

CY-ICER2012

CLIL and the teaching of foreign languages

Blanka Frydrychova Klimova*

University of Hradec Kralove, Faculty of Informatics and Management, Rokitanskeho 62, Hradec Kralove, 500 03, Czech Republic

Abstract

Nowadays, some schools across all Czech educational system try to integrate curricula subjects. That means that students use not only their acquired knowledge but also their skills across curricula. Thus, speaking of foreign language tuition, students use English medium to study subjects such as geography, history or mathematics that were originally taught in the native language, in this case in Czech. This type of learning is exploited in the so-called Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which involves teaching a curricular subject through the medium of a foreign language. The purpose of this paper is therefore to discuss CLIL, its benefits, constraints and tips for teaching.

Keywords: CLIL, foreign languages, teaching, benefits, constraints;

1. Introduction

Since the language teachers attempt to develop learner's language knowledge and skills as much as possible, they try to find new ways to the teaching of foreign languages. And one of the possibilities, when students are exposed to the target language for a longer period, is CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning). In practice it means that students use English medium to study subjects such as geography, history, arts, or mathematics that were originally taught in the native language, in this case in Czech.

The introduction of CLIL into teaching at all educational levels has been also one of the priorities of EU. In its *Action Plan for Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity* (2003: 8), EU emphasizes that *CLIL, in which pupils learn a subject through the medium of a foreign language, has a major contribution to make to the Union's language learning goals. It can provide effective opportunities for pupils to use their new language skills now, rather than learn them now for use later. It opens doors on languages for a broader range of learners, nurturing self-confidence in young learners and those who have not responded well to formal language instruction in general education. It provides exposure to the language without requiring extra time in the curriculum, which can be of particular interest in vocational settings. The introduction of CLIL approaches into an institution can be facilitated by the presence of trained teachers who are native speakers of the vehicular language.*

*Corresponding author. Tel.: +420-493332318
E-mail address: blanka.klimova@uhk.cz

2. Benefits of CLIL

Therefore, CLIL is worth implementing into the school curricula. Besides the opportunity of being exposed to the target language at least for one extra lesson, which is not a language lesson, there are other advantages of CLIL, which in fact reflect five CLIL dimensions covered by the so-called *CLIL Compendium* (10.10.2011). Five CLIL dimensions are related to culture, environment, language, content and learning. The detailed benefits of the exploitation of CLIL in teaching thus might be as follows:

- it builds intercultural knowledge and understanding,
- it learns about specific neighbouring countries/ regions and/ or minority groups,
- it introduces the wider cultural context,
- it develops intercultural communication skills,
- it prepares for internationalization, specifically EU integration,
- it accesses international certification,
- it creates better working environment,
- it enhances school profile,
- it improves language knowledge and communication skills,
- it makes students learn the same way as native speakers do,
- it deepens awareness of both mother tongue and target language,
- it develops plurilingual interests and attitudes,
- it complements other subjects at school and thus deepen student's knowledge, e.g. of history, geography, arts, or mathematics,
- it accesses subject-specific target terminology,
- it provides opportunities to study content through different perspectives,
- it prepares for future studies and/ or working life,
- it enables to diversify methods and forms of classroom practice,
- it complements individual learning strategies,
- it increases learner's motivation and confidence in both the language and the subject being taught.

3. Constraints of CLIL

However ideal CLIL might seem for the teaching of foreign languages, there undoubtedly exist certain difficulties which prevent teachers from achieving this ideal. The Czech case might serve as an example.

The phenomenon of CLIL is not new to the Czech educational system. CLIL was included into the Czech syllabuses a decade ago. Nevertheless, it has faced difficulties since. Probably, the most obvious one is the insufficient number of teachers who are both competent linguists and experts in the content subjects. As *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe* (2008: 13) reveals: *In very few countries do education authorities oblige teachers to have special qualifications to contribute to CLIL-type provision. As a result, it is the schools offering provision of this kind which determine the recruitment criteria required to ensure that competent teachers will be employed for this purpose.*

Other issues, which cause constraints to CLIL in the Czech Republic, are as follows:

- student's lower knowledge of the target language,
- students with mixed language competences of the target language in one class,
- students with mixed learning abilities in one class,
- language is not taught systematically,
- a lack of suitable learning materials for the selected CLIL subjects,
- unsuitable learning styles and teaching approaches,
- a large number of students in one class,
- language teachers might find it difficult to teach other subjects,

- reluctance to cooperate with the subject teachers,
- a lack of institutional support.

