



CLILLING ME SOFTLY...

Si enseigner des contenus ayant du sens pour l'apprenant dans les cours d'anglais de l'école primaire peut être judicieux, enseigner la langue anglaise est en revanche absolument nécessaire. Bien entendu, diluer les contenus d'un cours ou simplifier à l'excès la langue anglaise pour pouvoir aborder certains contenus est également frustrant et souvent insatisfaisant. Le présent article propose d'abandonner le "I" (intégration) de CLIL, au profit d'un fort accent sur le "L" (langue), et un "C" (contenus) sans objectifs d'apprentissages linguistiques particuliers, dans le but d'un enseignement de la langue plus efficace et ayant pour but de préparer les élèves à l'école secondaire.

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Since the advent of English in the primary school in Switzerland, there has been endless discussion about CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning). A special form of CLIL in public elementary schools was piloted in the canton of Zurich in the late 90s through Schulprojekt 21 (Stotz & Meuter, 2003) when English was not yet its own subject – it was integrated into various other established school subjects such as handicrafts or science and social studies. Since that time, as English became its own subject and an intercantonal curriculum was developed, the initial concept has undergone changes and much of the pioneering practice has been lost due to mandatory EFL coursebooks, end of term grades and other larger changes to public education which occupy teachers' time. At the peak of the piloting, we saw teachers with no textbooks with which to teach English use elbow grease and innovation to passionately integrate the English language into whatever they were teaching. From the lifecycle of the frog to how to help hedgehogs survive the winter, from origami to experiments – it was all done

and there are myriad archived lesson plans and Schulprojekt21 materials in the basement of Zurich University of Teacher Education.

There is much discussion in the literature about CLIL – whether it is better than “traditional” language teaching or not, or about the complexities in how different studies define it (e.g. Cenoz, Genesee & Gorter, 2014, or Stoller & Fitzsimmons-Doolan, 2017). Yet there are few long-term studies or significant findings in studies that compare performance in various language skills in different settings (such as Pladevall-Ballester, 2016). There are CLIL materials for both teaching (such as National Geographic's *Our World* series) and assessment (see Massler, Stotz & Queisser's (2014) materials), but the big international publishers have been reticent to develop coherent and levelled CLIL courses.

'I' for 'integration' doesn't work

Through sixteen years of work as a teacher trainer (which includes hundreds of lesson observations) and teaching experience in the canton of Zürich at the

primary level, this author's conclusion is that English lessons can be based on deep, meaningful content (not just a topic) or pure, explicit language teaching but rarely does the integration of both deep, meaningful content with a clear focus on specific language work. The following three reasons elaborate why.

1. *It's a separate subject.*

The first reason the integration of content and language does not work is that English is an officially separate subject in the curriculum – there is no longer any pressure to have to combine English with other subjects. As English is a separate subject, it is graded and assessed and there are language, not content, performance expectations defined by the curriculum and expected by society.

2. *The coursebooks are confusing.*

With limited time – two or three lessons of English a week – and a mass of coursebook accompanying materials (additional modules, workbooks, easy readers and so on), teachers may feel slightly overwhelmed and like they have to “get through” the ‘language’ parts of the coursebooks to meet curricular aims; thus the content parts are neglected. Even though the original books published by the Lehrmittelverlag Zürich (*First Choice* and *Explorers*) are CLIL-based, in the classrooms where they are still used, deeper content is often skipped due to time constraints and the focus is on the language parts. This was seen by the facts that teachers often work directly from the *Explorers Workbook* and skip the task cards, and that it often takes half a year to get through the *First Choice Starter pack*, leaving little time for the modular, content-based books. In this case, language and content are not integrated.

