Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

**Titulo:** Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). **Target:** Educación Primaria. **Asignatura:** Inglés. **Autor:** Lidia López Sanz, Maestra. Especialidad en Lengua Extranjera (Inglés), Maestra especialista en Lengua Extranjera (Inglés).

CLIL is the acronym for **Content and Language Integrated Learning.** It is an approach to Foreign Language Teaching as a way of working in which English is used as a tool in the learning of a non-language subject in which both the language and the subject have a joint role.

**Is it a good idea?**

Yes, it is. It is important for the children to see the language they are learning as something normal and natural. It should not be something apart from the rest of their learning. The language students are learning should be seen as something they use, not just some exercises they do in language classes. So, learning other things in English will help children to learn English. Children benefit from bringing existing skills and understanding to new areas. Integration can be realistic if the teacher bears in mind several essential elements which language teaching and other school subjects have in common.

These essential elements are the following:

- understanding through demonstrating
- responding through doing

**USING ENGLISH CLASSES TO LEARN IN OTHER LESSONS**

Children do not take meaning from language. If students understand the message, they start to understand the language. If they understand the language they get the message.

Even in their mother tongue we do not always respond to language with language. This is because doing something is itself the answer to the message we have received. If the teacher asks the pupil to close the door, the student will do it. Moreover, we can often understand more that we can articulate. For this reason, it is essential to use the target language in the English classroom as much as possible. In Primary Education, especially in the first cycle, when the ability to speak in English is a long way behind the capacity for understanding, responding through doing is essential. It is always possible to use English into other work. For example, teaching an English song in Music. Or doing simple sums with English numbers.

In Maths, children make charts to show distributions. They get the information from class surveys showing, for example, likes and dislikes, who has pets, who has blue eyes, and so on. These surveys are usually done in their mother tongue as part of the Maths subject. Some of them can be done in the English lesson. So the idea is that the children do the survey in the foreign language and use the results to improve their Maths.

Children need to understand as much as possible. Some of the useful listening activities in the language classroom which improve their listening skills are those where children are listening to the teacher and processing the new language in the light of what they understand through seeing. This is a way of indirect learning. The teacher has to integrate the language work and other learning and this has to be done by a
demonstration in the language lesson in something that has to do with the learning of other area. So, for example, if the teacher talks to the class about the photosynthesis, the teacher has to explain beforehand the key vocabulary by a demonstration explaining the process used by plants and other organisms to convert the light energy captured from the sun into chemical energy that can be used to fuel the organism’s activities.

**BENEFITS OF CLIL**

1. Builds intercultural knowledge and understanding.
2. Develops intercultural communication skills.
3. Improves language competence and oral communication skills.
4. Develops multilingual interests and attitudes.
5. Provides opportunities to study content through different perspectives.
6. Allows learners more contact with the target language.
7. Does not require extra teaching hours.
8. Complements other subjects rather than competes with them.
9. Diversifies methods and forms of classroom practice.
10. Increases learners’ motivation and confidence in both the language and the subject being taught.

**TEACHING OTHER SUBJECTS IN ENGLISH**

The teacher can introduce the topic and the general approach in the mother tongue in the lesson before. So, if they are studying the body, the children will have spent the previous lesson discussing the overall theme of the body. The children can discuss fully in the mother tongue afterwards the significance of the events that the children have participated in during the Science lesson.

It is not a problem for teachers to find suitable topics to teach in English. Teaching a whole lesson of another subject in a foreign language is a combination of already known techniques.

The idea of a CLIL lesson is that English is simply used as the medium for expressing the ideas and information. The focus of the lesson is very much on the content. The teacher might, on occasion, focus on vocabulary, but only in as much as the vocabulary is key to the topic being taught.

**CLIL IN THE ENGLISH CLASS**

Time and flexibility are often issues within a school curriculum. There often seems to be pressure to get through a certain section of a book (or a set of particular grammar topics) by a set date.

The problem with this approach is that it usually fails to take into account the differing abilities of students. The teacher may find that students who struggle with grammar-focused materials flourish when using CLIL materials. The problem is, do they perform any better on the tests?

Flexibility is important. Adjusting the focus is a key to the success. In the overall curriculum CLIL materials can be extremely useful for revision, recycling and clarifying. Students automatically get a second look at stuff they are doing in other subjects as well as an opportunity to talk about it with another teacher. CLIL materials also allow topics that are of particular interest, but where there is not enough time to spend longer on them in the particular subject area, to be revisited.
Testing is a key issue. First, there is the different focus that CLIL materials take – therefore, a traditional test looking at grammar, vocabulary and skills does not fit. The real problem lies with the fact that CLIL materials are simply a way of packaging the language where the focus is on communicating information rather than on learning facts that can be subsequently tested. Not that this in itself is a problem, but it does not ‘fit’ with the conventional ideas of testing.

However, if the teacher can avoid ‘rigid’ tests that focus solely on discrete language items and instead ask students to complete a CLIL worksheet as a test of their overall ability to understand English as a tool for communication, this will give a much more reliable indicator of their ability to ‘use’ the language.

Bibliografía