4. Tips for potential CLIL teachers

Although the above mentioned issues might discourage potential enthusiastic teachers from CLIL, the actual practice is not that bad. In fact, it might be a challenge for language teachers because it is they who become CLIL specialists, not the subject teachers as the web page of EU claims (see *Content and language integrated learning*, 10.10.2011). The reason is that the CLIL lesson should not just be a lecture or a reading class; it should include a variety of different activities, which would promote not only essential knowledge of the topic, but also develop student's communicative competence. And in this the language teachers have an advantage and experience since they are very well familiar with EFL methodology, which they can exploit while discussing the subject topics. They have experience in working with texts and setting, for example, pre-reading exercises through which students can master the necessary terminology to be able to comprehend the text. They know different kinds of reading techniques, such as skimming or reading for gist. Moreover, they know how to use the text to promote discussion afterwards. They can advise students how to write a project on the topic in question. In addition, such lessons can also help the language teachers to realize that fluency is more important than accuracy. They can teach them how to work with accuracy mistakes and make them aware of the fact that grammar should be always contextualized.

Furthermore, the CLIL teachers should think about their learners first. They should consider them as individuals with specific needs, interests and learning styles. In practice they should run their lessons as student-centred lessons. They should set tasks, for example, a joint project, when students can collaborate with each other, share knowledge of the real world, but also exploit each other's language potential. Moreover, the given tasks should be stimulating to provoke student's (critical) thinking skills. Such an approach to learning definitely makes students more responsible for their learning outcomes.

According to the 4Cs curriculum (Coyle 1999), a successful CLIL lesson should combine elements of the following:

- **Content** - progression in knowledge, skills and understanding related to specific elements of a defined curriculum.
- **Communication** - using language to learn whilst learning to use language.
- **Cognition** - developing thinking skills which link concept formation (abstract and concrete), understanding and language.
- **Culture** - exposure to alternative perspectives and shared understandings, which deepen awareness of otherness and self.

And after the lesson teacher should also check and reflect on the following questions (see Fig. 1 below).

