are taught in a non-native language. However, we can see that this approach focuses on both - the subject and the language. Despite CLIL is subject-led and the subject dictates the content, the vocabulary and what language is needed, the linguistic aspects are emphasized as well. In CLIL the language is a tool rather than the aim. The language is used for solving problems in the different spheres of knowledge. I believe that this approach towards language learning is more natural than just simple language learning. We learn our first language the same way – we learn about the World, do things, explore and by this we learn new words and new constructions. Teaching a foreign language empty of a special content could be less effective than bringing a meaning to it with a specific subject matter. Such approach could prepare students much better for future studies and professional work. It develops cognitive skills, logic, and memory and

implies more project work and collaboration. Teachers and other professionals in the sphere of education see the perspectives in CLIL and believe that it will develop and become more popular in the World.

Historical Background

CLIL is not a new form of language or subject education. It is an innovative fusion of both. Actually education in a language which is not the first language of the learner is as old as education itself. As individuals from different language groups have lived together, some have been educated in an additional language. Deller and Price (2007) mention the fact that the example of CLIL dates many years ago when Roman Empire expanded and absorbed Greek territory, language and culture. Families in Rome educated their children in Greek to ensure that they would have access not only to the language, but also to the social and professional opportunities it would provide for them in their future lives, including Greek-speaking educational communities. Mehisto et al. (2008) point out that the first known CLIL-type practice dates back 5000 years to what is now modern-day Iraq. The Akkadians, who conquered the Sumerians, wanted to learn the local language. To this end, Sumerian was used as a medium of instruction to teach several subjects to the Akkadians, including theology, botany and zoology.

We can conclude that CLIL is not a new method and there are many examples in history of situations when CLIL-like approach was used. Reasons can be different – geographic, demographic or economic conditions. We can track these examples all through the world history. For instance, when Latin was used as a language of instruction in European universities and became the primary language of law, medicine, theology, science and philosophy. Another example is when in 1965 English children in Canada started to learn subjects in French because their parents regarded that standard second-language teaching at school would not lead to fluency.

Therefore, they encouraged local authorities to establish language-immersion programme. CLIL is a natural approach in teaching and learning, which originates from certain historical and cultural conditions and gives the opportunity to learners to study in a language that is not native for them.

Teachers of CLIL

In teaching and learning a meaningful point is a teacher, a person who has all necessary skills to teach students exact things through the most appropriate methods. Deller and Price (2007) claim that there are two kinds of CLIL teachers: subject teachers who find they need to teach their subject in a foreign language and language teachers who are assigned to teach their subject in a foreign language. I regard that the problem which the teachers of the first kind can face is that they might have a lack of proficiency in a foreign language in which they are going to teach as well as the knowledge of language teaching methodology. However, the second kind of CLIL teachers might face another problem which is unfamiliarity with the subject areas.

Baidak et al. (2006) admit that in CLIL type provision teachers are generally fully qualified for one or more educational levels at which they work. In most cases, they are specialists in one or more non-language subjects or have two areas of specialisation, one in a language subject and the other in a non-language subject. Certified evidence of further particular skills in addition to their teaching qualification is a firm requirement in only a minority of countries. Undoubtedly, it is not easy to be a CLIL teacher, as one has to be aware of many aspects of teaching at the same time: subject matter, language matter, subject teaching methodology, and language teaching methodology, assessment, finding or creating appropriate materials and finding appropriate techniques to teach CLIL.

Mehisto et al. (2008) notice that as the programme expands from primary into middle school or secondary school, the material becomes more difficult and there are less teachers who can teach both language and subject at a high level. In spite of this, teacher training institutions in many countries do not yet specifically prepare teachers of CLIL. I believe that maybe in the future in Latvia there will be special educational programmes preparing teachers of CLIL. Now there is a possibility to get two qualifications, for instance, a language teacher's and a subject teacher's qualification. But these are two separate qualifications and they don't teach how to make interconnections between them, how to integrate one in another. In CLIL programme it would be necessary to emphasize how to teach the subject in a foreign language.

Mehisto et al. (2008) emphasize several obstacles that teachers of CLIL might meet. One of them is that teaching in CLIL requires more preparation and co-operation with other teachers. Also it takes huge effort to set content, language and

learning skill a goal for every lesson. Moreover, due to the fact that CLIL materials are in a shorter supply, teachers often have to spend much time on developing or adapting existing learning resources. One of the most important problems concerning CLIL teachers is a lack of them. For instance, in Latvia there are not many teachers who can teach both the language and the subject in this language. However, there are ways how to solve this problem and find a decision.

