
OH WHAT A FEELING! USING TOYOTA AS A CASE STUDY TO TEACH YEAR 9 CLIL ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

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ABSTRACT

This paper documents my efforts to turn a personal trip to the Toyota factory in Aichi into an engaging CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) unit of work for students in my Year 9 Japanese class. Using the Year 9 Economics and Business curriculum as a starting point, students studied the history of the Toyota company, its business model and work ethic, the progression of environmentally-friendly cars and compared advertising success in Japan and Australia. Students even got a tour of the local Toyota dealership, met mechanics and sales people and went for a test drive in the latest models. The unit culminated in the students returning to the Toyota dealership and using real Toyota cars to film TV ads in Japanese. This was an incredible effort from students from a typically low-performing regional high school, and proved that CLIL can work anywhere.

INTRODUCTION

After successfully implementing a Year 9 Economics and Business CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) unit at my school, I wanted to show other teachers that CLIL was achievable irrespective of the background and achievement levels of both the teacher and the students. Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a dual-focused educational approach in which the target language (in this instance, Japanese) is used for both the learning and teaching processes. The focus is not only on the language, nor only on the content, as they are both interwoven (Coyle, Hood and Marsh 2010, 1). It is incredible. It is engaging. It is meaningful. In the case of my school, the CLIL unit had a direct positive impact on retention of students in senior language classes, as the Year 10 Japanese class the next year was the biggest ever. In the instance of my unit, Japanese was used as the language to explore aspects of the Year 9 Economics and Business curriculum. CLIL has the ability to transform the way you teach and the way your students learn. However, it is misunderstood by many. And it is a lot of work. In the presentation this paper is based on, I delivered a mini CLIL lesson for other teachers to understand what a CLIL lesson feels like, talked through the curriculum, showed the final assessment pieces of the CLIL unit, and shared all of the resources I had created so that teachers were able to teach this unit to their own classes.

BACKGROUND

SCHOOL BACKGROUND

At the time of delivering this program, I was working at a large regional secondary school in Victoria with approximately 1,300 students. Despite these huge numbers, Japanese only had four or five students continuing on to VCE, and the other language had not run a senior class in several years. Almost half the school population was classified as coming from very low socio-economic backgrounds, and literacy and numeracy levels were well below national averages. Despite this, thanks to a concerted recruitment effort by the language department, Japanese had three classes at the Year 9 level for the first time ever—two elective classes and one compulsory Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) stream. Japanese in Year 10 was timetabled against electives in Surfing and Automotive—it was an uphill battle to encourage students to take the leap to senior Japanese, but I was determined to do something different. Given CLIL's focus on both language and content, CLIL seemed like the perfect way to combine Japanese with a topic the students could be actively engaged in and boost senior school numbers. The focus here was not on achieving standards, as the Year 9 curriculum had already been completely taught by Term 4, but rather on students enjoying language classes and empowering them to acquire knowledge while actively engaging and developing their own powers of perception, communication and reasoning (Coyle, Hood and Marsh 2010, 6). As I had never taught using this methodology before, and the students had already completed the prescribed Year 9 curriculum, I had no specific goals I needed to achieve; this CLIL unit was simply an opportunity to explore a completely new methodology and learning style for both the students and myself. I wanted students to look back positively on the experience, and to inspire some of them to continue on to Senior Japanese.

UNIT OF WORK BACKGROUND

The year prior I had been honoured to participate in the Aichi-Victoria Teacher Exchange. When I was in Aichi on exchange, my partner teacher took me to visit one of the Toyota plants. I wanted to see Japan's number-one export from an economic point of view, but given I view cars as simply a way to get from Point A to Point B, I did not think I would be particularly interested in the cars themselves. How wrong I was! The whole process was enthralling and I wanted to know more. It immediately hit me that the manufacturing, business and environmental impacts of Toyota would make a great topic to study with my Year 9 students when we looked at transport. But the more I looked into it, the more I realised Toyota was worthy of its own standalone subject.

