EXPERIENCING CLIL FROM THE LEARNER'S SEAT

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ABSTRACT

Since February 2013, Year 6 students at Kalamunda Christian School have been taught art in Japanese using the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) pedagogy. A survey of students who have gone through the course showed their appreciation of and confidence in the approach. As the CLIL pedagogy is perceived to be too difficult by many teachers, I have started to promote CLIL by getting teachers to experience it firsthand by taking part in an art class in Finnish. I preface the lesson with a PowerPoint introduction to CLIL. In order to track the effectiveness of this approach, I ask the participants to note down their attitudes towards CLIL before the PowerPoint presentation, immediately after it, and finally after the example lesson. The results of this survey show that the teachers are more likely to trial CLIL if they get to experience it themselves as a learner. This practical report includes key recommendations for successful implementation of the CLIL pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

Since February 2013, I have taught art in Japanese to a Year 6 class at Kalamunda Christian School following the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) pedagogy. The course follows the regular art program for the year group except that all instruction is conducted in Japanese, as are all conversations in the classroom. The end of year survey in 2013 showed that 95% of the students enjoyed their CLIL art course more than the topic-based language programs that are used at the school in Years 1 to 5. In addition, 87% believed that they learnt more Japanese by taking part in a CLIL course.

Encouraged by these results I wanted to promote CLIL to other teachers. I have been to several CLIL professional development sessions where the presenters talked a great deal about the theory of CLIL without engaging the participants in CLIL activities or even showing footage of a real CLIL class. Discussions with other participants after these sessions have revealed that many teachers consider the CLIL style of teaching to be too difficult for the learners and too hard for teachers to administer. In order to challenge these negative attitudes, I decided to include an example CLIL art class at the end of my own presentation at one professional development workshop. I chose Finnish (my first language) as the medium of delivery, as very few participants would have prior familiarity with it. This ensured that the participants got an authentic experience of a CLIL class from the learner's point of view and genuinely needed to rely on the alternative ways of communication that include facial expressions, body language and visual images.

In order to track the effectiveness of this approach, I asked the participants to note down their attitudes towards CLIL before the PowerPoint presentation, immediately after it, and finally after participating in a real CLIL class. This feedback showed that attitudes improved after each stage of the presentation. Although the theory lesson gave the teachers useful background information, it was the practical session that convinced many teachers of the effectiveness of CLIL and proved that it is possible to convey meaning with very limited vocabulary.

This chapter explains, firstly, how I structured my presentation to teachers of Japanese to promote CLIL and how I gauged their changing attitudes towards CLIL as they moved from a presentation to experiencing it themselves as learners in a Finnish art class. It then outlines the survey results that clearly show the increased likelihood of teachers' trialling CLIL themselves after being part of a CLIL class. Finally, it gives advice to teachers on how to plan, run and evaluate their own CLIL class, avoiding common pitfalls.

STRUCTURE OF MY CLIL PRESENTATION

1. ELICITING THE PARTICIPANTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS CLIL BEFORE THE START OF THE PRESENTATION

As the participants were entering the room, I gave them a CLIL attitudes survey. I asked them to tick their answers to the following questions:

1. How much do you know about CLIL?
   ◯ Lots   ◯ Something   ◯ Very little   ◯ Nothing

2. How likely are you to run your own CLIL class in the near future?
   ◯ I'm already involved in an immersion /CLIL program.
   ◯ Very likely
   ◯ Not likely
   ◯ Not relevant to me

2. PRESENTATION ON CLIL

After the initial survey, I explained the background and definition of CLIL with a PowerPoint presentation, as well as how to run a program while avoiding common pitfalls. The following is a summary of this presentation.

WHAT IS CLIL?