In the more frequently used coursebook series, *Young World*, there are topics, but rarely deep content. There are some attempts to include elements of culture through a picture of a Halloween party, for example, though no history of Halloween or comparison of similar holidays is presented. In the same book, there is a picture of a traditional English Christmas with a loving mother serving a seated father at the head of the table – but going deeper into history or stereotypes through these pictures is at the liberty of the teacher, not a concrete aim in the teacher's notes. And when there is deeper content, for example in a unit on history

of events and inventions, the language is rather arbitrary in that the learners are instructed to underline “ed” endings, but in the text there are more irregular verbs than regular ones and also the passive tense which is not addressed. At other times, the language chosen to be explicitly focused on does not match the content. For example, in a unit on tourism where tourists ask for some information, there is a gap fill about Swiss attractions with some/any – “Do you know anything about Chateau Chillon?”. The answer could be “something”, too, which is not discussed, the examples presented do not match the recorded conversations and going further, if a child knows something or anything about Chateau Chillon is not discussed or hinted at in the teacher's notes. Thus, the content is neglected and the language is not taught clearly. These examples show that language and content are integrated at times, albeit confusingly and neither one in depth. Over the years, local publishers have tried to merge CLIL with task-based learning, yet in two to three lessons a week, it is hard to do it thoroughly and the language focuses do not always make sense.

3. *Teachers are semi-specialized and scheduling is tight.*

The third point is that in many Swiss primary classrooms teachers have a semi-specialist training which means that often, it is not the classroom teacher teaching English but rather another teacher who teaches English in several different classes. In generalist models, the teachers teach every subject and can well be flexible in what they teach. By nature of this and as many teachers do not work full-time, the coordination of the topics to teach is in the hands of the individual teacher or left to the coursebook and is not a group consensus of what to teach when in English based on other topics from other subjects taught. Furthermore, teachers do not have the time to plan CLIL lessons that would be relevant to their class or they cannot due to scheduling of support co-workers such as German-as-a-foreign language teachers who come to specific lessons. For this reason, lessons have to be forty-five minutes, have a clear end and not drag on into the next lesson. Finally, it is difficult to schedule CLIL lessons if there is a lesson on Monday morning and Thursday afternoon – too much time has gone by to make the topic coherent. In

Is there anything wrong with teaching Content and Language separately?

If learners who may not be so motivated by language ARE motivated by content, then why not have meaningful, flexible content, based on the needs and the interests of the class? And then why not have concrete, direct, inductive language instruction that saves time? The language examples do not have to be boring, though they do not have to be CLIL either.

other subjects, there are more, regular lessons or double lessons which makes it easier to work more intensely. Again, these constraints make integration of content and language difficult.

The introductory article (Stotz & Massler, 2018) introduces three types of CLIL implementation. A Type A (explicit foreign language teaching in another subject) typology might occur informally, when a teacher uses foreign-language input from a video or song for the good of the main content point (such as a video on Ramadan in a Religion and Culture lesson) but in this instance in the primary school, there is no time to analyze the language, thus no integration.

Although one could view a Type B (where language lessons include content from other subjects) typology as fairly common in the Zurich primary school English classroom, the question that has to be asked is what the difference between “content” and “topics” is. It seems that learners learn about animals in almost every grade – they’re fascinating, so why not – but rarely does the language production reflect the deeper levels of thought a science and social studies teacher would encourage as the language is often simply descriptive (cf. Do Coyle’s interview answer #3, this issue). Furthermore, how frequently the English lessons complement the content in another subject is questionable due to the role of cooperation between the specialist and classroom teacher and the pre-determined syllabus in the English coursebooks which could be adapted but is frequently not. Again, the integration is in question.

Bruton (2010: 5) states “the research conducted here does not show conclusively that CLIL is either positive or negative for FL development, in this case mainly English”. Thus, why is it deemed as such an important part of methodology in Zurich schools? If generalists such as Hattie (2003) point out that the quality of instruction is based on what is done in the classroom – the atmospheres that are created and how much of an explicit focus is placed on a specific domain, topic, or skill – then this would speak for more direct English language instruction

which does not speak against a spiral curriculum, but does indicate a focus on language, otherwise they wouldn’t be called “English lessons”. Yet is there anything wrong with teaching Content and Language separately? If one argument for CLIL is that learners who may not be so motivated by language ARE motivated by content, then why not have meaningful, flexible content that is determined by the teacher based on the needs and the interests of the class? And then why not have concrete, direct, inductive language instruction that saves time? The language examples do not have to be boring, though they do not have to be CLIL either.