About six months after I visited the Toyota factory, I studied the Bastow Institute's CLIL course, which I found so informative and inspiring. CLIL focuses on the interrelation between content, communication, cognition and culture. It is an educational theory that came out of Europe in the mid-1990s, based on language education in Canada that saw mainstream curriculum content delivered in the target language (Cross and Gearon 2013, 6). Research has shown that the benefits of CLIL include academic achievement matching first-language instruction, positive gains in first-language literacy and heightened levels of cultural awareness (Cross and Gearon 2013). It goes without saying that my program was much more modest than established CLIL programs both in Australia and overseas, but I believed even just a CLIL taster would result in positive benefits for my students.

Toyota seemed like the perfect topic for CLIL—rich and engaging, deeply entrenched in Japanese culture, and also well known to my regional students. Initially, I was unsure which subject to teach the content through. I looked at the obvious places like Technology and Science, but the curriculum did not really seem relevant to Toyota. I broadened my search and looked at the curriculum for all subjects, and Business and Economics seemed like a great fit. The Victorian Business and Economics Curriculum at Levels 9 and 10 looks at the nature of innovation and how businesses seek to create and maintain a competitive edge in local and global markets, as well as how enterprising behaviours and capabilities can be developed to improve work and business environments (VCAA 2019). Given that Toyota is the world's number one car manufacturer in terms of production output (IOMVM 2019), it seemed like a great case study to explore innovation and competitiveness in business. Although the unit changed, resulting in less of a business and economics focus by its end, this was definitely the inspiration and a real focus at the beginning. Conveniently, I am also a trained Humanities teacher, so felt more comfortable teaching my first CLIL unit with content that I understood.

PROGRAM

I taught CLIL four lessons per week for 50 minutes each lesson in Term 4 to both Year 9 Japanese elective classes. The CLIL unit went for about six weeks, before camp, exams and transition began. In our first lesson, I explained in English what CLIL was all about, and the students discussed their fears and hesitations around it. As my aim was to teach the vast majority of the unit in Japanese, it was important we discussed some strategies for the students as a class, and as a result most people's fears were assuaged. I privately spoke to a few of the extremely weak students in the class, and told them if at any point they wanted me to speak in English with them, I would quietly do so. This was important and empowering in order to get the whole class on board. I did eventually speak some English in class, especially when explaining the assessment task, but initially I had the goal to use 100% Japanese in class.

Initially we looked at the history of Toyota, and used this to reinforce the use of past tense. Students completed timeline activities before moving on to the company's name change and the business decisions behind it. Students then designed their own logos to use for the original company name Toyoda. We next looked at Toyota's innovative environmentally-friendly technology, which provided a lot of katakana practice. Students completed simple comparison activities about the differences and similarities between electric and petrol cars, before discussing and voting on whether electric cars were a good idea in our small regional town. The class decided ultimately the answer was no, as electric cars currently cannot drive long distances, and are therefore unsuitable for regional areas in Australia. All of the resources were sourced online using a combination of information from Toyota's websites and advertising materials, Japanese media, and my own visit to the Toyota factory.

At this point in the unit I arranged for my classes to visit the local Toyota dealership. The dealership allowed us to tour their workshop, where the mechanics talked us through what they did (the students were very excited to see the police car getting a service!), and we also got to tour the showroom and look under the bonnet of both a petrol and an eco car, comparing the engines and asking questions. Finally, the students were able to roam around the car yard, sitting in the cars and picking their favourites. For many of the students this was the first time they had ever been in a brand new car, and they felt very privileged. The fact that the students' small town had a real and meaningful connection to such a huge multinational Japanese company was a revelation for many students, and provided a very practical way to incorporate another aspect of the Business and Economics curriculum—investigating Australia as a trading nation and discovering its place within Asia and the global economy (VCAA 2019). The dealership was very accommodating and helpful to us, and I am sure many others would be, too.

