"In subject matter teaching, we overlook the role of language as a medium of learning. In language learning, we overlook the fact that content is being communicated".

Mohan B. 1986 Language and content, Reading, MA Addison-Wesley

CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) is spreading fast. In many cases, faster than the teachers it affects would like. The skills involved in teaching a subject in the mother tongue are not exactly the same as teaching it in another language. This article will focus on some of the issues involved in CLIL at this time.

Teacher difficulties
When working with teachers in CLIL I often hear these cries:

- It's so difficult for me to explain in English.
- My students don't like listening to English.
- My students find it hard to read in English.
- I have to write most of my own materials.
- The book I've got is so boring.
- I can't get my students to participate in English.

The first thing to point out is that there are two different kinds of teachers in this situation, who face it with very different gaps and needs. One kind is the teacher of English who now has to teach a subject in English, rather than teach just the language. The other is the subject teacher who now has to adapt to teach their subject in English. In an ideal world they would be in the same classroom, team-teaching. In a very small percentage of classrooms that is the case. But financially and logistically this is not very often possible so they have to work alone.

In fact, in some countries English teachers have always taught other subjects as well. In Austria for example, all teachers, language teachers included, teach more than one subject. But up to now they have not necessarily taught the other subjects in English. The language teachers who have only been language teachers face the problem of learning the new subject matter. Teaching it in English is not such a problem for them. But the content is. And it has to be said, that most of the published materials will be in the mother tongue. However, they have the advantage of being able to communicate in the classroom with confidence. They also have the advantage of having used many interactive types of teaching activities.

As language is a communicative subject, it is more common for language teachers to plan interactive lessons, where students have to communicate with each other and the teacher, rather than just take in new information more passively. One of the skills involved when teaching a language is to make it interesting, simply because there is no real content - unless we are teaching English for a specific purpose such as tourism, commerce etc. We therefore have to spend a lot of time thinking up topics that work and engage our students. This is a great advantage of CLIL. Our content is ready made. What we have to do in this case is think up ways of presenting it that will enable our students to understand it. In other words, the subject determines what language we teach, rather than vice versa. In the CLIL classroom the language really is a tool, rather than an end in itself.

The other side of the coin is the subject teachers who now have to teach their subject in English. For many, their major gap is the language, which is a real problem as it causes a crisis in confidence. There is evidence that in subject teaching there is less interaction than in language teaching. This must mean that subject teachers are giving more input and talking more than language teachers. If their problem is a lack of language, they need to use strategies which reduce their need to speak, and be up front. Successful language teaching depends on such strategies. Students need to repeat new language, process it, and most importantly use it. So a good percentage of the lesson is taken up with student talk. This is not so necessary in subject teaching - unless the subject is being taught in another language. In this case the teachers may want to speak less, and the students will need to have more active involvement to help them take in, understand and memorise the new information. There are many interactive, communicative activities that could be applied across the curriculum.
Student difficulties
In addition to all this, there are the problems that the students face. If it is a subject for which they have very little understanding, liking, or empathy, and on top of that, if they are being taught in a language they find difficult, then learning anything is going to be a miracle! Our only hope is to make the lessons active and interesting. That means that the activities and processes must be appealing in order to counterbalance the negative aspects of the content and language.

Teaching strategies
There are some strategies which seem to me to be particularly important when teaching another subject in a foreign language.

Giving students the necessary language support
When preparing lessons teachers need to analyse the lexical and cognitive demands of the topic and where necessary focus on the English the students will need in order to take in and participate in the lesson.

Chunks and collocations
Teachers and learners need to focus on and learn the high-frequency chunks related to their subject.
For example, in music: a high-pitched note, a key signature, to play the piano.

Multiple intelligences
Teachers need an understanding of how this affects the subject we are teaching and the fact that we are teaching it in another language.

Use of the mother tongue
There will be times when this can act as a resource, rather than as a fall-back. The bulk of our teaching will obviously be in English, but there are times when we can use activities which link with the mother tongue to help understanding and memory. In group work it may often be more profitable for the students to discuss in their mother-tongue as a route to achieving the given task in English.

Active involvement
This is crucial - especially at times when the content may not be particularly mentally engaging. It will also mean that we don’t have to do all the talking and teaching.

Repetition and recapping
We need to find ways of doing this which add variety and fun. For some topics, rote learning will be the answer. For others, a regular re-visit.
Visual input
Too many lines of text in English will be daunting and de-motivating. In the same way, listening to too much English will be hard. The use of charts, pictures, graphs, tables etc will ease understanding and give something for students to look at and do.

Learner training
When studying in a foreign language it is even more important for students to understand ways to read more efficiently, ways to plan their writing, ways to store and learn new lexis, how to use the library, how to use the internet, understand charts and graphs, use effective revision and exam techniques etc.

Checking understanding
Giving tests is just one way of doing this. Asking students to produce tests is another. Giving them focused tasks to perform is another. Asking them to list what they have learnt and how, is another.

Thinking time
Our syllabus may be huge, but the possibility of our students taking it all in is probably much less! In a foreign language they are going to need to go more slowly, and have more processing and thinking time.

I personally hope CLIL is here to stay. It certainly looks like it at the present. It is a great way to develop the foreign language skill, while at the same time, focusing on important, rather than contrived, subject matter. In terms of relevance to our students, it must be a fantastic preparation for future study and work.

The obvious people to help teachers in CLIL are the teachers themselves. The language teachers have a lot to offer the subject teachers, and the subject teachers a lot to offer the language teachers. Whether or not anyone is prepared at a local level to set up such a liaison is the problem. But what a waste not to have it. We all have a lot to learn from each other.

Useful books

Useful websites
www.scienceacross.org
www.factbghit.bg
www.factworld.info
www.factworld@yahoogroups.com (discussion list)
www.coollist.com
www.bbc.co.uk/schools

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