CLIL stands for Content and Language Integrated Learning. It is "an umbrella term which refers to any dual-focused educational context in which an additional language is used as a medium in the teaching of non-language content" (Coyle 2008, 97; see also Marsh 2002). The focus of the CLIL lesson is not on the language itself as in a traditional Languages classroom; rather the language is used "as a tool to develop new learning from a subject or a theme" (Coyle et al. 2009, 6). CLIL explains how we become masters of our first language in a relatively short time and why we always learn a new language quicker if we go to the country where the language is spoken. In these situations the language is always used as a tool to achieve something, whether it is to get milk from our mother or to buy a train ticket in Tokyo, and our success or failure gives us immediate feedback on our communication skills. If we make errors but the message is understood, we are also often given the correct language to model on. There are many approaches to CLIL, but each program must cover the 4Cs framework in order to be considered CLIL: content (subject matter), communication (language learning and using), cognition (learning and thinking processes), and culture (developing intercultural understanding and global citizenship) (Coyle 2006). The language used in the classroom is distinguished according to three purposes: language for learning (language to assist communication), language of learning (topic-related vocabulary) and language through learning (incidental language learning).

CLIL was developed in Europe in the 1990s and was born out of immersion. Immersion was first used in Montreal, Canada in 1965 as non-French speaking families desired their children to become fluent speakers of French.

There are many similarities between CLIL and immersion. In both cases part of the curriculum is delivered in the second language, so bilingualism occurs naturally. The students enter with limited or no knowledge of this second language, the language is often confined inside the classroom and their first language development is paramount. The culture of the school is normally that of the first language community.

However, compared to immersion, CLIL is more flexible and easier to administer. In some countries and states a school can only be called an immersion school if at least 50% of the curriculum is taught in the second language. This typically requires significant resources and restructuring and hence the commitment of the whole school. On the other hand, a CLIL program can cover just one subject, topic or a theme and can be driven by an individual teacher. "There is neither one CLIL approach nor one theory of CLIL" (Coyle 2008, 101).

CLIL VS TRADITIONAL LANGUAGES CLASSROOM

It is the differences between CLIL and a traditional language teaching model that make CLIL so effective. In a traditional language class the language is always the focus and the end product. In many cases the language is out of context and it is heavily drilled in order to prepare the students for an anticipated real language use some time in the future. Teacher talk is ABOUT the second language in the first language instead of IN the second language. The language also tends to be rather formal, as accuracy is more important than conveying the message. All of this, combined with the amount of repetition required to memorize the language, can lead to low motivation in both the teachers and learners.

In CLIL the language is always in context as it is used for a real communicative purpose. In an art class the students would use their second language to learn about a new artist, express their view on her/his work, understand the processes necessary to produce a similar piece of art, and ask for necessary materials to complete the project. The language is not used in practice or pretend situations but always for immediate and pressing needs to communicate. Learning new language in context also entails less repetition, and monotonous drill exercises are not required.

The language is often more natural in a CLIL class, even if not always correct. In many ways CLIL mimics the way we learn our first language, through trial and error, and how children understand and are understood years before their language can be described as "perfect". Motivation levels of CLIL students are higher as learners get tremendous joy from being able to understand and speak another language in a real communicative situation.

Other benefits of CLIL for the learner include cognitive development, improved self-esteem and academic achievement. Several studies prove that students involved in CLIL programs are not disadvantaged but often do better than students in the control group. Benefits for teachers include time-efficiency (you can cover two subjects in one lesson, thus addressing the challenges of the "overcrowded curriculum"), teacher collaboration between languages teachers and subject teachers, and creativity as you think of ways to communicate with limited vocabulary.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Traditional Languages class	• Less preparation required • Teacher does not need to be fluent in the target language • Easier to explain grammar forms	• Practice language use • Pretend situations • Low motivation • Lots of repetition required
CLIL	• Teacher collaboration • Real, natural language use • In context • Time efficient • Development of higher cognitive skills • High teacher and student motivation • Increases creativity • Effective as mimics first language acquisition	• Teacher required to have conversational fluency in target language • Requires knowledge of additional learning area • More preparation required • Requires educating school community on CLIL to get "buy-in"

Table 1: Traditional Languages class vs CLIL: Advantages and disadvantages

STARTING A CLIL PROGRAM

When planning their own CLIL program, teachers need to start by choosing a skill or topic from the curriculum of a non-language learning area that they feel they are able to teach in the target language. They also need to decide how long they wish to run the program – for a few lessons, for a term, or for a whole year? It is advisable to start with a short "trial" that can be evaluated together with the students and then added to. A common pitfall is to start too big, run into difficulties and then abandon the program halfway through. This will be seen as a failure of the program – and also of CLIL – and the teacher will not get another chance with the same group of students.