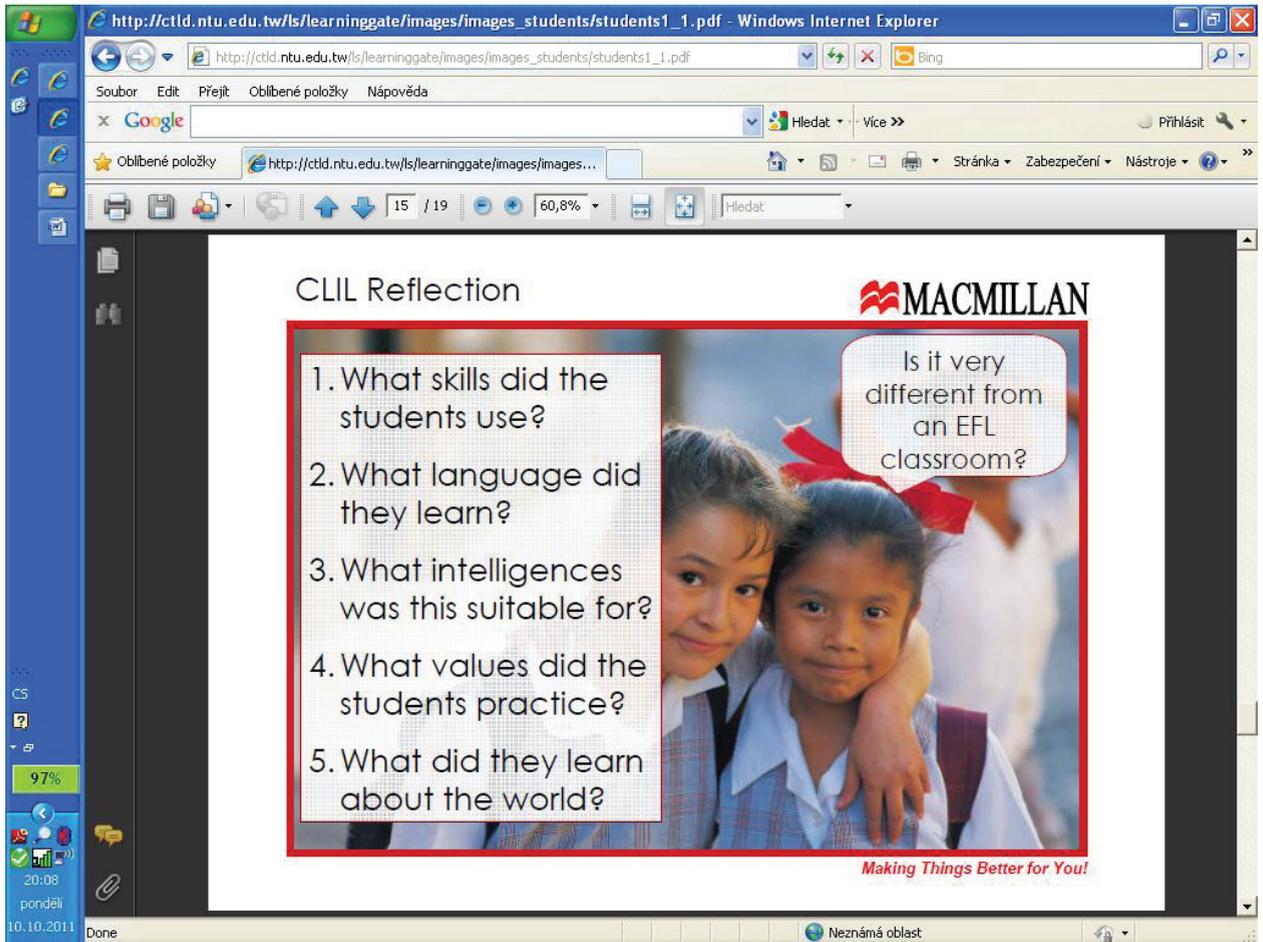


Figure 1. CLIL reflection framework (CLIL 2008)

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, one can say that a CLIL lesson is not a language lesson, neither is it a subject lesson transmitted in a foreign language. In fact, it is a lesson where language is used as a medium to broaden one's horizons of knowledge. Students use language to learn about the world around them. It is the topic or task that is a driving force. Nevertheless, one must admit that if a student wants to express his/ her ideas on the topic or task clearly and persuasively, s/he has to use the right language. That means that students unconsciously but naturally master a foreign (target) language so as to be able to speak effectively.

Moreover, if the right approaches to teaching and learning are used and if the teacher shows his/ her enthusiasm, then CLIL must be a success. As Mackenzie (10.10.2011) states, *CLIL produces life-long learners and students are sent out with real-world skills and enhanced motivation and self-confidence.*

References

Action Plan for Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity. (2003). Retrieved October 10, 2011, from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2003:0449:FIN:EN:PDF>

CLIL. (2008) Macmillan. Retrieved October 10, 2011, from http://ctld.ntu.edu.tw/ls/learninggate/images/images_students/students1_1.pdf*CLIL Compendium*. Retrieved October 10, 2011, from <http://www.cilcompendium.com/cilcompendium.htm>.

Coyle, D. (1999). Theory and planning for effective classrooms: supporting students in content and language integrated learning contexts. In

J. Masih (Ed.), *Learning through a foreign language*. London: CILT. *Key data on teaching languages at schools in Europe*. (2008) Brussels: Eurydice network.

Mackenzie, A. *How should CLIL work in practice?* Retrieved October 10, 2011, from <http://www.onestopenglish.com/support/methodology/teaching-approaches/how-should-clil-work-in-practice/156531.article>.