Taking the ‘I’ out of CLIL for success?

The main point of this article is to question the feasibility of the ‘I’ in CLIL in the primary school classroom, yet the ‘C’ and the ‘L’ are certainly worth the time. The following examples illustrate this idea.

‘C’ for ‘Content’ – Embrace trends and rich rituals

If teachers embrace trends and content-rich rituals into their classroom, they have ample authentic materials for powerful input in English, with the disadvantage that there may not be so much time left for concrete language work. For example, 2017 was the year of the fidget spinner, bottle flipping and slime-making (though one might remember making slime in the 1980s as well) or a few years back it was the Mentos-Coke experiment. These trends most likely did not begin in Switzerland, thus many a lesson can be found from teachers in English speaking countries that can be easily adapted for Swiss children. In Figure 1, you see the worksheet used for a very messy classroom experiment comparing four slime recipes in a class of 3rd-6th grade gifted learners (3 native speakers, their work is not shown here).

Three weeks later, the learners were given a short quiz to see what they had remembered and lo and behold, not only was the slime sticky, but the content stuck as well. (see Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 1: Slime experiment (December 2017).

What is slime?

This POLYMER is unique because it is both a solid and a liquid. It can take the shape of its containers like a liquid, but you can hold it in your hand and pick it up like a solid. Solid molecules are tight together, liquid molecules spread out and break apart (drops). POLYMER molecules CHAIN themselves together (they can stretch and bend like chains) and that makes them special. Jell-O, rubber bands, plastic soda bottles, shoe soles, even gum are all types of polymers. Have fun!



Adapted from: https://sciencebob.com/make_slime_with_borax/

What is slime in ONE sentence?

What questions do you have about slime? What questions COULD you have if you don't have any

	Elasticity	Viscosity	Non-Newtonian fluids			Creep	Evaporation
	Put the slime at the edge of the table. Wait 30 seconds. How far does it go?	Which slime "pours" best? (Rank 1-4)	Stretch it quickly – what happens?	Stretch it slowly -what happens?	Make a ball. Put it on the table. What happens?	Put it in the funnel. What happens?	Which one moves the fastest on a slight incline? (Rank 1-4)
Group 1: Liquid Starch Slime							
Group 2: Borax Slime							
Group 3: Saline Solution Slime							
Group 4: Fluffy Slime							

1. With your partner, in your own words, say what these are:
elasticity, viscosity, non-Newtonian fluids, creep, evaporation
2. With your partner, say out loud how each of the slimes differs and speculate as to WHY!!

Quiz questions on the board

1. What is slime?
2. Why is it interesting?
3. How can you test it?

Figure 2: 6th grader

1) it is a solid and liquid
 2) because it's solid and liquid
 3) If you look how strong it is or knead it
 My slime got to liquidity

Figure 3: 4th grader

Slim is in the middle from liquid and solid.
 Because it is soft on its outside sticky and it is a little bit liquid and solid.
 You can test Slim by seeing if it's sticky or not.
 it froze in the frisers.

One can see in Figures 2 and 3 that the learners could use some language work, some rewriting, some spelling activities and some grammar input. However, there was no time for this. Language feedback was briefly orally provided to the learners, but not solidified through revision. As each learner had a completely different level in English (as in every classroom), the language needs were varied and each child worked at his or her own level, being challenged only through the texts, the classroom atmosphere and the intrinsic motivation to speak English in the lesson. The English language lessons were isolated from the rest of the curriculum as the teacher was not the classroom teacher; there was no systematic curricular design, but rather the learners, in agreement with the teacher, chose topics they found were motivating and the teacher prepared content-based lessons. This is the price to be paid for a focus on content, with no systematic language aims integrated. With this “immersive” approach the learners were motivated because they chose the topics they were interested in, evidence of language learning can be seen through their questions about pronunciation and spelling in class, their ability to answer the questions because they understood them and the fact that orally, even weeks after the quiz, they could still talk about the experiment.

