

## 2 Key principles of CLIL

In this chapter we discuss eight principles that are important for effective integration of content and language learning and teaching. These principles are related to beliefs that can affect the way educators teach additional languages to school-age learners or the way they plan a programme where content is learned through an additional language. Beliefs are important because they affect the decisions we make on a day-to-day basis and the actions that stem from those decisions. For example, if you believe that people need extra vitamins to stay healthy, then you may decide to purchase vitamin pills and take one every day. In contrast, if you believe that your normal diet provides your body with all the vitamins it needs, then you will decide to resist all of the ads that say that vitamin supplements are necessary. Many educational decisions by policy-makers, curriculum and education specialists, and classroom teachers are similarly influenced by the beliefs they have about bilingualism, the facility with which young children can learn additional languages, the ability of students with learning difficulties to acquire an additional language, and so on. Sometimes, we are not even aware of these beliefs; we just take them for granted because they have always been part of our way of thinking. As professionals, it is important to be aware of your beliefs and how they affect your professional decisions and actions. In the following sections, we present scientific evidence along with our own professional advice based on our experiences about each of the key principles we consider important; and we invite you to consider your own beliefs regarding these principles.

## 2.1 SPECIAL NOTE

### *Self-reflection for professional development*

Before you read about these principles, take a few minutes to examine your own beliefs about the topics we are about to discuss. Discuss your answers with a partner and, if applicable, with a group of colleagues.



| Check Y (yes) and/or N (no). Do you think that:   | Y | N | Why? |
|---|---|---|------|
| 1 The best way to teach an additional language is to focus learners' attention on the vocabulary and grammar rules they need in order to speak and read the language correctly.   |   |   |      |
| 2 Without direct instruction of language, learners will have trouble becoming proficient.   |   |   |      |
| 3 It is important to plan instruction so that students are at the centre; i.e. they determine what and how they learn; they learn through activities they do themselves.  |   |   |      |
| 4 It is best to encourage learners to keep their two languages separate when they are learning a new language.  |   |   |      |
| 5 To make learning easier for them, students in CLIL programmes should be allowed to use their first language even when instruction is in the additional language.  |   |   |      |
| 6 Assessment is most useful when it focuses on student achievement.   |   |   |      |
| 7 There are some children who cannot learn an additional language or for whom it is so difficult that it is not worth the effort. Who are these children and why do they have such difficulty acquiring more than one language? |   |   |      |
| 8 It is important that school leaders – principals/heads of schools and subject-matter heads – be knowledgeable, proactive and committed to dual-language teaching for the programme to work.                                   |   |   |      |

The eight key principles we think are important when planning programmes and instruction for additional-language learners can be seen in the box below.

### Key principles of CLIL

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 | Additional-language instruction is more effective when integrated with content instruction.                         |
| 2 | Explicit and systematic language instruction is important.  |
| 3 | Student engagement is the engine of learning.   |
| 4 | Both languages should have equally high status.   |
| 5 | The first language can be a useful tool for learning the additional language and new academic knowledge and skills. |
| 6 | Classroom-based assessment is critical for programme success.   |
| 7 | All children can become bilingual.  |
| 8 | Strong leadership is critical for successful dual-language teaching.  |

#### PRINCIPLE 1:

#### **Additional-language instruction is more effective when integrated with content instruction**

From a student's point of view, learning a language is radically different in a CLIL classroom in comparison to a classroom with grammar-based instruction. Rather than being expected to memorise new words and grammar rules, and then to use them in repetitive practice activities, students are expected to talk about important events in their communities or personal lives, learn how to do scientific experiments, or to solve mathematical problems – all the time using the additional language. Students are taught the words and grammatical patterns they need in order to communicate. In intensive CLIL programmes, such as IMM, they also learn the language from hearing the teacher use it. It is by using the language that students learn the language. Thus, from the learner's point of view, attention is focused on what is being



## RESEARCH NOTE

### *Effectiveness of CLIL*

#### *Part I: CLIL for majority-language students*

*(from Genesee, 2004; Genesee & Lindholm-Leary, 2013)*

- a) IMM students achieve the same levels of competence in their first language as similar students in monolingual programmes.
- b) IMM students demonstrate the same levels of academic achievement as similar students in monolingual programmes.
- c) IMM students achieve advanced levels of functional proficiency in the additional language, significantly more advanced than the levels achieved by students in conventional additional-language programmes.
- d) IMM is effective for students with a wide variety of learner characteristics and backgrounds:
  - students with poor first-language skills
  - students with low levels of academic ability
  - students from disadvantaged family backgrounds
  - students from minority cultural groups who already speak the majority language.
- e) IMM is equally effective with languages that are similar (English and French) and languages that are very different (English and Japanese).

