

## A reflective approach to CLIL instruction in the VET context

### Podjęcie refleksyjne do zintegrowanego nauczania przedmiotowo-językowego w środowisku kształcenia zawodowego

**Key words:** reflective approach, CLIL, Content and Language Integrated Learning, VET, vocational education and training.

**Abstract.** The paper adopts a reflective approach to EFL teaching and teacher-training in order to shed light at the interplay between CLIL instruction and the VET context. The paper opens with highlighting the main tenets of CLIL and VET training and signals the former's origins, basic components and instructional guidelines. It then progresses towards reflectivity as a component of pre-service teacher training, which can (or should) resurface as a token of the reflective teacher-practitioner. The next section (Method and instrument) constitutes, together with the tool in the Appendix, the principal contribution of the paper in that it introduces an approach which may become a blueprint for conducting a reflective analysis of one's CLIL/VET teaching. In doing so, the section accrues dimensions of reflective (self-)observation and includes: language (and language learning strategies in the context of lexical update; also the ARC division of types of language), content (and the relation between content and different types of language: BICS vs. CALP). The aim of the paper is not only to introduce the instrument but at the same time to bring together notions well-established in mainstream EFL/CLIL instruction and seek their application in the VET context.

**Słowa kluczowe:** podejście refleksyjne, zintegrowane nauczanie przedmiotowo-językowe, kształcenie zawodowe.

**Streszczenie:** Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przywołanie tak zwanego podejścia refleksyjnego w kontekście nauczania języka angielskiego jako obcego dla celów zawodowych. Punktem wyjścia dla poniższych rozważań jest scharakteryzowanie zintegrowanego nauczania przedmiotowo-językowego (nauczanie typu CLIL), w tym przedstawienie jego głównych założeń (np. koncepty „4C” oraz „3A” profesor Do Coyle), oraz przypomnienie podstawowych cech kształcenia zawodowego (kształcenie typu VET). Część teoretyczna kończy się wprowadzeniem do podejścia refleksyjnego jako elementu konstytutywnego kształcenia nauczycielskiego (nauczyciela-glottodyaktyka) czy późniejszej pracy nauczyciela-praktyka. Główna część artykułu

poświęcona jest opisowi narzędzia refleksyjnego (*vide*: załącznik). Stanowi to przyczynek do przywołania pewnych zagadnień, obecnych w głównym nurcie nauczania języka angielskiego jako języka obcego (w tym, w nauczaniu zintegrowanym) i zaadaptowania ich do nauczania języka dla celów zawodowych. W podsumowaniu zwraca się uwagę na dynamiczną naturę zaproponowanego narzędzia refleksyjnego i zachęca się do przystosowywania go do własnych potrzeb nauczyciela-praktyka poprzez usunięcie bądź uwzględnienie aspektów, które stanowić będą podstawę konkretnej refleksji czy konkretnej obserwacji.

**Theoretical background.** Due to considerations of space, the following part will concentrate only on three notions signaled in the title of the paper: on CLIL, on VET and on reflectivity in teaching and teacher training; the remaining notions shall be discussed in the further section (see: Method and instrument).

**CLIL.** Despite the fact that Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) as an approach or style of foreign language instruction has been around for centuries (for instance, see reference to the Sumerians in Mehisto, Marsh, Frigols, 2008), officially the term was introduced in 1994 (see *Council Resolution of March 31 1995 on improving...; Country Reports Poland*, 2006; Roda, 2007). This type of provision may be defined in a range of ways, most of which stress the interplay between language instruction and content instruction (cf. also Dalton-Puffer, 2007; Graaff *et al.*, 2007; Pawlak, 2010).

- [CLIL is] a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language. (Mehisto, Marsh, Frigols, 2008: 9)
- [CLIL is an approach] which seeks to develop proficiency in both the non-language subject and the language with or through which it is taught. ([www.eurydice.org](http://www.eurydice.org))
- [CLIL is] an approach in which pupils learn a subject through the medium of a foreign language. ([http://ec.europa.eu/.../clil\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/.../clil_en.html))

The above definitions all seem to emphasize two elements: the content subject and language (hence “dual-focus”), whereas there seems to be one more strand that pervades the current debate on CLIL provision, namely integration.

In my personal view, the ideal CLIL provision would have a triple focus, instead of the commonly mentioned dual focus: we teach the content subject, we teach the language AND we teach about the language. The last proviso has been implicit in most CLIL-oriented writings. It has to do with reflecting on L2 structure, raising the learners’ awareness of their L1, comparing L1 and L2 knowledge and expectations, as well as inductively or deductively arriving at rule formulations of non-trivial predictive power. (Gozdawa-Gołębiowski 2008: 9)

This idea is reiterated in Gozdawa-Gołębiowski (2010), where a question is posed concerning the role of focus-on-form in CLIL instruction.

