



21st Century Language Teaching Conference 2024

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Making Content and Language Integrated Learning Fun

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Abstract

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is an approach in which a second or foreign language is used as a tool in the learning of a non-language subject in which both language and the subject have a joint role. Younger learners are often more motivated to learn about topics such as animals and nature than language itself, so can particularly benefit from CLIL if their interest is piqued with age-appropriate motivating content. It is common for the content in CLIL classes to be presented through reading texts, which can be very effective when the students are competent readers, but it is difficult with beginner and emergent readers. This paper will demonstrate a way in which short YouTube videos and craft projects based on marine animals can be used to present content for CLIL classes for students, leading to simple writing activities. Craft projects based around the content are then used to review the vocabulary and encourage speaking and collaboration. This can promote language learning in a way in which the content is naturally recycled throughout the lesson whilst four skills can be acquired simultaneously. Students are motivated by the content and learn language unconsciously, even at very early stages of language learning.

Making Content and Language Integrated Learning Fun

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a way in which a foreign language is used a tool to teach a non-language subject (Coyle, 2006). The language and content are both presented at the same time and have an equal role. Marsh and Langé (2000) state that CLIL can offer young learners a natural environment for language development, which boosts motivation and a hunger for learning. If content from the national curriculum is taught through the target language it can also be a very time efficient way to teach language (Bentley, 2015).

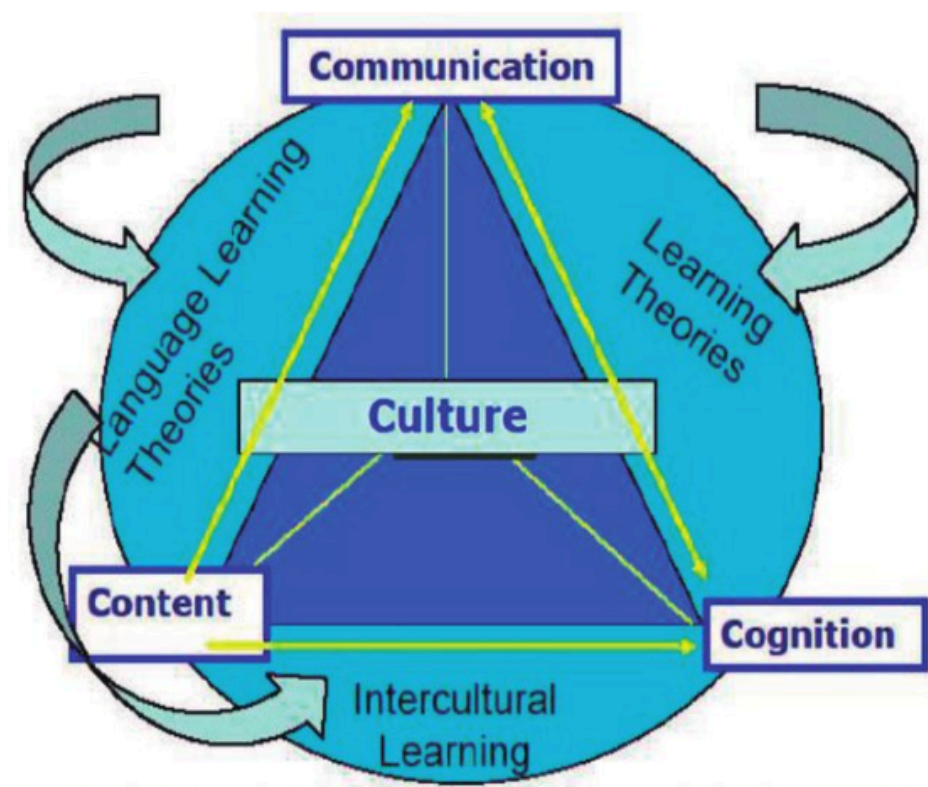
There are two basic versions of CLIL - hard CLIL in which a content teacher, who is also fluent in the target language teaches the subject in the target language, and soft CLIL in which language teachers teach the content subject. Both styles have their merits, but mainly depend on the knowledge and ability of the teacher. If the content teacher does not have a sufficient knowledge of the target language the students may acquire sub-standard language, but on the other hand, if a language

teacher does not have sufficient knowledge of the content the students may not acquire a sufficient understanding of the content.