A simple google search in English for the trend (e.g. “fidget spinner”) + “lesson plan” + grade (elementary/middle school) and perhaps a core subject (+physics) with +ESL (English as a second language) can lead to meaningful, current materials that can be adapted for Swiss classrooms and has already been simplified for non-native speakers in native-speaking classrooms. And though this slime example came from a gifted and talented class (“Begabteförderung” during school hours) in a village near Schaffhausen, it would well work in a well-behaved upper primary class (or half class) if it was guided step-by-step or if different groups needing different levels of support were strategically placed around the classroom (for example learners who can be trusted further away from the teacher). This is just one example, but it could simply have been a lesson reading about “how fidget spinners work” +ESL and then the “fidget spinner game” found on iscollective.com. This is an example of content, with no explicit language syllabus.

In this day and age, there is no excuse for teachers to not take advantage of the wonderful visual resources available for free that can ‘clil’ many birds with one stone. For example, a short 15-minute weekly routine using various newspapers’ “Week in Pictures” (for example from CNN (<http://edition.cnn.com/specials/photos>) or “Die Welt in Bildern” from the Tages Anzeiger) can be done at any level, from A1 (*It is burning!*) to A2 (*How did that happen?*) to C2 (*I guess they wish they'd known that...*). These rich images are springboards for simple language to complex thought, the content can go into many different lessons and learners can work at their own levels.

Furthermore, regular work with Wiki-How can be extremely gratifying as there are pictures and text to any process imaginable (such as how to make a compass or tie a slipknot). There are so many picture-based resources and ideas available from which teachers can profit in any lesson without having to prepare anything.

With upper primary classes, there are a lot of adapted current events materials for different reading levels for native speakers that can also be used in the Swiss context. For example, if there is an active volcano in Hawaii and there are so many articles (on breakingnewsenglish.com or newsala.com or simple.wiki.com or newsinlevels.com) and tweets about it, this can well be addressed in the English language or other relevant subject classroom with no preparation by the teacher. And this short input in English can lead to deeper discussions in German. Any of these things can promote deep thought with simple language and become part of a weekly routine without having to have specific language aims for the whole class.

In some ways, these examples do exemplify CLIL but the difference is that the content suits the needs of the class and the language is not standardized, not adapted and not artificially specifically selected for some language aim – the language that is produced or received is not necessarily controlled or adapted, it is a more natural situation than pre-made, preselected CLIL lessons.

‘L’ for ‘Language’ – why not back to basics?

Over the years in the canton of Zurich, grammar teaching and language aims based on specific structures have gotten

a bit of a bad rep. In teacher training, it is common to tell students to first focus on the content, on what the learners should learn about the world, and then to choose language aims. However, with two to three lessons a week, there is little time and some direct instruction can be time-efficient. There are slim grammar books (such as Bourke's (1999) *The Grammar Lab*) which cover structures that support performance at the A1 and A2 level that are more resource books and are not meant as coursebooks. Using these instead of the coursebook allows the teacher to choose fascinating content for the class and then use this simple book for specific language points encountered in the content or to develop concrete language activities around the grammar points in a more traditional approach (which might not be the worst way as Schwerdt & Wuppermann (2011) indicate). Since what secondary teachers often complain about is not necessarily a limited range of learners' vocabulary, but their accuracy (or rather inaccuracy), then some direct language instruction might aid the transition. Some direct teaching can complement a more holistic, CLIL-based approach. Nassaji (2017) provides a comprehensive and compelling argument for including "grammar" teaching. Some direct instruction is time efficient in the current setting of primary English for two to three hours a week because teachers do not always have time in class to guide language discovery in more naturalistic ways. Learners do not have the time in and the exposure to the English language and lessons to make patterns from this limited exposure yet rich input through enticing content provides them with fuel for later.

