

# Introduction to CLIL

## Background

### What is CLIL?

CLIL is Content and Language Integrated Learning. It can involve teachers and learners of content subjects (e.g. science, geography, music or art) using a foreign or second language as the medium of communication and instruction. Alternatively, it can also involve teachers and learners of English using another area of the curriculum (e.g. science, geography, music or art) as the content or subject matter of their English classes.

### Why use CLIL?

CLIL is widely seen as an excellent means of learning a language, not least because it provides opportunities for using English in varied and motivating contexts. English teachers using CLIL methodology are able to engage students with widely different interests and, in this way, foster positive attitudes towards the English language classroom.

CLIL not only draws on the different interests of students, it also exploits their different learning styles, making the most of their abilities, background knowledge and skills from other disciplines.

In addition, CLIL students don't only learn English, they also learn how to use it as a tool for learning. Through CLIL, English teachers can motivate those students who would otherwise struggle to see the relevance of English to their own lives.

CLIL is considered an excellent way of introducing an international aspect into the teaching of content subjects. Secondary students who become accustomed to conducting their studies in English will be at a definite advantage in their future education. Since English is the common language of the internet and many journals and academic papers, a confident command of English is often indispensable for research purposes.

### Tips for using CLIL

#### Be prepared and encourage students to be prepared

Teaching another subject in a foreign language can, of course, be a daunting experience. One of the best ways to gain confidence and make sure your lessons are successful is to be well prepared.

If you are primarily an English teacher with limited experience of teaching another subject, take time to research and understand the content of each lesson in advance.

Learning another subject in a foreign language can also be daunting. One of the most practical ways to help your students to gain confidence is to encourage them to do a little preparation in advance of a lesson, too.

If you are concerned that there may be a lot of new vocabulary in a lesson, you can help students by asking them to find out how to say a set number of key words in English. To do this they can use a dictionary or the internet.

If you are concerned that some students may find the concept of a lesson difficult to grasp, you can encourage them to review the topic in their own language, if they have studied it previously in another subject. You can also direct them towards material which will aid their understanding, for example, a particular website on the internet.

When preparation requires internet research, it is important that you have checked the website recently and in some detail, to make sure that the information is accurate and the website reliable. The preparation students are asked to do must be achievable in terms of cognitive and linguistic level, and the time available.

#### Don't be afraid to say you don't know

If you are primarily an English teacher, there may be times when students ask you questions relating to another subject which you are unable to answer immediately. As an English teacher teaching another subject, this is only to be expected from time to time and is not a problem at all. In this situation it is better to tell the students that you are unsure. You can then opt to either tell the students you'll find out for the next class or ask a teacher of the other subject to come into the next class to answer the question.

#### Be reassured that different kinds of teaching have a lot in common

When teaching another subject in English for the first time, you may believe that the teaching techniques are very different for teaching that subject and English. Please be reassured, however, that there are also lots of similarities between English classes and classes of other subjects. Many activity types are common to both kinds of classes, e.g. sharing ideas, making deductions and predictions, following oral instructions, collecting data and using ICT. Use the teaching techniques you are familiar with, as well as learning from your colleagues.

#### Exploit students' background knowledge

The more motivated and engaged your students are, the easier the lesson will flow for you. In order to motivate the students with the subject, it can help if they are asked to contribute and make a personal investment in the lesson early on.

It is likely that most students will have at least a small amount of knowledge of the subjects you are dealing with, as well as varying levels of English. If the small amount of knowledge of each student in a class is added together, it could result in quite a considerable amount of knowledge before the lesson even begins.

Be sure to make the initial stage of a CLIL lesson fun and motivating, challenging the students to solve conundrums, suggest solutions to problems or guess the answers to general knowledge questions in a quiz.

### **Give plenty of visual support**

In the CLIL classroom, meaning is paramount. The students have to be able to grasp the concept of the lesson before anything else. Visual support can take the form of illustrations, photos, realia, sections of a DVD film, PowerPoint presentations, miming and gesture, etc.

### **Focus primarily on the content**

The principle aim of the CLIL lesson is first and foremost to impart knowledge of the subject area, albeit in English. As long as students understand the key concepts of a lesson, they do not need to understand every single word of the material in English. A passive understanding of some areas of language is sufficient. It is not necessary for students to be able to actively use all the language, especially grammar, which they encounter.

### **Build students' confidence**

As previously stated, helping students to be prepared for their CLIL lesson will go a long way to making them feel confident about learning another subject in English, and the more confident the students feel, the more confident you as the teacher are likely to feel. There are also many other ways in which teachers can help to reassure students, thereby increasing their confidence.

#### ***(i) Make aims clear***

It is important for students to focus on the right elements of each lesson. It is therefore essential that the teacher makes the objectives of CLIL lessons very clear at the outset. It's sometimes as important for students to know what they don't need to know, as well as what they do need to know.

#### ***(ii) Find opportunities for recycling***

It can be hard for students to retain lots of new information, especially in a different language. For this reason, reviewing key concepts and language whenever they come up naturally in other classes will be helpful for the students.

#### ***(iii) Make tasks as easily achievable as you can***

It stands to reason that students will only be able to output language and content that they have received as input. It is therefore important to always provide models for the students' own production.

It is also recommended that students are allowed to answer questions in different ways. It is more important that they participate in the lesson, than that they participate only in English, so they may sometimes need to use their first language. You can help them to use English more by making your own language straightforward. It is also important that you take into consideration how easily students will be able to formulate answers to your questions in English. As well as asking questions which require phrases as a response, you can also use questions that they can answer simply with a 'Yes' or a 'No', for example.

#### ***(iv) Develop useful classroom language***

Teachers often need to use the same instructions and classroom phrases again and again. Using these phrases, as well as high-frequency scientific terms in English can help both you and the students feel more confident in the CLIL classroom. In addition, employing English classroom language from the outset can greatly add to the students' passive knowledge and facilitate not only learning the subject matter in English, but learning how to learn, too.

#### ***(v) Provide other forms of support where necessary***

As well as providing visual support, students may sometimes need some support in their first language. Many teachers adopt the successful strategy of switching briefly and naturally from one language to another in order to explain a difficult concept or overcome an unexpected breakdown in communication.

### **CLIL and English Plus second edition**

**English Plus second edition** allows you to experiment with CLIL in the English classroom. There is a **Curriculum extra** section in the Options section at the back of the Student's Book. These sections are linked to the curricula of other subject areas, such as Natural Sciences and Language and Literature.

For students who are very interested in CLIL, there are also eight **Curriculum extra worksheets** on the **English Plus second edition Teacher's website**. These worksheets cover additional topics to the ones in the Student's Book.