Before writing the program, teachers should do as much reading as they can, visit a CLIL class (or a bilingual school if possible), and find example CLIL programs and lesson plans to base theirs on. Collaboration with other CLIL teachers and/or subject specialists while writing the program is beneficial. Even if the program is short, it should include some kind of assessment. Both the content and the language can be assessed. If assessing content in the target language, the level of language required should be kept low so that lack of language skills does not stand in the way of students demonstrating new learning. Assessing in first language may be preferable in certain circumstances, provided that the students have learnt the topic-specific vocabulary also in their first language. Language should always be assessed in the context of the new learning. Including formative assessment is paramount, as it helps both the teacher and the student assess where they currently are in their learning and what the next step should be.

Before starting the CLIL program, teachers need to prepare the students well. This includes explaining the benefits of CLIL, the challenges they are likely to face, and how to overcome them. It is also advisable to survey the students at different times during the program, both formally and informally, to find out how they feel about the lessons and how the teacher can support them further. By acknowledging their feelings and welcoming feedback and suggestions, the teacher ensures that the students have ownership of the program and that it meets their needs. Quick, informal surveys ("Hands up if…") may also help achieve "buy-in" from all students because those who resist can see that the majority are finding the lessons enjoyable and beneficial.

Care must be taken when planning and running the CLIL lessons. As discussed before, in order to qualify as CLIL they must have a dual focus on language and content. They must be conducted entirely in the target language and the content must come from a non-language curriculum. Common pitfalls include drilling vocabulary for the new topic but not using it to develop any new knowledge or skills (focus on language) – or the opposite, slipping into explaining the new concepts in English (focus on content). Vocabulary should always be introduced and used in context instead of drilling (language use vs language practice), and it should merely be used as a tool to access the new content. A good way to ensure use of target language is to agree on "language rules". For instance, in a Japanese CLIL class the teacher may not speak a word of English between the Japanese greetings that take place at the start and end of the lesson. However, the class may agree that if a word cannot be explained with gestures, pictures, body language, facial expressions and other visual means, the teacher is allowed to write it on the board in English. A successful CLIL lesson should also include good classroom practices like pre-testing, differentiation, clear articulation of learning intentions, and evaluation of individual achievement against clearly articulated success criteria.

An essential part of any learning program is evaluation. This should be done together with the students, and suggested improvements should guide the writing of the next program. Students should also evaluate their own attitudes and efforts, and perhaps even keep a CLIL diary to help them better understand their journey.

3. SECOND STAGE OF CLIL ATTITUDES SURVEY

After learning about CLIL through a traditional PowerPoint presentation, teachers were asked to go back to their survey and answer the second question again. However, a "more likely" alternative between the "very likely" and "not likely" was added at this stage to see if there had been a shift in attitude since the start of the presentation.

4. ART CLIL LESSON IN FINNISH

The example CLIL lesson started with self-introductions so the participants could identify themselves. This also served as a pre-test to see if any of them in fact knew any Finnish beforehand.

First I greeted the teachers one by one in a friendly, informal manner and shook their hand. Incidentally, the shaking of the hand introduced an element of inter-cultural understanding, which is also one of the benefits of CLIL. After the lesson we discussed in English how Finnish people greet each other with a handshake and how they would be very uncomfortable receiving a kiss or a hug from anyone except a close family member.

I then put a hand on my chest and introduced myself using a full sentence *Minun nimeni on Mariel* ("My name is Mariel"). This was followed by a gesture towards the teachers with an open palm and the question *Ja sinun nimesi?* Every teacher understood the meaning of the question from the gestures I used and most commonly shook my hand and gave me their first name. Since I repeated the process with every participant, the participants soon started to say the greeting before their name, and later on some started to use the whole sentence *Minun nimeni on [own name].*

This simple activity demonstrates two of the main tools used in a CLIL classroom: repetition and gestures. It also shows how students can be differentiated by always using language that is "comprehensible input plus one" (Krashen 1977). The more able ones will soon start adding more vocabulary to their own responses following the model provided by the teacher.