CLIL instruction is traditionally depicted by means of the following three canonical distinctions. The CLIL Compendium, a European-based project, identifies five dimensions of CLIL (after <http://www.clilcompendium.com>): CULTIX, the culture dimension, aims at “build[ing] intercultural knowledge and understanding, [at] develop[ing] intercultural

communication skills, [at] learn[ing] about specific neighbouring countries/regions and/or minority groups, [and at] introduce[ing] the wider cultural context”; ENTIX, the environment dimension, aims at “prepar[ing] for internationalisation, specifically EU integration [...] [and at] enhance[ing] school profile”; LANTIX, the language dimension, aims at “improve[ing] overall target language competence, [at] develop[ing] oral communication skills, [at] deepen[ing] awareness of both mother tongue and target language, [at] develop[ing] plurilingual interests and attitudes, [and at] introduce a target language”; CONTIX, the content dimension, aims at “provid[ing] opportunities to study content through different perspectives, [at] access[ing] subject-specific target language terminology, [and at] prepar[ing] for future studies and/or working life”; LEARNTIX, the learning dimension, “complement[s] individual learning strategies, diversif[ies] methods and forms of classroom practice, [and] increase[s] learner motivation”.

Specifically, the final two dimensions (CONTIX and LEARNTIX) offer insight into VET-type of instruction and life-long learning (LLL).

The second distinction, listing four key principles for effective CLIL practice is known as the so called 4Cs (Coyle, 2006): Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture/Citizenship. It is argued that any successful CLIL lesson should combine these four elements (adapted from <http://www.cilt.org.uk>)

- Content – progression in knowledge, skills and understanding related to specific elements of a defined curriculum.
- Communication – using language to learn – whilst learning to use language. The key is interaction, NOT reaction.
- 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.

The third distinction in CLIL provision is called The Language Triptych (Coyle, 2005), or the 3As. While the 4Cs provides a useful guide for the overall planning of a unit of work, the 3As tool can be used for more detailed lesson planning; the tool operates in three stages and can be used with specific content:

**Table 1. The Language Triptych (adapted from Coyle, 2005)**

Stage 1	Analyze content for the language <i>of</i> learning.
Stage 2	Add to content language <i>for</i> learning.
Stage 3	Apply to content language <i>through</i> learning.

What the 3As tool enables is linguistic progression involving both language learning and language using. To subconclude, CLIL provision offers an interrelated focus on content (knowledge and skills), communication (using and learning the language), together with a focus on cognition and culture. CLIL provision is intensive, (supposedly) communicatively authentic, with the primacy of the content subject above

the target language, and (especially, at beginner levels) more challenging cognitively than linguistically (see also section: Method and instrument).

**VET.** Dubbed one of the “key element[s] of lifelong learning [LLL] systems”, vocational education and training (VET) is defined by the European Commission as a factor which “equip[s] citizens with knowledge, skills and competences required in particular occupations and on the labour market” ([https://ec.europa/.../vet\\_en](https://ec.europa/.../vet_en)). Depending on the time of implementation and educational segment, VET is divided into initial (I-VET) and continuing (C-VET); the former is usually “carried out at upper secondary level before students begin working life”, while the latter “takes place after initial education and training, or after beginning working life. It aims to upgrade knowledge, help citizens acquire new skills, retrain and further their personal and professional development.” ([https://ec.europa/.../vet\\_en](https://ec.europa/.../vet_en)).

**Reflectivity.** The reflective practitioner is primarily attained through the process of teacher training. When discussing pre-service teacher training, one can consider a number of models for developing and arriving at professional competence. Wallace (1991; after Bailey, 2006: 152) identifies three major approaches to training: the craft model (involving study with master and learning through demonstration and instruction, then practice, then professional competence), the applied science model (involving scientific knowledge, its application, its results conveyed to trainees, then practice, then professional competence), and the reflective model (involving received knowledge and previous experiential knowledge, then practice, then reflection, then professional competence).



Fig. 1. McTargert and Kemmins' reflective process (as cited in Bartlell, 1990: 209; after Gnawali, 2008: 70)

The task of the reflective practitioner “is to make this tacit or implicit knowledge [that any teacher possesses] explicit by reflection on action, by constant generating questions and checking our emerging theories with both personal past experience and with the reflections of others” (Williams and Burden, 1997: 54). This can be realized though employing various models of the reflective process, such as depicted in Fig.1; see also alternative models: Kolb’s learning cycle; Scrivener’s experiential learning cycle (Scrivener, 2005); Lewis’ O-H-E [observe-hypothesize-experiment] cycle (Lewis, 1993).

What is important to bear in mind while considering such models as in Fig. 1 is that they are both cyclic and spiral, i.e. they appear in step-after-step fashion and they re-appear in time, one after the other. Thus, as a method of (self-)reflection they may become useful models of professional development.

