

## ADDRESSING CLIL IN HIGHER EDUCATION BY SHARING EXPERTISE ACROSS DISCIPLINES

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### Abstract

Within the International Campus at the University of Vic over 30 courses are taught in English. This relatively new CLIL (content and language integrated learning) context has provided teachers with an opportunity for cross-disciplinary collaboration. This paper describes how collaboration, via an introductory CLIL course, tutorials, a working group and a digital platform, has raised common CLIL-specific classroom issues across disciplines: greater differentiation among students (language and content knowledge), covering a smaller volume of work and students' shorter attention span.

### Text of paper

Universities in Europe have increasingly been committing themselves to plurilingualism in their education policies, which has given rise to the emergence of a new learning context involving Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). This is a broad term which encompasses:

'...diverse methodologies which lead to dual-focussed education where attention is given both to topic and language of instruction. It is used to describe any educational situation in which an additional (second/foreign) language is used for the teaching and learning of subjects other than the language itself'

(Marsh *et al.*, 2005: 5).

The most highly accepted theoretical framework for CLIL (Coyle, 2005) considers content, cognition, communication and culture for effective learning of a subject in an additional language. These four basic considerations are then integrated into 'diverse methodologies', as cited above, which are based on second language acquisition theory and general learning theories. Therefore, good practice in CLIL stresses factors such as building on learners' prior knowledge, the cognitive grading of content, developing learner autonomy, varying forms of interaction and collaboration, scaffolding, use of ICTs and diversifying assessment (de Graaff *et al.*, 2007; Mehisto, 2012; Meyer, 2010). Higher education has long had its compass set on lecturing as an established methodology, and the individual acquisition of specific competencies. However, the implementation of the Bologna Plan has led to a significant shift in focus by including more general and cross-curricular competencies to better meet potential employers' needs: 'literacy, numeracy, communication, foreign language leadership, team work and IT skills' (Kirschner *et al.*, 2004). Therefore, as well as promoting plurilingualism, effective CLIL implementation is clearly in line with this new learning context in higher education and in satisfying vocational requirements.

Although English-medium instruction has been common in Northern European countries for longer, it has more recently gained momentum at Spanish universities. Some subjects within a

degree course, or even whole degree courses, are being offered in an additional language, usually in English. At the UVic (University of Vic) courses have traditionally been held in Catalan. However, over 30 courses are now being offered in English. This new measure is primarily to attract and accommodate international students but also to better prepare students for a stay abroad and to introduce internationalisation to those who cannot go abroad. It is also to prepare students for a career in research, where English is the dominant language in scientific communication and essential for gaining recognition at an international level. In an effort to systemize the integration of English, the UVic has introduced 6-credit compulsory English language courses and at least a further 6 optional credits in English-medium subjects on all degree courses. The International Campus and CIFE (Centre d'Innovació i Formació en Educació) have been key in promoting CLIL at UVic in terms of providing the financial backing for teacher training and for a 2-year CLIL project.

### **Objectives**

This institutional support has brought together teachers from different disciplines and faculties (Language, Education, Business and Communication, Engineering, Biosciences, Health Sciences) who need to address this new linguistic and pedagogical paradigm. The aim of this paper, therefore, is, firstly, to describe the initial collaboration between language and content teachers and also between content teachers from different disciplines, and secondly, to discuss some of the issues that have emerged from this context.

### **Development**

If we consider the nature of courses offered in English and the student and teacher profiles at UVic, it is easier to comprehend the challenge of teaching in this new context. Home students entering the UVic range between A1 and C1 on the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) in their English language competence, with the majority of students having an A2 or B1 level. For most of these students English is their third language with either Catalan or Spanish as the first/second language. Among international students (2% total student population) there are native English speakers and non-natives whose average level of English is higher than the home students, around B2. As for teachers their levels range between B2 and C2, just over 80% are native Catalan or Spanish speakers and nearly 20% native English speakers. At least half of the non-native teachers have either studied, worked or done research abroad. Classes add further variety to the context as groups can vary from six to thirty-six students, including only home students or home and international students, and groups can be more or less homogeneous in terms of language level. In order to adjust to this new context, therefore, three essential steps have been taken by teachers 1) participating in an introductory training course, 2) one-to-one tutorials and 3) working group meetings.

The first step, participating in an introductory CLIL course, is offered at the beginning of the academic year. Two language teachers with some CLIL experience present the fundamentals of CLIL and link them to basic linguistic and methodological considerations in lesson planning. Participants then work in cross-disciplinary groups describing and comparing how to adapt a sample of authentic material. Next, participants lead micro-teaching sessions with a plenary after each session. In other words, teachers present a part of a lesson to their colleagues, incorporating strategies discussed during the course, and this is followed by immediate group feedback and explicit identification of the strategies observed. Throughout the course teachers are encouraged to voice their feelings and opinions about CLIL and fill in a questionnaire before and after teaching their CLIL subject. Teachers also prepare an adapted CLIL course programme and lesson plan.