After the introductions I drew a tree on the whiteboard, repeating the name for each part as I drew them. Once I was certain the teachers had learnt the word for "branch" from the picture, I added "small branch" and "big branch". The art learning intention for the lesson was to be able to draw light and shadow to add form to the picture, and place the light correctly to reflect the source of the light. While saying it, I demonstrated the meaning of the word for "light" by taking out a torch and shining it on the whiteboard. While repeating the word I also pointed to any other light sources in the room, like the main ceiling lights and the projector. I demonstrated the meaning of "shadow" by putting my fingers in front of the beam from my torch and by drawing the participants' attention to other shadows formed in the room. I then labelled all the parts of the tree in Finnish, as many learners, myself included, prefer seeing a new word written down. Next I gave the participants a chance to model my native pronunciation by repeating the word several times, changing the speed, tone, height and volume of my voice for added interest.

I then introduced the materials for the project, white chalk and black paper, in a similar manner and modelled the project by drawing my own tree using these materials. While drawing the example, I kept repeating the key words as well as a new command, "draw". When handing out the materials to the participants, I repeated the word for "here you are" and modelled how to say "thank you". While the participants were drawing their own trees, I constantly gave feedback by using the key words they had learnt. I also repeated a new word, "more", while adding more light or more branches to their picture. I also clapped my hands if I was happy with their work and said "good". After a while the participants were able to understand simple feedback like "good trunk" or "more light" and started to give feedback to the other participants. It was delightful to see the participants creating their own language with the expressions they had already learnt. One lady asked for a bigger chalk by pointing to hers and saying "small chalk". Another one was very self-critical and called herself a "small artist" after I had used the Finnish word *artisti* myself, knowing that, being a loan word, it would be easily understood.

5. LAST STAGE OF TEACHER SURVEY

After completing their artwork, the teachers filled out the last part of their survey. This part repeated the second question one more time with the "more likely" option added, but also asked the teachers to note down whether their expectations of a real CLIL class were met after experiencing it themselves.

Did your expectations of a CLIL lesson change after experiencing it yourself?

◯ No, they did not change. I still think _____

◯ Yes, they changed because _____

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

To date, 47 people have fully completed my survey at four different conferences or professional development sessions, including the 2014 National Symposium on Japanese Language Education. In all instances but one the participants had chosen this session over others available, so attitudes towards CLIL were either positive or at least neutral, and interest levels were high before the session started.

Graph 1 shows that attitudes towards CLIL improved through the survey stages. This is not surprising, as 27 participants knew nothing or very little about CLIL beforehand (see Graph 2).
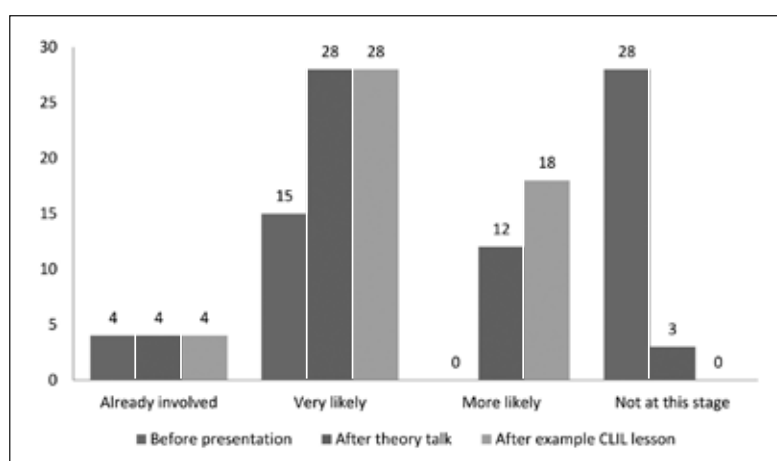
Graph 1: Likelihood of teachers trialling CLIL themselves
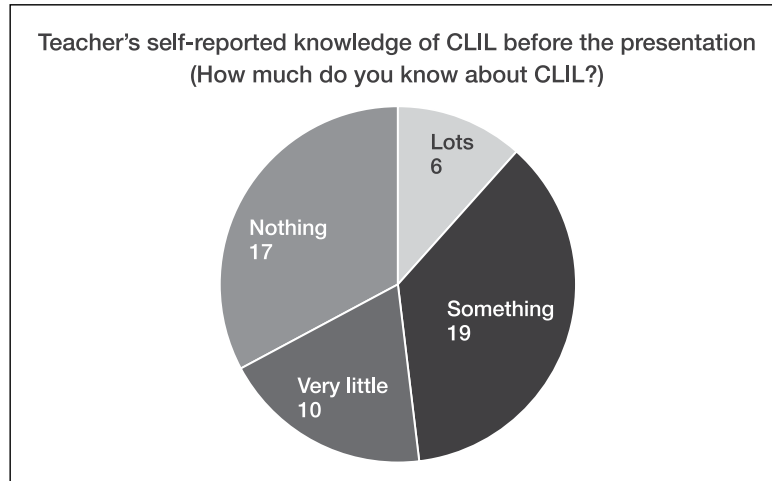
Graph 2: Knowledge of CLIL before presentation