**Method and instrument.** The instrument presented in the Appendix (“The CLIL/VET Instruction Observation/Reflection Sheet”) may be employed in two modes: as a straightforward observation instrument, or as a self-reflection instrument. The following section offers a rationale behind its subsequent parts and at the same time offers insights into the nature of CLIL/VET provision; thus, it plays a dual role – that of a guidebook over the territory of teaching practice and reflection, and that of a tentative catalogue of CLIL/VET good practice.

The opening section is dedicated to language systems and comprises: phonetics, syntax, lexis, functions, culture. Starting one’s reflection/observation with phonetics is mandated by the fact that this area is often neglected in the language classroom; at the same time, this is an area which is critical for intercomprehension, especially in the ELF (English as *lingua franca*) context (cf. Jenkins, 2000; Seidlhofer, 2001; Walker, 2001). Next, there are functions; again an area often overlooked in a conventional CLIL/VET lesson, where typically much greater attention is placed on (technical / content-specific) vocabulary, not on developing linguistic fluency. Finally, the list closes with culture – in line with Do Coyle’s 4Cs – and may encompass such aspects as interpersonal experience, intrapersonal introspection, technical organization or content-specific interlingual synonyms. Also within this focus on language, specific attention is devoted to vocabulary, not due to its exceptional significance, but due to its ever-presence in the CLIL/VET teaching process (“if it is there to stay, let it be done properly”). Here are several dichotomies which are important to consider while teaching vocabulary: (i) individual words vs. collocations (while vocabulary presentation and/or practice usually takes place on individual lexical items, it is beneficial for learners’ production and reception to present lexis in collocations or colligations (cf. Lewis, 1993); thus, it is important to train learners with respect to VLS, Vocabulary Learning Strategies (cf. Laufer, 2003; Meara, 1980; Nassaji, 2003); (ii) content-specific vs. General English vs. academic vocabulary (the initial dyad seems intuitively clear and relatively easy to control in a CLIL/VET context; the last component, academic vocabulary, encompassing lexical items and chunks typical of the genre yet independent of the field

of expertise seems much more difficult to introduce in the classroom); (iii) presentation vs. opportunities to practice (what is important here is that presentations need not be teacher-centered and may be student led in the form of peer-tutoring or the flipped-classroom format, and practice may range in form from more guided to freer, with emphasis on the comparative); (iv) raising awareness of vocabulary (*awareness* signifies here a whole range of teacher-initiated or learned-generated activities whose general nature is inductive and whose ultimate aim may be described as sensitization to language regularity of form or meaning).

The next two sections – Types of tasks and Language – partly overlap (I will discuss cognitive challenge and BICS/CALP together). Variety may be interpreted through the lens of M.I.; Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences may be surprisingly well suitable not only for multisensory teaching of young learners but also for advancing memory strategies in late teenage and young adult learners, though it needs to be admitted that the pilot study has not attested many instances of M.I. during in-class instruction. Visual organizers / infographics can be described as “simple drawings or formats used [for] represent[ing] information and [for] show[ing] relationships between ideas (<http://faculty.bucks.edu/specpop/visual-org.htm>); these include: Venn diagrams, trees, braces, flow charts, circles and double bubbles. Since their purpose is to improve the depiction of (new) information, infographics or visual organizers may foster the transition from LOTS to HOTS (Lower *versus* Higher Order Thinking Skills), may foster the stimulation of the latter, and may be employed in CLIL/VET instruction. Infographics are said to be particularly well suited for 21<sup>st</sup> c. learning, since they may increase digital age literacy (or digital (near-)nativeness of our learners), effective communication, inventive thinking and high productivity (Ann Dalhman, Phd, October 2017, personal communication). Visual organizers and HOTS lead us directly to [±] cognitive challenge of CLIL/VET activities.

The interplay between language and cognition in the (FL) educational context can best be captured the Jim Cummins' (1984) notions of BICS *vs.* CALP (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills *versus* Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency). These two types of language both may develop in the language classroom, though while the former seems to grow more instinctively on regular day-to-day communication, the latter requires more effort, more practice and more deliberate attention. The [±] cognitive challenge dimension may be plotted against the [±] contextual dimension (as in Fig. 2).

From the Social Constructivism standpoint (Williams, Burden, 1997), it is the teacher's role to facilitate cognitive challenge. When considered from the perspective of CLIL/VET provision, „[e]ffective content learning has to take account not only of the defined knowledge and skills within the curriculum or thematic plan, but also how to apply these through creative thinking, problem solving and cognitive challenge” (Coyle, Hood, Marsh, 2010: 29). In their 2010 monograph on CLIL, in chapter four entitled „The CLIL Tool Kit: Transforming theory into practice”, Coyle, Hood, Marsh (2010) introduce a certain paradigm for developing successful didactic sequences (see Fig.3).

