The A-B-C of Content Learning in CLIL Settings:

A call for contributions from Content-Pedagogy Specialists

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CLIL has been defined as an educational approach that adopts 'a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for learning and teaching of both content and language. There is a focus not only on content and not only on language. Each is interwoven – even if the emphasis is greater on one than the other at a given time' (Coyle et al. 2010: 1). For this reason, it has been argued that the single most important letter in the acronym CLIL is the 'I' for 'Integration'. The truth is that, in spite of this claim, the perspective overwhelmingly adopted to study, report or prescribe best practices in CLIL has been that of language learning, whereas the mastery of content matter has been left somewhat out of focus. This is not surprising, as the most important reason to apply a CLIL approach to any subject is precisely to foster the learning of the language adopted as a vehicle for instruction. In any case, however understandable this might be, the over-privileged attention that language development obtains in the literature may result in an insufficient understanding of 'full integration' and a biased implementation of (content-driven) CLIL whereby the content matter runs the risk of being trivialised. This outcome is undesirable but unlikely, as content teachers tend to drop CLIL if they feel it interferes with the learning of their subject. This is illustrated by the case of a secondary science teacher who reports that, in line with the pedagogical principles of science education, in her standard (non-CLIL) lessons she helps students to design and carry out experiments in order to confirm or reject hypotheses generated by the students themselves. She also reports that she finds it extremely difficult to deploy this pedagogical strategy in a CLIL context, as getting lower-secondary students to formulate hypotheses in English as a foreign language is extremely difficult and time-consuming. The teacher argues that devoting so much time to language issues when she has been entrusted to teach science amounts in effect to cheating students, families and society in general, and concludes that CLIL and quality science teaching in lower secondary school are incompatible.

It is also common for CLIL teacher-education courses to focus preferentially on language-related issues. The rationale for this approach is that teachers attending CLIL courses are already experts in the teaching of their subject matter, thus the inclusion of Pedagogical Content Knowledge or PCK (Shulman, 1987) components is superfluous. However, this assumption does not pass the Litmus test of classroom practice. First, our observations show that the fact that content teachers are experienced in the teaching of their subject matter does not necessarily imply that their practice is in line with updated PCK principles deriving from research in their own field. Secondly, experienced practitioners may or may not be familiar with innovative across-the-curriculum approaches, such as transdisciplinary project work which incorporates both general pedagogical principles, and also those that derive from the distinctive world view generated by their own discipline. Last but not least, switching into a foreign language as a vehicle for instruction may severely hinder the implementation of well-proven PCK techniques. Thus, in our conversations with methodologically well-equipped content teachers, they report the limitations they run up against when trying to deploy in the CLIL classroom teaching strategies which are fundamental to their subject. These accounts show how attempting to re-conceptualise the teaching and learning of a teacher's subject through another language can jeopardise his or her pedagogical repertoire because the familiar (and probably effective) ways of doing things may become quite unviable in a CLIL environment unless they are completely reworked.

The anecdotes above teach us at least three things. First, standards of content teaching need be guaranteed in English-taught courses in order to safeguard the principles of their respective PCK area. Second, this is not a simple thing to do and requires a profound understanding of the principles underlying the pedagogy of the content area. And finally, Integrating (again, our celebrated 'I') the teaching of content with the teaching of language requires reflection, knowledge, specific skills and collaboration. Subject-matter teachers and education scholars, in short PCK specialists have a key role at the forefront of this undertaking.

The A-B-C of Content Learning in CLIL Settings section of **CJ** aims to become a forum where the role of PCK in CLIL can be explored collaboratively, thus helping to fill a gap in the field. With this purpose, The A-B-C invites content-area specialists and PCK-Language teacher tandems to make informed contributions about how best to approach the teaching and learning of their particular subject matter in language development settings such as CLIL and Immersion classrooms, or Language Reception programmes for newly arrived students with migration backgrounds. More specifically, The A-B-C adopts a FAQ format and consists of a set of questions (see below) aimed at identifying CLIL-PCK issues, which are central to the teaching and learning of a particular discipline or content area in plurilingual settings. As in all FAQ, questions need to be answered succinctly in a reader-friendly style. In order to support the answers they provide, writers are encouraged to use bibliographical references or add links to other answers.

