

2006

The CLIL Symposium: Content and Language Integrated Learning

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The CLIL Symposium: Content and Language Integrated Learning

The CLIL Symposium explored issues surrounding the growth of Content and Language Integrated Learning in its varied contexts around the world. The speakers referred to contexts that they were familiar with (Bahrain, Yemen, U.K., The Netherlands, Spain, Italy, U.S.) and also interacted with the contexts, challenges and stories of the participants.

Issues for teachers

Loes Coleman and Deborah Robson addressed the changing roles and professional challenges for teachers on CLIL programs. In recent years a growing number of schools in countries in Europe have introduced CLIL programs into their curricula, and in many cases this has been a positive and successful experience. However, in their enthusiasm to get started, some schools have perhaps not taken sufficient time to consider the ramifications of introducing CLIL and as a result, both English language teachers and subject teachers have experienced professional difficulties. Some of the issues and fears teachers have expressed:

- English language teachers have not been involved in the introduction of CLIL in their school.
- Both the language teachers and the CLIL teachers question the skills of the CLIL teachers in foreign language medium education.
- There are questions about whether the language proficiency of the CLIL teachers is adequate.
- English language teachers feel devalued as language specialists (having studied and trained over many years) and are concerned about their future. They feel they may be sidelined or become redundant.
- CLIL teachers feel isolated and lack support from their English language specialist colleagues

The approach adopted in the Netherlands has seen schools investing in a development program for CLIL teachers in language training and CLIL methodology in both the Netherlands and Britain. For audience members interested setting up CLIL programs in their schools, the speakers offered these suggestions:

- Involve language teachers from the start.
- Present the proposed CLIL project to all staff.

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- Set a language standard for CLIL teachers to achieve (and a time frame), and provide language and CLIL methodology training.
- Give language teachers a clearly defined role.
- Build any CLIL responsibilities into teachers' existing contact hours.

A case study with Young Learners

Eilidh Hamilton then spoke about her experience at British Council language centers in Bahrain and Yemen, and explained that for anyone who has worked in an Arabic teaching context it is clear that literacy skills are the major issue which needs to be addressed. The fact that reading is not a popular recreational activity in Arabic language cultures is linked to the difficulty of reading in Arabic, as the written language differs, often greatly, from the spoken form. This resistance to reading and writing often carries over into the YL (young learners) English classroom, where any activities directly relating to developing these skills are met with reluctance at best, and often vocal complaints. It was to find a way to overcome this attitude and develop these key language skills, that the British Council in Bahrain started exploring CLIL.

From initial reading and research it seemed that the way CLIL was being used in bilingual education to integrate the content and language could be adapted for an EFL context, although in the language center teaching context it differs somewhat, as the main goal is the language and content is secondary; however, content can become the major focus if used as a motivational tool and if the language syllabus is flexible enough to allow for 'language focus' to be done in a different order and come more directly from the needs of the students. Eilidh felt that basic science would be a useful place to begin, not only because the topics are of interest to the students she was working with (aged 7-10), but also because scientific experiments need instructions (which could be read) and outcomes should be reported (in written form), thereby attending to the linguistic issues the students faced.

From the outset, doing simple experiments in class – predicting and then seeing if objects could float/sink or were magnetic – was extremely engaging for her students. They were engrossed in the tasks and keen to share their findings with their peers. This meant they were reading and writing quite significant chunks of text almost inadvertently.

Teacher Training in CLIL

There were two presentations from CLIL teacher trainers with the Norwich Institute for Education (NILE). Kay Bentley spoke of the primary programs while Keith Kelly focused on

secondary. Kay Bentley stated that it is important to start any CLIL-training course with an understanding of what CLIL is, and what the differences are between a course for Young Learners and one for Primary CLIL. In order to achieve the latter objective, teachers need to compare materials from current YL books and books which either include CLIL sections or books which present complete content curriculum. The conclusion is that, in general, CLIL materials present a more extensive vocabulary list or word bank; a more progressive series of cognitive challenges, such as classification, comparison, deduction, evaluation; and a wider range of topics from science to art.

These differences relate to Jim Cummins' theory which states that pupils should be encouraged to progress from mastery of basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and be 'pushed' towards cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). This process is generally thought to take from five to seven years. The methodology embedded in taught input is widely accepted as good primary practice. For example, student talking time is promoted. Task based learning is integral, as are visual, auditory and kinesthetic experiences which support comprehensible input. All sessions related to curriculum content are practical and progressive.

Teachers on NILE courses are made aware that across all curricular subjects, CLIL incorporates learning skills, such as locating and organizing information, interpreting and constructing meaning, evaluating and applying knowledge. Planning and support strategies for CLIL lessons are presented. These include activating prior knowledge so it can be linked to new subjects, language frames and other materials to help scaffold pupils' language for communicating content information. Sessions on medium term planning, and assessment of content and language, thinking and learning are presented too. Throughout the course, teachers experience a language rich environment to stimulate production of higher order talk in the classroom.

Keith Kelly stated that there are two main areas which stand out from secondary CLIL training and they are i) guiding input and ii) supporting output. He put forward the suggestion that, simple though these two factors are, these areas are an essential focus of any CLIL training context. The skills that CLIL teachers need are:

- a level of foreign language which allows them to function in their subject content and manage the classroom in their subject
- an awareness of the specific language demands that their subjects place on the learners
- subject content competence

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- the ability to produce materials or adapt resources since, at the time of writing, there are few published CLIL resources on the market
- skills in networking to be able to share and make the most of the groups of colleagues out there with substantial experience in this field.

What makes CLIL different from other teacher training education is that CLIL focuses on the content curriculum and places it within a foreign language. This necessitates an approach which brings together ‘discourse analysis’ and ‘ideational frameworks’. CLIL teacher training needs to focus on investigating the language of the subject and identifying structures for guiding and supporting that language. The best way to deal with assessment is to integrate it with planning. It was suggested that the input must be accessible and the output achievable and that CLIL teachers should be wary of testing what they have not taught.

CLIL is a relatively new approach in English Language Teaching. As too often happens in our profession, new trends tend to get picked up wholesale, without a clear understanding of the issues and theoretical underpinnings, and certainly without thoughtful teacher training. The speakers and participants in this symposium, in sharing their ideas and success stories, proved that CLIL has become a professionalized topic for teacher education and research.

Cummins, J. 2000. *Language, Power and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, Ltd.