Back in the classroom, the students examined advertising for Toyota cars in Australia and Japan. We watched a few different Toyota television commercials from both Japan and Australia, and the students described, using simple adjectives, their thoughts about the advertising. We focused on the emotions behind the advertising, and questioned what Toyota wanted us to feel when we watched the commercials. The students once again completed Venn diagrams comparing and contrasting the similarities and differences between advertising in Australia and Japan, before receiving their main assessment task for the unit: students were to write and film their own Toyota television commercial, in Japanese. The most exciting part was that the dealership invited us back to film these in real Toyota cars. Students wrote scripts in groups unassisted, and had them corrected by me. We returned to the dealership to film the commercials, then had quite a few lessons in the computer lab to edit and subtitle them.

On the due date, we had a film screening where all students watched one another's commercials and provided feedback. The best were both funny and clever, and showed a real understanding of the studies we had done on Toyota. The students were very proud of their efforts, and so was I. The Toyota dealership was impressed by the student output as well, finding some of the videos hilarious, and was keen to continue the program the following year. I showed some of the best commercials to my students in lower year levels, who were engaged and already anticipating being able to film their own when they chose to study Year 9 Japanese. It was a real affirming moment for me, that CLIL had worked in terms of motivating students to get engaged in language learning. The students also improved their speaking skills thanks to the commercials, and were more confident in their listening skills thanks to constant exposure to listening to Japanese in the classroom.

BENEFITS AND PITFALLS

BENEFITS

I thoroughly enjoyed teaching this unit, and most of my students enjoyed studying it. At the end of the CLIL unit, 25 of the 28 students completed a Survey Monkey survey. Sixty-two percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I have enjoyed learning about Toyota', while 25% gave the noncommittal neutral response. Sixty-four percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I enjoy video assessment tasks'. Less than 10% agreed with the statement 'I regret choosing to study Japanese in Year 9'. Year 9 Japanese comprises two electives, and was timetabled against some very attractive electives like Surfing and Campfire Cooking, and so I would argue this was a win for language learning.

At the end of the survey, students were able to leave optional comments, all of which were positive. I have included two comments here, with original spelling, capitalisation and punctuation.

Japanese was enjoyable this year, I had fun learning about Toyota and its history, I also liked doing the video assessments, I learnt a lot of Japanese this year that I didn't know already and I had lots of fun in class this year.

I love Japanese. I am kind of regretting that I didn't choose it and I will miss my sensei.

PITFALLS

CLIL is an extremely time-intensive way to teach. I was lucky to have a three-term curriculum I was required to teach to Year 9, and had the freedom to determine the curriculum in the shortened fourth term. Without this free rein, as well as the understanding of my colleagues, I would not have been able to implement this CLIL unit. Additionally, CLIL requires a great deal of content creation by the teacher. You are obliged to search for authentic materials that students can access at their own level, or create your own. There needs to be more understanding and support of this, as well as better networking around the country, in order for teachers to share CLIL units that others can implement.

Some limitations meant that students did not spend enough time on environmentally-friendly technology, and I did not touch as much on business models and practices as I had originally wanted, as I believed the students did not have enough language skills. If I were to teach the unit again, I would need to critically reflect upon the content and restructure it.

CONCLUSION

A few months after teaching this unit with great success, I left teaching for a period of time. Upon returning, I moved to teaching primary Japanese. I wholeheartedly believe CLIL is a wonderful way to engage students and make language learning authentic and meaningful, and have continued to implement smaller CLIL units in my primary classes. As for my Toyota unit, I do not know how many students ultimately continued their Japanese language studies through to Year 12, but I do know that the year after my Year 9 CLIL success the Year 10 Japanese class had its biggest enrolment ever. There was a greater depth of content covered in these CLIL classes than in typical textbook topics, and I believe my students' learning was better because of it. I strongly encourage teachers curious about CLIL to give it a go.

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