According to Coyle (1999) a successful CLIL lesson will incorporate the following elements known as the 4Cs - content, communication cognition and culture. These can be seen interconnected through language learning theories, and intercultural learning.

Figure 1

The 4Cs Framework of CLIL. Adapted from Teacher Education and CLIL Methods and Tools, by D. Coyle, 2011, unpublished seminar presented in Milan, Italy. Copyright 2011 by D. Coyle.



In language learning, incorporating culture is essential for students to develop a deep understanding of language and how it is used. Kramsch (2013) states that culture is necessary for L2 speakers to communicate within a global economy although they do not want it to be forced on them. Incorporating intercultural content within the language learning curriculum is a culturally sensitive way for it to be included in a curriculum.

The amount of time spent on language learning is also a topic of debate. In immersion schools most of the content is taught through an L2. It is assumed that students will receive L1 input at home

enabling them to become bilingual, this has been very successful in immersion schools across Canada (Genesee, 1985). Although there is some discussion as to whether students acquire both languages comprehensively without explicit language teaching (Ellis, 1985), various research has shown that students can acquire complex grammatical rules implicitly (Jarvinen, 1999). Coyle (1999) emphasizes that in CLIL classes the focus needs to be on learning rather than teaching and that teachers need to provide transparent definitions in order for learners to bridge the gap between cognitive capabilities and the learner's linguistic level. In order to do this Coyle (1999) suggests that activities be planned in such a way that the learners' prior knowledge is sufficient to facilitate a clear understanding of the content whatever their linguistic ability. Cummins (1984) suggests that students need two types of communication skills – basic interpersonal communication skills and cognitive academic learning proficiency. In order to encourage student output, activities need to be created in such a way that students are forced to participate verbally (Swain & Lapkin, 1986).

Parental involvement has been shown to be a key factor in foreign language acquisition, but according to Forey et al. (2015) many parents in Asia are not as involved as some parents in other parts of the world. This could be due to lack of English ability, lack of time, lack of knowledge on how to support their child's language learning and cultural beliefs that education should be left to teachers. What they found was that by providing workshops for parents with culturally appropriate ways to support their child's learning could be effective in improving foreign language learning outcomes.

Method

Participants

Twenty-four 2nd grade elementary school students who attend Japanese school Monday to Friday and an English immersion program 9am to 3pm once a week. They have literacy classes, physical education, STEM, and projects classes taught in English. Each class has a teacher and a teaching assistant. The current research is based on a combined literacy and project lesson using a CLIL methodology in the immersion program.

Syllabus and Activity

The students were introduced to a different marine animal each week. Each lesson consisted of video input introducing the content, discussion and critical thinking about the content, reading, writing and a project activity. The lesson was completed over two 50-minute classes.

Content and Critical Discussion

The content was initially introduced using a short video as a way to introduce content without students needing to read long passages, as their reading skills are limited. After watching the video students discussed points of interest in the video and critically discuss questions as a group. In the textbook each video had a QR code printed next to it. Students and parents were encouraged to rewatch the videos at home recounting and reviewing the content of the lesson with their parents. In this way a connection was built with parents and students had an opportunity to review the lesson outside the class.

Reading and Writing

The second stage was to complete a cloze activity on the content of the video. The cloze activity allowed for differentiated learning with higher level students completing the activity on their own and the lower ability students following dictation from the teacher. Collaboration was also encouraged with students working in groups helping each other. After completing the cloze activity students then recycled the vocabulary by labeling the body parts of the animal.

Listening and Speaking

After completing the written parts of the lesson students were then encouraged to complete a craft activity to create a replica of the animal. The goal of this activity was to encourage active listening with a task-based goal. When the teacher gave instructions, and students engaged in authentic, meaningful speaking to request craft supplies and ask the teacher for help, such as “Can I have a piece of paper please?”. When students could not produce correct sentences, teachers modeled correct English for the students. Learning these basic formulaic phrases enabled students to communicate meaningfully by asking for help and clarification. At the end of the project students achieved a sense of accomplishment by having completed the activity and they had an attractive replica of the animal studied.