On the other hand, readers of The A-B-C are expected to understand that this section is only intended as an appetizer, not a main course. **CJ** urges readers not to take the section as a "catechism" but to continue reading and exploring in depth the hot issue of Content-Learning in CLIL settings, and then perhaps to even submit a new A-B-C entry to **CJ** that sets out their own views on the matter.

CJ hopes that The A-B-C will foster a double-sided debate on content-driven CLIL pedagogy, as well as on the role that language and discourse play in the teaching and learning of content matter in plurilingual contexts. ∎

References

Coyle, D., P. Hood, and D. Marsh. (2010). CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shulman, L. S. (1987). Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. Harvard Educational Review, 57, 1–22.

Instructions for writers

1. **Write a subheading for your A-B-C.** You may use the template: 'The Teaching and Learning of [DISCIPLINE] in [STAGE] Education, where the word 'DISCIPLINE' is replaced with the name of the non-language content-area or discipline of your interest, such as biology, music, history, science, art, mathematics, literature, citizenship, ICT, etc., and the word 'STAGE' is replaced with the label corresponding to the educational stage under focus, such as infant, primary, secondary, vocational, compulsory, upper secondary or tertiary, and so on.

2. **Write your name, affiliation and email address.**

3. **Answer the questions below according to your knowledge and viewpoint.** Remember that informed answers are a requirement. Your text should not exceed 1,000 words.

4. **Writers are encouraged to answer all questions below, but you may decide to skip some of them.** However, texts with fewer than eight questions answered will not be considered for publication.

5. **Write a 60- to 100-word autobiographical summary** and include a photograph of yourself.

6. **Highly recommended: Add one or two photographs of class work or student output to illustrate your points.** Please remember that you need to state that you are the owner of the copyright.

Questions

1

What is the **main purpose** of teaching and learning non-CLIL as well as **CLIL** [DISCIPLINE] **in (post)compulsory education?**

2

How do **current approaches** to the teaching and learning of [DISCIPLINE] **differ from traditional encyclopaedic approaches?**

3

What **role** does **language** (i.e., oral interaction, reading and writing) play in the teaching and learning of (non-CLIL as well as) **CLIL** [DISCIPLINE]**?**

4

Can the teaching and learning of [DISCIPLINE] **benefit** in any way **from** being taught through English, or through any **additional language** in general?

5

Can the teaching and learning of [DISCIPLINE] benefit from an **across-the-curriculum** approach? If so, how?

6

Please describe one instance of exemplary **teaching strategies** especially useful in a quality [DISCIPLINE] lesson.

7

Can you provide one or two examples of **quality learning tasks** for the [DISCIPLINE] **CLIL** class? (maybe perhaps also useful in non-CLIL classes)?

8

How can a teacher **adapt the activities** above to a CLIL classroom, so that the activity can be carried out partially or mainly through an additional language?

9

What are the main characteristics of the **disciplinary texts** that students are required to read and write in the non-CLIL as well as [DISCIPLINE] **CLIL** class? What genres and task typologies do learners need to become familiar with?

10

What are the **main linguistic characteristics** of the aforementioned genres and text types that the teacher will need to focus on or provide support for so that learners can successfully read and write these sort of disciplinary texts?

11

Can you provide one or two instances of exemplary tasks especially useful in the **assessment** of [DISCIPLINE]-related key competences which could be adapted to a CLIL environment?

12

How can **less scholastic** activities, such as dancing, pottery, drama, singing, etc., be integrated into the teaching and learning of [DISCIPLINE]?

13

If you hold to any particular pedagogical, psychological, philosophical or linguistic **view** or **theoretical framework** (i.e., behaviourism, cognitivism, social-interactionism), please let the reader know the label or labels that designate it.

14

Can you suggest one or two **titles** (books, articles, etc.) which might help a practitioner to become a better CLIL (and non-CLIL) [DISCIPLINE] **teacher?**