

Reading Aloud in English and Discussing the Discovery of America: One CLIL Lesson Plan from a Double-focused Integrated Course for Primary School

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Abstract

Content and language integrated Learning (CLIL) today is often taken as a mainstream in world second language education (ESL) albeit typically optional than obligatory. In Russia the CLIL methodology is not widespread yet but steadily gains popularity. The article presents one lesson plan, “Meet Christopher Columbus”, from an integrated double focused course for 4th grade children devoted to reading fluency and world history. The author undertakes a theoretical and empirical approach.

The main educational resource of the lesson is the well-known American poem for kids, “In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue”, by Jean Marzollo (Marzollo, 1948). The lesson goals are to improve oral reading technique and discuss some essential questions about the discovery of America. The lesson framework is based on Do Coyle’s 4C’s model (Coyle, 1999, 2006). Scaffolding strategies include some visuals in the PowerPoint (pictures and videos), translanguaging and codeswitching when necessary during the lesson.

The lesson had been piloted in Ekaterinburg municipal school №171 in 2021 and proved to be effective in boosting self-esteem in reading and motivating children to learn more about historical figures and events.

1. Introduction

Content and Language Integrated Learning appeared as one of the answers to the great educational challenges of the end of the 20th century. The crucial global changes at the turn of the millennium that altered the face of humanity made people revise a considerable proportion of strategic guidelines about the pedagogic objectives for a new generation. A flexible approach, described as a dual-focus methodology in which content and language are learned together in an integrated way (Marsh et al., 2001) that could combine various educational aims in different models, has begun to win teachers’ minds and hearts all over the world. Today CLIL has become a driving force in various types of mainstream education and is seen by many as the best practice for the future, though no unanimity exists with regard to the linguistic competencies that result from CLIL and an overall picture of the long-term effects of CLIL is lacking (Goris et al., 2019). The Eurydice report “Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe” noted that CLIL increased learners’ exposure to the language they learn without taking the additional time from the curriculum but it was not very widespread yet (Eurydice Brief, 2017). Spain is probably the most experienced European country in CLIL application with government support, while in other countries it is realized systematically but offered as an option (Cimermanová, 2021).

In Russia, CLIL seems to develop largely in a similar way. On the one hand, the very idea of subject integration and deep learning stimulating development of cross-curricular skills and functional literacy are officially recommended by the Federal Public Education Standard both for Primary and Secondary education. The majority of English language students' books that are used in Russian schools contain cross-cutting themes yet confined to language learning purposes. On the other hand, several CLIL projects that were realized in different regions over the past fifteen years were localized and small scale. For example, there is a municipal language integrated school "Duplex" in Perm (Sokolovskaya & Nabatova, 2015). Other than that, in 2017 the implementation of an integrated course for first grade children in Togliatti was reported (Gudkova & Iashina, 2017). Some CLIL lesson plans of teachers in service are occasionally published on different educational sites. CLIL in the Secondary school has become a research topic for several Master's degree theses during the last five years. Thus, the promotion of the approach is expanding, which Maria Ellison describes as initiatives made both at ministerial and grassroots levels (Ellison, Net(Working), 2018).

2. The Integration of L2 Reading Fluency and History in Primary School

The choice of two priority areas for integration was determined by some essential features of primary school curriculum in Russia. The first one is the widespread problem of poor reading skills among Russian students. Except English classes most of them encounter English written words in computer games, labels and signboards. The insufficiency is made worse by lack of time for reading tasks during English lessons and the differences between languages. For instance, in the Russian language the words are read according to rules and in the English language there are a lot of exceptions. Besides, in Russian there are no letter clusters. Russian children often need auditory memory fixation of English words as they can be taken as meaningless (Milrood, 2017). Additionally, it should be kept in mind that reading aloud has a special value for beginners for control and self-control. The optimal proportion of reading aloud and silent reading for young learners is 90 to 10 per cent (Solovova, 2005). So reading aloud becomes an important educational purpose that needs additional attention and practice.

History as the second integration branch was chosen because of great opportunities of language integration with citizenship education. Another reason was the coincidence of the subjects in the basic 4th grade curriculum. The last year of primary education is the time of the propaedeutic history course called "The world around". The simultaneous learning of history during double focused and standard lessons can create synergy that also contributes to the CLIL lesson effectiveness.

3. The CLIL lesson model

A well-known inspirer of CLIL, Do Coyle, says that the major strength of CLIL-based teaching is the great flexibility of the model: it can easily be adapted to suit the needs of all stakeholders involved (Coyle, 2005). In 2009, P. Ball presented the classification of CLIL models including a strong version (hard) of CLIL, a weak version (soft) of CLIL and some interim variants (Ball, 2009). Our CLIL lesson model can be classified as a soft CLIL type, in which language classes are based on thematic units. According to

the classification of the British Council's Profile Report on Bilingual Education (English) in Poland (Marsh et al., 2008), our variant is "Limited English language medium instruction, with L1-L2 code switching".

