The Ingredients of a Great CLIL Lesson

A clear progression of knowledge that meets the identified goals of the curriculum.

This should always be your first step in planning a lesson. Look at your curriculum and consider your ultimate goal. What do you want students to know? What do you want them to be able to do at the end of the lesson?

Higher-order thinking skills

While you may need to spend some time using lower-order thinking skills like identifying and recalling, always strive for those higher-order skills: problem solving, critical reasoning, evaluation and creation. It may take some time to get there, but involving these skills should always be your goal.

A combination of all four language skills

A great CLIL lesson engages students in listening, speaking, writing and reading. Cultivating all four skills will help students with everything—not just with learning the language but with understanding the subject matter too.

You can combine many of these skills by using authentic examples of the language. For example, you may choose a video with built-in interactive subtitles to combine reading and listening. For that, I recommend FluentU.

An environment that is immersive and communicative

Surround students with the target language. Do all you can to make sure they use the target language as much as possible. Encourage natural speech as an alternative to grammar drills whenever you can.

Connections to multiple subjects and disciplines

The more connections students make, the more meaningful and memorable the lesson will be. Look for as many cross-disciplinary connections as you can, possibly with help from your colleagues.

How to Come Up with Ideas

Now how do you come up with CLIL lesson plan ideas on your own?

The following steps can help you with this:

Observe classes in your school. Find out what students are learning and observe your colleagues' teaching styles across a variety of disciplines. You may find that a certain topic, style or activity appeals to you. If you find some connections that would work well for a CLIL lesson, that is even better.

Contact schools in your area. There is a good possibility that, somewhere in your district, a teacher is experiencing fantastic success with his/her CLIL program. Try to talk with this teacher and pick his/her brain for some ideas.

Look at curriculum documents from other teachers. Does their curriculum line up with yours in any way? Do you do any similar activities or assessments? Search through your learning objectives and theirs to find some common ground.

Look at social media platforms and blogs. Teachers love posting their ideas on social media, and you can find some wonderful resources posted on Pinterest. You can also find inspiration by following a CLIL-themed Twitter feed like CLIL Symposium.

Create or Choose a Template for Writing CLIL Lesson Plans

A good lesson plan template will keep you focused on your goals. It can serve as a checklist, ensuring that your lesson plan meets all the criteria for a quality CLIL lesson.

The template you create will depend on you and your teaching style, but it is a good idea to include a field for each of the following.

Goals and desired outcomes: State the specific skills and knowledge that students will acquire from the lesson. Try to connect them with relevant standards and with your curriculum goals.

Activities: List instructional activities that students will engage in during the lesson. Be sure to convey the specific manner in which they support your objectives.

Assessments: How will you know that the lessons met your goals? Include assessments and/or checks for understanding that allow students to demonstrate what they have learned and what they are able to do.

If the thought of creating a lesson plan template from scratch is a bit overwhelming, there are some excellent documents that already exist which you can easily tweak for your own needs.

A good template is helpful because it breaks down your objectives into several categories: content, language, instructional and cultural. It also has a space for listing necessary materials right at the beginning for better organization.

4Cs

A CLIL lesson is therefore not a language lesson neither is it a subject lesson transmitted in a foreign language. 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.

4 skills

In a CLIL lesson, all four language skills should be combined. The skills are seen thus:

Listening is a normal input activity, vital for language learning

Reading, using meaningful material, is the major source of input

Speaking focuses on fluency. Accuracy is seen as subordinate

Writing is a series of lexical activities through which grammar is recycled.

Example: for ELT

For teachers from an ELT background, CLIL lessons exhibit the following characteristics:

Integrate language and skills, and receptive and productive skills

Lessons are often based on reading or listening texts / passages

The language focus in a lesson does not consider structural grading

Language is functional and dictated by the context of the subject

Language is approached lexically rather than grammatically

Learner styles are taken into account in task types.

Lesson framework

A CLIL lesson looks at content and language in equal measure, and often follows a four-stage framework.

Processing the text

The best texts are those accompanied by illustrations so that learners can visualise what they are reading. When working in a foreign language, learners need structural markers in texts to help them find their way

through the content. These markers may be linguistic (headings, sub-headings) and/or diagrammatic. Once a 'core knowledge' has been identified, the organisation of the text can be analysed.

Identification and organisation of knowledge

Texts are often represented diagrammatically. These structures are known as 'ideational frameworks' or 'diagrams of thinking', and are used to help learners categorise the ideas and information in a text. Diagram types include tree diagrams for classification, groups, hierarchies, flow diagrams and timelines for sequenced thinking such as instructions and historical information, tabular diagrams describing people and places, and combinations of these. The structure of the text is used to facilitate learning and the creation of activities which focus on both language development and core content knowledge.

Language identification

Learners are expected to be able to reproduce the core of the text in their own words. Since learners will need to use both simple and more complex language, there is no grading of language involved, but it is a good idea for the teacher to highlight useful language in the text and to categorise it according to function. Learners may need the language of comparison and contrast, location or describing a process, but may also need certain discourse markers, adverb phrases or prepositional phrases. Collocations, semi-fixed expressions and set phrases may also be given attention as well as subject-specific and academic vocabulary.

Tasks for students

There is little difference in task-type between a CLIL lesson and a skills-based ELT lesson. A variety of tasks should be provided, taking into account the learning purpose and learner styles and preferences. Receptive skill activities are of the 'read/listen and do' genre. A menu of listening activities might be:

Listen and label a diagram/picture/map/graph/chart

Listen and fill in a table

Listen and make notes on specific information (dates, figures, times)

Listen and reorder information

Listen and identify location/speakers/places

Listen and label the stages of a process/instructions/sequences of a text

Listen and fill in the gaps in a text

Typical speaking activities

Question loops - questions and answers, terms and definitions, halves of sentences

Information gap activities with a question sheet to support

Trivia search - 'things you know' and 'things you want to know'

Word guessing games

Class surveys using questionnaires

20 Questions - provide language support frame for questions

Students present information from a visual using a language support handout.

Materiał stworzony i udostępniony przez Rob Kiteley - kurs metodyczny w Barcelonie