

## **CLIL: from Online Sources to Learning Resources**

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### **Abstract**

*The internet is a rich source of materials for CLIL. The advantages of these materials – videos, blogs, podcasts etc. – are evident: they are authentic, up-to-date and relevant, which makes them attractive for teachers and students alike. Thus, the use of ICT in the CLIL classroom can have a very positive impact on students' motivation and learning outcomes by using challenging materials that provide learners with opportunities to develop both academic knowledge and language skills. However, it would be a mistake to assume that the use of authentic materials from online sources automatically makes for successful CLIL lessons. In fact, innovative activities, which take into account the students' experiences, interests and learning styles, have to be created. This is a considerable obstacle to the effective use of online resources in contexts where subject (content) teachers with little or no formal teacher training have to teach their subjects in English. In this presentation, we aim to provide some basic pedagogical guidelines on how to integrate online resources into a successful CLIL approach and combine individual activities into effective teaching sequences that activate students, guide their understanding of the content and support language learning and development.*

### **1. Background**

Language as well as subject teachers face challenges in CLIL classrooms, especially in the area of methodology. CLIL requires such a close collaboration between subject and language teachers that many theorists and practitioners agree that a team teaching approach (a subject teacher and a language teacher working together) has numerous advantages in CLIL settings. "It is obvious that teaching a subject in a foreign language is not the same as an integration of language and content... language teachers and subject teachers need to work together... (to) formulate the new didactics needed for a real integration of form and function in language teaching" [1]. According to Valcke and Tudor [2], this new collaboration ideally leads to "interactive pedagogical approaches and carefully designed learning tasks."

However, the reality – especially in tertiary CLIL – is, in our experience, often very different. The setup that we have most often encountered is a subject teacher with no background and/or experience in language teaching presenting his/her subject in English - a difficult situation for the subject teachers, especially since many of them do not have any formal teacher training at all, not even in their first language.

This lack of pedagogical expertise is a serious drawback when one considers Widdowson's [3] argument that only a teacher who is reflective and informed about the theories underlying his or her way of teaching is able to react to changing conditions and can claim professionalism. A lack of pedagogical expertise is particularly problematic when subject teachers use online sources in their teaching – which they frequently do, often with mixed results. In this article, we will explore the problems inexperienced subject teachers encounter when they use online sources and present a checklist to support them in turning internet sources into CLIL learning resources.

### **2. Online Sources and the inexperienced CLIL teacher**

#### **2.1. Online sources and methodology**

Language teachers have long been avid users of online sources, based on their conviction that: "the linguistic nature of online communication promotes language learning" [4]. Online sources are also attractive for inexperienced subject teachers in a CLIL situation for a number of reasons. As far as language is concerned, teachers who are insecure about their English feel that video and audio material is a good way of providing the students with 'authentic', 'correct' language and that the exposure to different accents, rates of speech and expressions support the student in assimilating the

language and the content better. Regarding content, the internet provides materials for every subject area and topic, no matter how specialised and arcane. This is extremely valuable for teachers who cannot rely on coursebooks because they may not even exist for their particular field of interest. Moreover, in some disciplines, books are out of date almost as soon as they are published. Online sources, by contrast, are up-to-date, constantly enhanced, regularly improved and free to the public. Even more importantly, subject teachers use internet sources themselves for their research and to keep abreast of developments in their fields. In our experience, they often simply want to share an interesting or amusing video that they have come across with their students, assuming that this will improve motivation.

The capacity of ICT to facilitate and enhance learning is well documented. Vlachos, for example, argues that "ICT has a multimodal and vital role to play in CLIL, since it caters for the media and the resources that can enhance multidisciplinary learning, and provides the means that stimulate, guide, and facilitate students in their efforts to express themselves adequately and effectively in the target language" [5].

When subject teachers are unaware of the methodology that they would need to fully exploit these advantages, however, they are often disappointed when using online sources does not have the effect they had anticipated, e.g. sparking a lively discussion, generating student interest leading to independent research etc. This reflects Marsh's frequently quoted assertion that "teaching through English requires much more than just teaching in English" [6].

## 2.2. Online sources and scaffolding

What subject teachers often fail to appreciate is just how challenging learning in a CLIL classroom is for students. They are faced with a high cognitive load as well as a demand for a high level of foreign language competence. In fact, the students have to understand what is for them entirely new content in a foreign language. It is therefore not realistic to expect them to watch a video/ podcast once in class, assimilate the content immediately and apply it in a discussion or project. The teacher needs to provide some 'scaffolding' – a key concept in CLIL methodology, referring to "temporary supporting structures that will assist learners to develop new understandings, new concepts and new abilities" [7] that the teacher has to provide for his / her students. This temporary assistance is necessary in order to enable the students to carry out future tasks on their own. Among other things, scaffolding aims [8] at

- building on a student's existing knowledge
- repackaging information in user-friendly ways
- fostering creative and critical thinking
- challenging students to take another step forward

The last two points are exactly the expectations that inexperienced teachers have when they use ICT in their lessons. However, they are closely linked to the first two points.