Furthermore, it is important that teachers are aware of what acceptable 'perfect' performance in the CEFR levels A1 and A2 actually is. Lehrplan 21 provides some descriptors, and there are multiple resources online to know what attainment of a level means. Following current CEFR developments also opens up content worlds and encourages activities such as chatting on Whatsapp and Vlogging, though not about any particular school subject. It is also helpful to have the higher level in mind – so if all primary teachers were comfortable with what A2 means (even those who teach learners in the first year of English), then they could provide activities at this level to keep the bar high, but with more or less support

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based on the age and motivation of the learners. Some learners ARE motivated by language and rules and appreciate to have "English for the sake of English". At the same time, those who are not so keen on language would have some refuge in content. Integrating the two is not always necessary for learning.

Can CLIL work?

Perhaps a Type B CLIL can work if classroom teachers do not feel constrained by the coursebooks and have the right settings – being the classroom teacher, not being dependent on support staff. It can be rewarding to combine certain subjects such as Music or Religion and Culture with English and just declare the afternoon a double lesson with both, thus moving momentarily into the Type C spectrum of balanced CLIL. Like this, topics such as differences between Halloween and Dia de los Muertos can be treated in both languages and meet the curricular aims but no CLIL coursebook can cover what specific situation a teacher is in that might turn an English lesson into a CLIL lesson.

Furthermore, a teacher's enthusiasm for a topic without mastering a subject can help to teach both subjects well. For example, if a teacher is not really a fan of English but is really interested in robots and finds a fantastic English text on robots, then this topic will come over well with the learners due to the teacher's enthusiasm. Thus, not only trying to combine two subjects that might work well as a double lesson, but also thinking about placing a subject that is liked (such as Music) with one that a teacher is slightly less enthusiastic or knowledgeable about (such as English) might be a winning combination (there is support for this idea in Huston, 2009 or Loder Buechel, 2014).

Pre-service teachers during their final exams often mention the idea that CLIL is a good approach because by nature of having exciting topics, it becomes a “communicative” approach to language teaching. However, pedagogical communication is not the same as natural communication. Topics that get the kids excited will never work for them to stick to English without some sort of techniques (such as a punk rock English-speaking puppet or the full size English policewoman or teachers pretending to be English speaking tourists as seen on visits) because they’ll WANT to discuss it in the local language. If a teacher can motivate the learners to stick to English in such a setting, then the language production will not be manageable in a way that attainment of narrow aims for a class can be measured because language production will be all over the place, on individual levels.

Non-native teachers of English in the Swiss primary school system do not always have the linguistic resources themselves to come up with exciting English lessons in a CLIL context and are sometimes lacking in analytical skills to know “what tense is represented in this text”, thus it is easier for teachers to separate the ‘C’ and the ‘L’ and CLIL if they want to get away from coursebooks and work in more open ways. Swiss primary teachers are professionals who have interests and strengths and ideas that should not be limited to prescribed teaching materials. And not every primary school teacher finds English to be his or her favorite subject to teach or has the language skills to teach the language well. Thus, there need to be slim resource books which provide a base that even the not-so-motivated and stressed-out teacher can use because planning has to be efficient. That said, there are also teachers who would

embrace feeling like they can take more liberties. There is so much happening in the world on a regular basis that no textbook can keep up with it and that can be the basis for meaningful CLIL lessons.

Final words

There has been a bit of a CLIL overkill coming from local universities and publishers over the past few years. All lessons in the primary school should be meaningful with thought behind them based on the class needs. If a class needs development in reading skills, this should be reflected not only in the German lessons but also in English lessons through motivating, interesting, timely texts with metacognitive activities that guide learners in becoming better readers. If a class is into music and rap, then nothing speaks against using rap in English lessons. There is no “one size fits all” approach to language teaching and CLIL, nor any other approach or method is a panacea that will make all learners successful language learners – the teacher’s ability to teach dynamically is what sets the stage for success.

The joy of teaching is that there is no one way to do it. Teachers can provide meaningful content in English for one lesson, with only very global language aims. This acts as a playground for experimenting with language in an array of content points and at the same time, they can teach a more traditional grammar lesson in the next lesson – they can make the most of content and language and let integration happen when it happens. Learners and their parents have expectations – to learn English. With less focus on producing quality CLIL materials and leaving the teachers more freedom, English language teaching COULD be more relevant, inspiring, interesting, motivating and even CLIL-like.

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