#### *Part II: CLIL for minority-language students*

*(from Genesee & Lindholm-Leary, 2012)*

Compared to similar minority-language students who are educated entirely in the majority language:

- a) Minority-language students in programmes that aim for bilingual proficiency (DL-CLIL) acquire the same or higher levels of proficiency in the majority language.
- b) They attain the same levels of competence, or higher, in academic subjects.
- c) They achieve higher levels of proficiency in the home language.
- d) They have lower failure rates, lower drop-out rates, and greater expectations for continuing on in higher education.

communicated. The teacher's job is to create opportunities in class that will engage students in meaningful communication about interesting and challenging topics, at a level that is appropriate for them cognitively and linguistically. While the teacher is teaching content, he or she is also teaching language that is useful for communication about the content. CLIL teachers use scaffolding strategies to facilitate acquisition of the language and, at the same time, to make the content comprehensible even though it is being taught in an additional language. We talk about how to do that in **Chapters 4** and **5**.

Extensive research carried out over many years has shown that CLIL approaches to additional-language teaching are highly effective – if done well; see **Research Note 2.1**. Moreover, they have been shown to be effective in a wide range of learning contexts, with different languages, and, most importantly, with a wide range of learners – who vary with respect to age, socio-economic background, language-learning ability and academic ability. As we talk about how to implement CLIL effectively, we draw on research on a variety of CLIL classes and programmes from around the world.

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**PRINCIPLE 2:****Explicit and systematic language instruction is important**

Many years of research in CLIL classrooms has taught us that including systematic and explicit language instruction that is linked to students' communicative needs is important in promoting additional-language proficiency even when content is the vehicle for teaching. Additional-language learners are remarkably agile at communicating in an additional language despite the fact that they have not fully mastered the grammar and have limited vocabulary. They develop many strategies for circumventing what they do not know. Indeed, extensive research on the language competence of students in IMM programmes in Canada has shown that even after many years of participation in such programmes there are gaps in their grammatical competence; their vocabulary is limited; and they often lack idiomaticity (Lyster, 2007) if they are not given explicit language instruction in aspects of the language that are difficult to acquire.

Being able to use an additional language correctly and idiomatically is important for students who plan to go on to higher education or to

professions where they will use the additional language. Many secondary-level students in countries around the world are learning English with the hope that they will be accepted by an English-language university to pursue their education or because they want jobs in the international job market, where English is often an asset. Although students who are learning an additional language only in school are probably always going to have some gaps in competence, the role of additional-language educators is to fill as many of those gaps as possible. Including systematic and explicit instruction of specific vocabulary, grammar and discourse patterns that are linked to communication in and outside the classroom can help push learners' linguistic competence further and avoid fossilisation of incorrect usage.

### 2.1 PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

#### **Intentionally drawing attention to language in meaningful contexts**



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When I taught grade 8 in a French immersion program in the 1980s, we were advised to neither focus too much on the mechanics of the target language nor give much corrective feedback. It was believed that students would simply 'pick up' the language on their own, thanks to exposure to lots of input provided through subject-matter instruction. We now know that students do indeed 'pick up' lots of language, but not all of it – what often goes unnoticed are non-salient yet important morphological features. Consequently, teachers need to draw their students' attention to these features, but not necessarily through decontextualized language analysis. One of the best ways for teachers to intentionally draw attention to language is in the context of meaningful interaction about content. It is during such teachable moments that students are motivated to use the language and so are well positioned to notice how otherwise hard-to-notice language features play an important role in making meaning.

Teachers have at their disposal at least two ways of intentionally drawing attention to the target language in meaningful contexts. First, they can integrate language with content in seemingly spontaneous ways through a *reactive approach*. Ostensibly unplanned opportunities can take the form of (a) teacher questions intended to increase both the quantity and quality of student output and (b) corrective feedback that serves to negotiate both form and meaning. Second, teachers can adopt a *proactive approach* that requires planning for noticing and awareness activities followed by opportunities for both guided and autonomous practice. Planning for content and language integration in this way involves shifting learners' attention to language in the context of content instruction in cases where they would not otherwise process the language at the same time as the content (see Lyster, 2007).

Explicit language teaching is even more important when the additional language is being used to teach academic subjects, such as Mathematics or Science. Why is this? Increasingly, educators and researchers recognise that the language needed to function effectively in school settings is different from the kind of language people usually use on a day-to-day basis for social communication. School language is often referred to as language for academic purposes; language for day-to-day communication in most situations outside school is referred to as language for social purposes. We provide more detailed discussion of how these two forms of communication differ, and how to plan content lessons to include these kinds of language skills, in **Chapter 4**.

