A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO CLIL AND ESTABLISHING A CLIL PROGRAMME

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Introduction

In the TEFL arena both learners and teachers are constantly looking for the "next big thing," i.e. a new way teaching (input) with the goal of increasing and improving students' production (output).

A term first coined in 1994 by David Marsh and Anne Maljers, CLIL – content and language integrated learning - has become one of the most significant and talked-about innovations in TEFL over the two decades and is now promoted by educationalists and institutions around the world.

"(CLIL) is an educational approach where some content learning (like a topic on global climate, or a subject) is taught in an additional language (such as English language in Korea)." ('CLIL: An Interview with Professor David Marsh,' IH Journal 26, Spring 2009)

It is important to note that CLIL not a new method; rather it is the fusion of the teaching of content from the curriculum with the teaching of a non-native language, as well as both thinking and learning skills. This gives learners a new experience but also presents new challenges for both students and teachers.

The main difference between TEFL and CLIL is that with CLIL the primary focus is on the curricular subject, not the language. It offers a more authentic learning experience with a lot more meaningful exposure to the target language.

Key concepts

It is important to note that there is no "one" CLIL. "It is a single educational approach which involves very different models" (Marsh 2009). It is an idea which can be applied in different ways using a variety of methods. In their book CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning (2012), Coyle, Hood and Marsh identify three different models of CLIL:

C1: Plurilingual Education, which is not common in the Spanish public education system but may be found in private institutions

C2: Adjunct CLIL, where "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"

C3: Language-embedded content courses "content programmes are designed from the outset with language development objectives. Teaching is carried out by content and language specialists"

Once a teacher or institution has decided on the type of CLIL course they are going to introduce onto a curriculum, they need to be sure about the aims. For example, these could include:

INTRODUCING new concepts

IMPROVING production, performance (curricular subjects and target language) and confidence

DEVELOPING thinking skills

"The aims depend on the model used. These may be subtle, as in helping youngsters understand the point of learning a language and developing in the youngsters a positive 'can do' attitude towards themselves as language learners. This is crucial in places like Spain and Japan where English is often remote from the real lives of young people." ('CLIL: An Interview with Professor David Marsh,' IH Journal 26, Spring 2009)

Another key concept is the 4Cs of CLIL: content, communication, cognition and culture

Content can be any subject (or a mix) on the curriculum.

Communication can be written and oral. We must encourage participation by increasing STT and therefore decreasing TTT. Self-evaluation, peer and group feedback are important.

CLIL promotes cognitive skills which challenge learners, such as reasoning, creative thinking etc.

Culture is the process of understanding ourselves and other cultures. Learners need knowledge of those in different countries to develop positive attitudes and awareness and the concept of citizenship.

Beginning a CLIL Programme

"Successful CLIL practice is likely to require teachers to engage in alternative ways of planning for effective learning." (Coyle, Hood and Marsh, 2012)

As is pointed out in this book, starting small is important to the process of beginning to plan a CLIL course. The first step should involve identifying the key people in the institution and establishing shared objectives. Just because CLIL is a flexible concept, it does not mean that we can adopt an "anything goes" attitude, nor should we assume that greater exposure to the target language (input) directly corresponds with more and better production (output).

Examples of shared objectives are:

"I want my classroom to be interactive."

"I plan on using CLIL to teach my students about a different culture."

"In CLIL classes I am going to expose my students to authentic materials in the target language."

It is vital to consider the learner's experience and moreover the benefits of, for example teaching them science in English. To that end, four key words can define the beneficial process of CLIL on a curriculum: motivate, involve, challenge and enable.

Motivating learners is often the greatest challenge in any learning environment, and is especially true in primary and secondary education. How can teachers motivate students? Essentially, any answer to this question (and there are many) is that the teacher must involve learners in the learning process. It is true that there are many classrooms in which the only resources that the teacher uses are the board and the book. This seems strange given that, nowadays, most classrooms are equipped with a computer, projector, the Internet, a DVD player and more. This gives the teacher access to limitless resources. With younger learners, other resources such as toys and games, songs, cards and anything performance-based will also involve them, thereby increasing their motivation.

Thirdly, it is important to challenge learners. What's the point in giving them tasks that they will find easy? Challenges need to be appropriate to the learner and can vary not just from class to class but from student to student. CLIL is interesting in that learners can often surprise the teacher in terms of what they find challenging. A student who finds the language component difficult might be confident with the content, and vice-versa.