It is also natural that the biggest change in attitudes occurred during the theory session when the participants who knew nothing were given their first glimpse of the CLIL approach. At this stage the number of participants who answered "very likely" grew from 15 to 28. In addition, the number of teachers who responded "not likely" was reduced from 28 to 3, with 13 teachers changing their answer to the new "more likely" option and 12 straight to "very likely". Although there is no difference between the number of teachers who responded "very likely" after the theory session and after the example CLIL lesson, the number of "more likely" responses grew from 13 to 18 by the end of the presentation. In similar fashion, the last three of the "not likely" responses were finally eliminated after the example CLIL lesson. The 28 "not likely" responses were first reduced to 3 after the theory lesson but dropped to zero after the teachers had experienced CLIL themselves.

From these figures alone we can conclude that giving general information about CLIL is important in order to promote the pedagogy. However, it is just as important to show teachers what it would look like in real life as this further raises their interest, shows its effectiveness and, most of all, increases their confidence in being able to run a CLIL program themselves. The importance of getting teachers to experience a real CLIL lesson becomes even more evident when analysing the responses to the question "Did your expectations of a CLIL lesson change after experiencing it yourself?" All the participants answered either that they still believe it is a great teaching method (or some other positive comment) or that the experience was better than expected.

Although the participants were asked to write in their own words how the experience was different from expectations and not everyone elaborated on their answers, there were enough similarities to group the answers as follows:

"It is easier for the student to understand than I thought." (9 participants)
"I learnt more Finnish than I thought I would be able to." (6 participants)
"I can see more benefits of CLIL." (3 participants)
"My understanding of CLIL improved after experiencing it myself." (3 participants)
"I could get the feel of it and see how it would work." (3 participants)
"I saw how interesting and motivating it is." (2 participants)

Some of the individual responses included:

"It was more fun and relaxed."
"I thought that it can only be used in primary school but now see that I can use it in high school too."
"I got encouraged to use more target language in the classroom."

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study confirms the finding in Cross (2013) that the key to the future success and expansion of CLIL is lifting teachers' confidence both in the CLIL pedagogy and in being able to teach CLIL effectively themselves. Although traditional PowerPoint presentations are a necessary part of promoting CLIL, teachers often leave such presentations feeling that CLIL is not possible in their context – or that they would not have the skills to teach CLIL successfully.

The results of the teacher surveys in this study indicate that teacher curiosity about and knowledge of CLIL can be raised with a traditional presentation. However, in order to gain confidence in CLIL – the confidence that it is in fact effective and the confidence that they have the skills to make it effective – teachers must take part in it. Being able to learn 20 words in less than an hour and then use these words to acquire new information takes many by surprise. In an example CLIL lesson the teachers are also given a variety of tools to help them make meaning with limited vocabulary, as well as a chance to evaluate from the viewpoint of the learner which of these seem to be most effective.

Based on the results of my survey and the oral encouragement I have received from the teachers who have taken part in my Finnish CLIL art lesson, I would recommend more example CLIL lessons as part of teacher training for CLIL. Getting immersed in whatever you wish to learn, being a participant rather than observer, learning in it rather than about it, all these lie at the heart of the effectiveness of CLIL.

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