<b>Cognitively undemanding / BICS</b> simple language, everyday structures, familiar topics			
<b>Context-embedded</b> face-to-face, gestures, concrete objects of reference	<i>for instance: an everyday face-to-face conversation</i>	<i>for instance: a telephone conversation</i>	<b>Context-reduced</b> lack of non-verbal cues, abstract language
	<i>for instance: demonstrations, experiments</i>	<i>for instance: writing a standardized test</i>	
<b>Cognitively demanding / CALP</b> field specific vocabulary, complex structures new ideas			

Fig. 2. Types of BICS/CALP tasks in FL instruction (adapted from Bilash, n.d.)

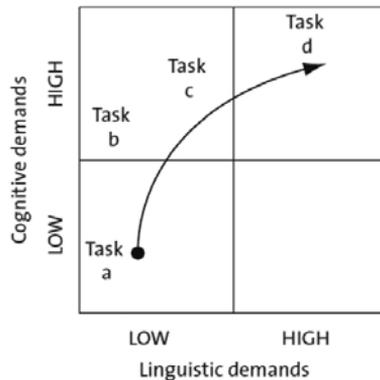


Fig. 3. Auditing tasks using the CLIL Matrix (adapted from Cummins, 1984; after Coyle, Hood, Marsh (2010: 68)

While Fig.2 may be interpreted longitudinally as capturing types of tasks over the period of proficiency development of a particular learner (where BICS would naturally precede the appearance of CALP), Fig.3 may be employed as offering a blueprint for planning and/or evaluating a CLIL/VET teaching sequence. And so, one would quite expectedly proceed from tasks which offer lower linguistic demands on learners to those where the linguistic expectations can be higher; what is interesting are tasks “b” and “c”, where the cognitive demand is increasingly higher than the linguistic demand – this may be obtained for instance via employing scaffolding in the form of visual organizers.

The last aspect on the observation/reflection instrument in the domain of Language is Jim Scrivener’s (2005) concept of ARC (Authentic, Restricted, Clarification). The triad is often juxtaposed with PPP (Presentation, Practice, Production), a traditional approach to (FL) instruction, the latter being criticized for its limitations and counterproductivity (Nunan, 2004; Skehan, 1996; Willis, 1996; Willis, Willis, 2007). Scrivener’s acronym is described as follows: Authentic language stands of the entire language that is at the disposal of the learner at a given point in time; Restricted language represents language that is deliberately limited to a certain area (Scrivener uses the metaphor of a slice

of a pizza); Clarification denotes any use of *metalinguage*, i.e. using language to talk about language (Scrivener uses the metaphor of a magnifying lens). As a tool for lesson planning or conducting *post-hoc* reflection, ARC is non-prescriptive – contrary to PPP – and offers an opportunity to scrutinize the type of language that has appeared or will appear in the lesson.

**Conclusions.** It needs to be stated that the posited “CLIL/VET Instruction Observation/ Reflection Sheet” introduced in this paper is postulative in nature – it may be treated as an impulse for adopting a reflective approach to one’s own teaching. As such, it catalogues the potential areas of reflection, including – in line with postulates of CLIL provision – content and language, cognition and culture, emotions and types of activities. At the same time, the dimensions of reflection are amenable to change and selection, i.e. the teacher-practitioner is free to remove or add factors that undergo reflection, thus increasing or limiting the dimensions of observation – honing the tool to their particular needs. This makes the posited instrument a truly dynamic tool of in-class *post-hoc* analysis.

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## Appendix: CLIL/VET instruction observation/reflection sheet

### CLIL/VET Instruction Observation/Reflection Sheet

Grade:	No. of Ss:	Teacher:	Date:
Topic of the lesson:			Subject:

#### Reference to language systems:

area	occurrence	comments
phonetic	1-2-3-4-5	
syntactic	1-2-3-4-5	
lexical	1-2-3-4-5	
functional	1-2-3-4-5	
cultural	1-2-3-4-5	

#### Lexis:

individual words 1-2-3-4-5	collocations 1-2-3-4-5
content-specific 1-2-3-4-5	General English 1-2-3-4-5 academic 1-2-3-4-5
presentation 1-2-3-4-5	opportunities to practice 1-2-3-4-5 raising awareness of 1-2-3-4-5

#### Types of tasks:

variety 1-2-3-4-5	(cognitive) challenging 1-2-3-4-5
visual organizers 1-2-3-4-5	M.I. 1-2-3-4-5

#### Language:

BICS 1-2-3-4-5	CALP 1-2-3-4-5	
	Teacher (PL / EN)	Learners (PL / EN)
<b>A</b> [authentic] 1-2-3-4-5		
<b>R</b> [restricted] 1-2-3-4-5		
<b>C</b> [clarification] 1-2-3-4-5		

– THIS IS THE END OF THE INSTRUMENT –

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