Finally, the aim of these three steps is to enable students. That is the purpose of both TEFL and CLIL; to enable learners to communicate in another language. CLIL classes aim to educate students about the content of the curriculum, but this can be done in L1. Ultimately, CLIL is about encouraging "positive attitude changes in learners towards learning a language, and towards themselves as language learners." (Marsh 2009)

Delivering a CLIL lesson

Planning

This is a crucial stage of delivering a coherent CLIL lesson and enabling students' output. Teachers must consider learning outcomes, i.e. what should students know and be able to do after the lesson that they couldn't before?

Before the lesson teachers need to examine the content material and make sure that it is appropriate. In order to engage students, it is vital that the teacher explains their objectives and also provides things such as key vocabulary and meaningful activities that fit with the objectives previously decided. Finally, planning a plenary to finish the class will give learners time to reflect on the activities and objectives as well as assimilate new information that they have learned.

Resources

All of this planning is great, but teachers need to support learning objectives and curriculum content with the right resources. The Internet is especially useful - why spend time explaining something when there's a great YouTube video with that does it much better and engages your students? Multi-media resources have all sorts of positive effects on the learner, from helping them to understand key concepts better to enabling collaboration and personalising the learning experience.

Scaffolding

Scaffolding refers to the steps teachers take to support learners so that they can understand new content and learn new skills, especially when they are dealing with new and unfamiliar content. It is temporary in that learners can later use these skills in different contexts without support. The amount needed not only varies from student to student but subject to subject.

Scaffolding is crucial in ensuring that learners feel successful in the tasks they do. Without this, learners will be demotivated and unengaged. It can take a wide range of forms – from choosing the language we use in class to breaking down tasks into smaller steps. Of particular use in CLIL classrooms are language tools such as word banks, glossaries and writing frames which would not be necessary in an L1 environment but here enable students to communicate in a meaningful way.

Developing learning strategies

This is about the way in which learners learn new subject content.

"Effective learners are aware of how they learn and think about which learning strategies they use for different tasks. More able learners use a wide range of learning strategies." (Bentley, 2010)

Teachers need to encourage students to use different strategies and find the ones that work for them. This means that students need time to reflect on strategies after using them in order to enable them to build on their learning strategies in the future.

Monitoring and evaluating learners

Strategies for assessment

One of the challenges that CLIL teachers face is knowing how and what to assess. For example, should assessments focus on content or language or both?

A lot of factors can influence the answer – for example, which model of CLIL programme students are undertaking. However, the factors which do not change are as follows:

teachers must be clear about the reason for and focus of assessment

students must be made aware of the reason and focus

Once these goals are clearly defined, teachers need to decide on the assessment criteria. These are the statements which determine the performance of the student in relation to the learning outcomes.

Formative vs. summative assessment

Summative assessment is the formal type of assessment – typically a standardised test or exam – at the end of a unit or course. Perhaps more interesting in a CLIL course is formative assessment, i.e. the continuous, informal assessment which tells us how well students are learning subject content and provides feedback which can influence teaching methods and the course in general. This can take many forms: speaking to students, looking at their books and other written work, portfolio work, oral work and presentations, group work as well as self-assessment and peer-assessment.

Common to both types of assessment is the criteria used, for example a list of 'can do' statements. It is important that students understand the nature of the assessment and the types of answers expected from them. These could be open or closed, short or extended, objective or subjective and so on. CLIL teachers should support learners using scaffolding techniques. For example, students might respond better to exams where the instructions are in L1 or where questions are closed.

Conclusion

CLIL is still in its infancy and data regarding its results remains scarce. When poorly introduced, for example without clear objectives or without explaining the objectives to learners, students' uncertainty about the purpose of the CLIL course can have a negative effect on their motivation.

Further to this, one of the biggest problems is the confidence of the teacher. As demand for native speakers in the private sector grows, CLIL – now being introduced in public institutions in many European countries including Spain – shifts the dynamic. Often teachers with a knowledge of L1 are preferred, as L1 is important in the CLIL classroom in a way that it is not important in TEFL. However, it is vital that these teachers feel confident speaking and teaching in the target language. This is not just about ability, but also attitude. Learners will detect that if teacher has a negative attitude towards the course and they themselves may adopt a negative attitude towards learning.

Delivering quality CLIL lessons with confidence will motivate the learners. In turn, they will become involved in the course and this will give teachers the opportunity to challenge them and ultimately enable them. That should be the goal of all teachers.

Bibliography

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