Mehisto et al (2008) offer to co-operate with other teachers, who are professionals in the subjects the CLIL teacher is teaching. This kind of co-operation can relieve stress, save time and bring considerable personal and professional rewards. In case of successful co-operation, the CLIL teacher does not have to “reinvent the wheel”. However, as we understand such work implies a greater workload and enthusiasm from the teachers; School leaders have to encourage this activity, if they want to move in the direction of multilingualism. At the same time they need to provide the opportunities for the teachers to do this extra work. To sum up, being a CLIL teacher is not an easy job; however, it can bring useful experience to the teacher and to the students.

The Advantages of CLIL

There are numerous methods and approaches for teaching English. Each method draws on either any particular skills or the peculiarities of target students or cultural and other settings. When the teacher chooses a method, she or he is sure that this method is the best in this situation for particular students and it really meets their needs. Now we will talk about advantages of CLIL – what is so special and irreplaceable in this method. I have studied what is educators' and other professionals' opinion on CLIL advantages analysed my personal experience and summed up this information in the list of CLIL advantages. I hope they will encourage other teachers to try CLIL in their classrooms.

- CLIL prepares students for life in a more internationalised society and offers them better study and job opportunities.
- CLIL supports the variety of cultures and languages and encourages students to develop cross-culturally as it draws on the ability to use a foreign language on

daily basis. It also conveys to pupils' values of tolerance and respect of other cultures.

- The content is ready-made. This takes away the need to spend a lot of time thinking how to make the topics from the EFL course books more interesting.
- The students are more motivated when they are learning through English something that is the part of their school learning and thinking, rather than just learning the language, which may not seem to them to have any obvious purpose. Many children start learning English at a very young age so when they reach secondary school they do not want to repeat the same language lessons. CLIL brings something new, the purpose why do they have to learn the language.
- Concerning the theory of Multiple Intelligences by Howard Gardner, it is highly relevant in the CLIL case. When we are teaching another subject through the foreign language it is likely that we will draw on more of the intelligences and this is likely to be helpful to our learners. The linguistic intelligence that we use in language teaching is supported by the intelligences that are required for particular subjects, for instance, the musical, kinaesthetic, logical/mathematical or visual/special intelligences.
- CLIL can easily fit in to the parameters established by the national or regional curriculum. CLIL practice meets the need of European standards of education and personality development. Moreover, it cannot be separated from standard good practice in education.
- It gives the opportunity to co-operate with other teachers and to fulfil each other's knowledge and experience.
- CLIL improves learners' performance in both curricular subjects and the target language.
- CLIL increases learners' confidence in the target language.
- Students that have attended CLIL classes have more extensive and varied vocabulary.
- CLIL transforms the classroom into research laboratory where students work independently and co-operatively on important real-life topics, what leads to more learner autonomy which is regarded as a key educational aim.
- CLIL clearly reveals the gap between what students already know and what they do not know yet. That helps to set clear goals of what has to be learnt. CLIL

activates students' prior knowledge which can raise their motivation, activate their memory and think logically.

- CLIL provides opportunities for using the foreign language in practical and motivating contexts, while stimulating comprehension, production, and interaction in a natural way.
- CLIL makes a connection between real life and real-world skills.

We can conclude that CLIL is a highly effective method in teaching a foreign language, as it draws on not only the language skills, but also many other skills that helps to make interconnections and better memorize language and subject items as they are full of meaning. CLIL is engaging – it involves learners through the entire lesson; productive – learners are proud of the outcome; sociable – learners work and discover together and humanistic – the work that has been done is important and relevant to all children in the class.

CLIL really activates students to work and to be responsible for their knowledge. It is a very topical skill in the contemporary society, as approximately 30 years ago it was important to possess the information; however, now it is more important to be able to find the information and be able to analyse it critically. It is important to find qualitative information that will satisfy the exact task. The form, “shape” and quality have become more important than the amount. CLIL teaches the skill of critical thinking, as learners do not understand everything in the foreign language; however they make interconnections between what they already know about the subject matter in their native language and use this knowledge to understand what they cannot understand in the foreign language. They fill in these gaps with the items that they find in their passive or active knowledge “reservoir”.

CLIL encourages using different learning styles during the lesson: audio, visual and bodily- kinaesthetic. That happens because many multiple intelligences are involved. This diversity can satisfy the most learners than in an ordinary English class. CLIL provides clear and faster links with the outside world. When learners are exposed to the target language without any specific content they often cannot understand why they need this language for. However, in CLIL learners can clearly understand why they need to use any particular language construction right now or learn by heart the new vocabulary. They have to do that to better succeed in the

knowledge of the content. In this case language is a tool, rather than an aim and this is the real purpose of the language – to communicate and to deal with different kinds of information and content.

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