For our purposes here, suffice to say that language used in academic contexts for teaching and learning is more elaborate and complex than the language we use with friends and family members to talk about ordinary things. Language for academic purposes includes words that are seldom used outside school (such as 'meteorological', 'larva', 'asteroids'), grammar that is rare in day-to-day conversations (e.g. complex statements about causality), and discourse/text formats that are unique to talking about academic subjects (e.g. how to structure a science report). As students progress through school, mastery of advanced academic subject matter and cognitive skills that are taught in the higher grades

becomes increasingly dependent on the ability to use language in these ways. Moreover, oral language competence is the foundation for competence in reading and writing. Being able to read advanced academic texts or to write complex expository text for Science and History classes requires complex academic language skills. Academic language skills can be difficult to acquire – even students who have been in immersion-type programmes for 12 years often do not master them easily (Lyster, 2007). Teaching academic language skills systematically and explicitly



#### RESEARCH NOTE

##### *The importance of explicit language instruction in CLIL*

- a) Strategies for direct instruction are important when teaching literacy to additional-language learners in comparison to implicit or indirect strategies alone (August & Shanahan, 2006; Riches & Genesee, 2006).
- b) Corrective feedback when students use incorrect or inappropriate words or grammar can support mastery of the correct forms if done in conjunction with meaningful use of the language (Lyster, 1998, 2007).
- c) Recasts, which are a form of implicit correction, are not very effective in North American classrooms; students in those contexts respond more to corrective feedback that is explicit and student-centred. In contrast, recasts are effective in classrooms in other countries where students may be more used to instruction with a focus on correct usage (Lyster, 2007).
- d) Oral language proficiency of students in Canadian immersion programmes improves when they are given instruction with explicit language objectives, including a focus on both functional and discrete language skills (Lyster, 2007).
- e) Minority-language students' oral language proficiency improves if they are given plenty of opportunities to use new or difficult-to-acquire aspects of the additional language (including discrete grammatical rules and communicative patterns), corrective feedback and appropriate models of correct usage (Saunders & Goldenberg, 2010).



alongside content instruction can enhance the acquisition of these difficult-to-acquire skills and, in turn, makes it easier to process abstract subject-area concepts.

One of the strongest proponents of a balanced approach to language and content integrated instruction is Roy Lyster at McGill University. Lyster has carried out extensive empirical research on instructional strategies that enhance students' competence in their additional language. In his counterbalance approach (Lyster, 2007), he makes a strong case for ensuring that there is an explicit linguistic component to content lesson plans and a content component to language lesson plans. Mehisto (2012) also argues that effective dual-language education makes language and content objectives visible to learners so that they are better able to monitor their own learning. We provide guidance on how to build explicit language instruction into your teaching in **Chapter 4**. In **Research Note 2.2**, we review research evidence to show that explicit language instruction can enhance students' language skills.

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**PRINCIPLE 3:****Student engagement is the engine of learning**

Many additional-language teachers have experienced classrooms full of students who appear to be asleep because they do not want to participate in activities that they find boring and irrelevant. While researchers and linguists are probably interested in language for its own sake, there are very few school-age learners who are interested in learning an additional language for its own sake. Part of the rationale behind CLIL is that using content as a vehicle for additional-language learning engages students in using the language for authentic and deep communication. Certainly, this was the thinking by the educators and researchers in Canada who created the first IMM programmes. They believed that using the additional language to teach core subjects such as Science and Mathematics would engage students in using the additional language in order to do well in school. Grammar-based approaches, while seeking to engage students in make-believe scenarios, often fail because students cannot relate to the situations being depicted in their textbooks and find them phony and uninteresting. Moreover, the make-believe activities of traditional second-language classrooms provide students with little opportunity to use the language beyond individual lessons

because use of the language is tied to the textbook or a particular activity. These approaches are also less effective because they use a one-size-fits-all strategy so that all students are expected to be interested in the textbook scenario and to engage in using language in these artificial ways. The key to motivating students to learn an additional language is to select activities that are interesting and engaging and that appeal to individual interests, learning styles and goals. This is especially important when the additional language is a language that is not used normally outside school.

## 2.2 PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

### Implementing CLIL projects linking English to Environmental Science in a school in Colombia



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Educational policies of different countries are often affected by their ethnic and linguistic histories. In Colombia, a Latin American country with more than 60 indigenous languages, surprisingly, educational processes tend to be framed by an English–Spanish duality, in which English is a long-term expectation and Spanish is a long-lasting reality. Additionally, there is an evident gap between the private and public educational sectors, with the former representing privileged cities and socio-economic groups where English is a synonym for high status, and the latter representing regional and ethnic diversity where English learning is a challenge.

An example of the latter is the INEM (in English: National Institute of Middle Vocational Education) Santiago Pérez, a school that was built in order to provide disadvantaged communities with high quality vocational centres. It has students from different regions of the country, some of them displaced by internal conflict and most of them coming from underprivileged backgrounds. However, these conditions do not prevent students from actively participating in a special learning process where knowledge of subject matter (Science) is combined with the use of Spanish and English as vehicular languages.