Scaffolding needs clearly articulated learning goals and learning activities which support learners in expanding their existing knowledge. Only when the learning context is both highly challenging and supportive, learning can take place. Teachers need to think carefully about their task focus, i.e. what they want to achieve by showing a particular video in class and design their 'scaffolding' accordingly.

## 3. Designing a teaching sequence

Once the teacher has established a teaching focus, 'scaffolding' tasks and activities have to be combined into a teaching sequence. All activities have to be carefully planned and coordinated to achieve the re-conceptualisation of the content, as outlined in Coyle's '4 Cs' [9]:

- **Communication** – language and linguistic considerations
- **Content** - progression in knowledge, skills and understanding
- **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.

### 3.1. Communication: language support

It is obvious that successful communication is the basis for cognitively engaging with new content. Unfortunately, the need to provide language support for the students is a tricky issue many subject

teachers have to deal with. They feel, with some justification, that they are neither trained nor should they be expected to teach their students English on top of their subject without an increase in the hours allocated to them or indeed the amount of money they are paid! However, before you can exploit the content of a video/ podcast, you need to make sure that your students understand it properly. It is therefore in the teachers' best interest to provide some basic language support. Most of the time, this concerns the area of vocabulary, especially technical language.

Many language teachers hold strong beliefs about the 'correct' way of doing vocabulary work; they disapprove strongly, for example, of English-German word lists. Working with subject teachers with no background in second language teaching, however, it seems best to adopt a very pragmatic approach. A simple English-German word list with no context, example sentences etc. is, for all its limitations, still better than no language support at all. It is also often the only way of presenting vocabulary that the subject teachers are familiar with. Once subject teachers understand the value of actively involving the students in vocabulary work and giving them the time and the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the new vocabulary, however, they are often quite enthusiastic when they are introduced to some variations on the standard word list:

- student-led vocabulary research projects
- matching activities (new words – definitions, new words – German equivalents...)
- work on collocations
- web quests
- word grid
- word guessing games
- semantic webs

### **3.2. Content, Cognition and Culture: creating a clear focus**

Even when the students are familiar with the vocabulary, simply showing them a video is unlikely to result in them actually 'learning' the content. In order for learning to take place, cognitively challenging tasks have to be designed. The teachers need to decide what they actually want the students to learn on the level of content and culture and then create tasks that focus on that particular point or points.

This process of focussing can start before the students watch the video. Activating pre-knowledge can be achieved by, for example, asking the students questions to find out what they already know and tell them that they will get the rest of the answers from the video. A matching task or some 'true or false' statements can fulfil a similar purpose. Other popular pre-viewing activities that inexperienced teachers can easily adopt are:

- looking at pictures, maps, diagrams, or graphs
- predicting the content of the listening text
- going over the directions or instructions for the activity

In all these cases, students know what to listen for when they watch the video. This helps them to concentrate on those aspects that the teacher considers most important for the class. It is always a good idea to show a video more than once so that students can complete tasks while watching. Most of the pre-viewing tasks mentioned above can also be used at this stage. Another simple task is handing out key words on cards and telling the students to work out the context they occur in. Other options at this stage include:

- filling in graphs and charts
- checking off items in a list
- listening for the gist
- completing fill-in tasks

Post-viewing tasks should aim to make absolutely sure that students now understand the content of the video. The teacher can create a quiz, for example, or give the students a faulty summary of the video to correct. Students could also work on a debate, discuss questions that go beyond the content of the video/podcast, carry out a webquest and present their results or create a blog or wiki.

Only when the full teaching sequence has been completed can the teacher expect the students to join in a class discussion of the new content because they should now feel confident enough on both the level of language and the level of content.

#### 4. Conclusion

The way from online sources to learning resources within a CLIL setting is quite a rocky road for subject teachers since they often lack the methodological know-how for designing appropriate teaching sequences. In the appendix to this paper, we provide a simple checklist which, we hope, should go a long way towards making them feel more confident when exploring ICT resources in order to make the content of their lessons come alive for their students.

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#### Appendix

##### Checklist: Video/ podcast in CLIL 'subject' lessons

AIMS of the lesson:

##### 1. Choosing an appropriate source – language aspects:

Quality of sound:  
Accent of speaker(s):  
Speed of delivery:  
Technical language:

→ overall level of difficulty:        low - medium - high

##### 2. Introducing new vocabulary - support for students:

List of new vocabulary items:

Time of presentation:    € before class  
                                  € in class

Type of presentation:    € independent student research plus teacher feedback

€ Input provided by teacher (glossary etc.)

€ in-class

task: matching, fill-in-the-gap etc.:

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**3. Creating a content focus:**

List of key points the students need to understand:

**TASKS**

Pre-viewing:

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While watching:

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Post-viewing:

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