The second step in preparing for CLIL is in the form of one-to-one tutorials. Fortuitously, language teachers at UVic are members of each faculty, which allows content teachers to access language teachers easily, if needed. This is an example of the more on-going collaboration between language and content teachers. It attends to teachers unable to participate in introductory courses or working groups, as tutorials can be arranged at any time of the year.

The third step towards developing CLIL has been through the CLIL working group. Meetings are open to all and held periodically throughout the year. It provides an informal atmosphere where teachers can share positive experiences or voice their concerns, or, more specifically, work on the university guidelines or a particular aspect of teaching (fluency practice, adapting authentic material, lesson planning).

So what have been the outcomes of these three steps? Teacher collaboration at each stage has been key in shaping CLIL implementation and developing appropriate guidelines and resources. Language instructors have been essential in raising awareness within the university community to the fact that teaching a subject in English not only requires linguistic competence but also an alternative pedagogical approach. University teachers are traditionally expert in one particular discipline and, as previously mentioned, employ the traditional university approach – the lecture. CLIL courses, however, require teachers to be expert in two areas, their own discipline and the language of instruction, as well as considering the different pedagogical approach.

Microteaching has provided teachers with an opportunity to practise, sometimes for their first time, teaching in English. It has made theoretical concepts more tangible, allowing teachers to compare an array of teaching styles, lecturing strategies, tasks, communication strategies (repetition, use of visuals, comprehension checks) and the integration of different language skills (reading, writing, speaking and reading). Furthermore, teachers benefit from immediate feedback from colleagues, including language or teaching experts. Teachers were unanimous in finding this practical part of the course by far the most fruitful.

The advantages and disadvantages that teachers have discovered came out in questionnaires before and after they taught their subjects, as well as in working groups and tutorials. Despite pre-course reticence, the general perception was that the courses had gone well and that students had been more motivated than expected. Most teachers claimed to have successfully assessed in English, despite the fact that the majority had been reluctant to do so prior to teaching. Teachers also cited small class groups and students use of English for authentic communication as further benefits.

The key issues that have arisen are that some teachers were unable to include as much content as intended, as they had had to provide more time for language support, particularly if they had included production (written or oral) tasks. Furthermore, students' attention span was much shorter, requiring teachers to break up their lectures more. Another significant and unexpected aspect of the classes, as far as the teachers were concerned, was the greater disparity in language and content knowledge among students, which proved a challenge in managing tasks. In fact, when teachers had students with low levels of English, the teachers found it most difficult to cope.

## Conclusions

Summing up, collaborative measures have served to establish CLIL at UVic in several ways:

- 1- It has identified initial needs for CLIL teaching, allowing more tailored-made training to be provided in the future. Teachers confirmed that they needed more help, particularly in terms of assessment and pedagogical training rather than further language training.
- 2- It has identified differentiation, workload and attention span as particularly important in CLIL class management.
- 3- It has given teachers a unique space within the university community to exchange experiences and develop resources specific to this context.
- 4- It has led directly to the launch of a digital platform (<http://mon.uvic.cat/clil/>), a site where new and practising teachers can find basic information about CLIL, as well as linguistic (classroom, academic and subject specific language) and pedagogical resources (good practice indicators, course programmes, lesson plans, tasks, assessment measures).
- 5- Both content and language teachers have been involved in drawing up the university guidelines for CLIL in an effort to standardize teaching across courses.

Although students' perceptions of the CLIL courses are not the focus of this paper, informal feedback shows that most courses were viewed positively. Nevertheless, in one case, the teachers' language competence was questioned and in another case a group of students felt they could not follow the course. Such outcomes confirm that both language and pedagogical support for teachers is indeed extremely necessary. Although Northern European countries have long provided EMI (English-medium instruction), in Spain we need to be more cautious because of the different nature of our context. We cannot simply switch the language of instruction without detrimental consequences because of the lower levels of English among students and teachers and the lack of full immersion (whole degree programmes or English in everyday social use). For this reason, at the UVic we have chosen to embark on a more integrated approach – CLIL, and promote effective pedagogies focusing on how students are learning (through language) to improve what they are learning (the content).

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### **Questions and/or considerations for discussion**

- 1- How can teachers attend to the greater heterogeneity in knowledge of either the language or subject matter generated by the CLIL context?
- 2- How can teachers ensure they cover the whole syllabus without simplifying the cognitive complexity of the course content?