Discussion

Relevance to CLIL Methodology

Through using this activity, the 4 Cs of a CLIL methodology could be incorporated in meaningful and authentic ways. Content was introduced through the video of the animal. What was important is that students were interested and motivated by the content. Students wanted to learn about the animal and the language of input was not important to them. Communication occurred between teachers and students mainly, but also between students. It is important at this age for there

to be plentiful communication with the teacher as the teacher provides linguistically correct language input. Cognition was incorporated through thinking about the animal, but also through trying to complete cloze activities labeling, and project work. At every stage students needed to recall what they had seen and heard in the previous stage to complete the next stage of the project. Culture was introduced through students learning about the environment and habitats of animals around the world.

Input

Coyle (1999) emphasized that input needs to provide transparent definitions for students to be able to understand meaning beyond their current linguistic ability. In this case using video for listening allows the students to gain understanding without understanding all the language. The teacher also provided clear scaffolding with the cloze activity and finally through demonstrating the activity whilst explaining it, students were given visual support. All of these activities allowed students to achieve tasks beyond their current linguistic level.

Output

As Swain and Lapkin (1986) noted, students output in immersion programs is often minimal. It can be especially difficult to encourage young learners to speak in the target language due to a lack of ability and affective factors. In this case students needed to speak to the teachers in English to get materials as well as to ask for help. Creating a need to speak English was very motivating for students and enabled the teachers to communicate with students in a meaningful way.

Student Attitudes

Language learning can be an anxiety-provoking experience for many students. Horwitz et al. (1986) state that students often feel that anxiety interferes with their ability to learn to speak a foreign language. However, the lesson plan provided opportunities for students to boost their self-esteem and motivation in an English- dominant environment. As discussed earlier in this paper, students were motivated by content that interests them. They were encouraged to think freely before engaging with the material, reducing their fear of making mistakes. After forming their own assumptions, they learned factual information about animals. Since students were eager to know the facts, they became more engaged and attentive to the video. Students with strong English skills could share what they had learned from the video with the entire class, and everyone wrote down these shared ideas. In this way, students could experience a sense of achievement, which lead to increased motivation.

After the writing activity, students moved on to making crafts. This allowed students with lower English proficiency levels to be creative while learning new vocabulary. Usually in a language learning environment, students with good English skills get complimented but because craft is not related to

English proficiency, students with low-level English also receive compliments on their project, that motivated them to attend class actively and they gradually gained English proficiency in the process of making their crafts throughout the term.

Communication with Parents

Parents' involvement plays a significant role in children's educational development. Forey et al. (2015) state that parental involvement contributes significantly to the advancement of a child's foreign language literacy development. In this study some parents asked how they could help their children when the parents did not speak fluent English. As discussed in this paper, a QR code is included on each unit that links to the videos shown in the classroom. Parents were encouraged to watch these videos together with their children at home, allowing the children to explain what they had learnt in class. Parents commented that while watching videos together, they were surprised to realise how much vocabulary their child had learned related to sea animals and found themselves learning interesting facts from their child. Students were motivated by sharing content that might be unknown to their parents. This also provides an opportunity for them to review the content and new vocabulary while spending quality time together. Parents shared pictures of jellyfish crafts and mentioned that it was so beautiful, with its shining tentacles, that they decided to hang it from the ceiling in their living room. Consequently students were excited to show their craft projects to their parents. Thus parents' active involvement in their children's learning, such as showing interest in what their children learn at school, motivated students in the classroom.

Conclusion

In the scope of this research students were required to use both basic interpersonal skills and cognitive academic learning proficiency. It is believed that students were highly motivated to learn English through the medium of CLIL. By introducing the content through videos, all students could acquire knowledge both aurally and visually. Through incorporating tasks that could be differentiated for students with different English abilities, all students could achieve a sense of accomplishment and were motivated to study English at their own level. An added advantage was the interest it elicited from parents leading to increased parental participation in their children's learning. The main goal of this lesson was language learning, but students also acquired knowledge of nature and the environment providing a very effective way of integrating content and language for young learners.

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