4. The Description of a CLIL Lesson - the Framework, the Participants, the Procedure

This CLIL lesson is a part of a double-focused course devoted to reading fluency and introduction to world history. Ten authentic poems of British and American writers concerning the most important periods of world history became the content base of the course. The target audience of the course were the students of the 4th grade of municipal school № 171 from Ekaterinburg. The course was validated in the 2020-2021 academic year and now is being finalized.

The lesson "Meet Christopher Columbus" was based upon the well-known poem for children "In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue" by Jean Marzollo (1948). The choice of the poem stemmed from the importance of the event for world history, the vocabulary in the poem, and its length adequacy for the age of the participants. The proportion of new words for the students was up to ten per cent. As for the grammar structure, i.e. past tense, it was also familiar to the students. The poem is meaningful, authentic and challenging as it shows one point of view for an essential and controversial event in American history. The poem consists of 22 short lines.

The outcomes of the lesson were presented separately by language and content components. By the end of the lesson, the children were able to give the date of discovery of America, to define the character of Christopher Columbus and to briefly describe his voyage to America (the purposes, the reasons, the route, the means of transport, its length, conditions, results). Language outcomes suggest confident reading of the names and the words, connected to the topics: history, traveling and the Age of Discovery, automatised correct reading of the regular and irregular verbs and letter clusters such as *ai, ay, oo, ight, wh, ng, qu*.

The lesson was piloted as an additional English class for 13 children, including one disabled student as the school provides inclusive education.

5. Methodology of the Lesson

The methodological base of the lesson took into account the main CLIL framework for developing CLIL materials (including Mohan's knowledge structures, Do Coyle's 4Cs and matrix 3As planning tools, revised Bloom's taxonomy) that is used now for kindergarten and primary education (Garcia, 2013), as well as some reading strategies determined the choice of the exercise.

The aims of the lesson were developed according to the 4C concept: content, communication, cognition and culture aims. The lesson components were planned for a particular class. Thus, content aims were set in accordance with the student' age and overall mental level of the class. The communication aims were met by teamwork and peer support. The cognition element was realized by means of pictures and questions which stimulated a discussion. Culture aims were connected with a multiethnic class that consisted of children from mixed cultural and religious backgrounds.

With the use of Do Coyle’s Language Tryptych, the poem vocabulary and classroom language were divided into 3 parts - Language of learning (Analyzing), Language for learning (Adding) and Language through learning (Applying) (Table 1).

Language of learning	Language for learning (classroom language)	Language through learning
ocean, ship, Spain, night, day, compass, go, sail, sailor, crew, tree, sand, rock, land, natives, spice, gold, made, again, bright, brave, trip	settle down please, pay attention to, choose your variant, compare, you’ve worked very well today, well done.	a voyage, to discover, to change, dangerous, pride, Arakawa Indians, The Age of Discovery, The Bahamas, Siberia.

Table 1 Division of the lexical content according to 3As by Coyle

The exercises were structured according to Mohan’s and Bloom’s algorithms: from familiar language and content to new content and new language, from knowledge/remembering, comprehension/understanding, analysis/analyzing to evaluation/evaluating.

The oral reading skills development was based on BDA Strategies (before reading, while reading and after reading tasks) and some specific techniques. The training reading model was adopted from L. Urubkova (1980). She underlines that effectiveness of reading in class depends on a certain order of tasks: tone marking of the text, whole-class reading, reading in pairs, whispering reading and individual declamation. The whole class and pair reading were conducted by means of a wide range of practices: Neurological Impress method by Heckelman (Heckelman, 1986), 4/3/2 method by Nation (Nation 2009), some exercises from speed reading technique suggested by I. Fedorenko (Fedorenko, 1978) – “the tug reading” when the teacher read the text with different speeds and the students followed him with pointing the necessary line, “interrupted reading” when reading was stopped by a teacher and the students needed to find the line to continue reading as quickly as possible, tasks for peripheral vision improvement.

Ultimately, the CLIL lesson consisted of the following parts:

- 1) Before reading activities: checking students’ previous knowledge, revising the vocabulary connected to the target topic, historical context immersion (supported by PowerPoint presentation) and work with phonics and peripheral vision.
- 2) Musical pause.
- 3) While reading activities: listening to the teacher’s reading, whole-class reading, reading in pairs, individual whisper reading, creative declamation.
- 4) After reading activities: the discussion of stimulating questions with short assessment tasks.

6. Implementation

1) Before reading activities

As a brainstorming task the students were given a picture of an old compass and had to guess the topic of the lesson. The warming up activity was a game in which the children had to choose one word from the pair (coffee or tea, America or Australia, ship or car, sail or swim, Spain or India, go or run, sand or rock, hot or cool and etc.). The presentation gave students some facts about Columbus and the idea of the Earth's sphericity was discussed. For peripheral vision improvement, lists of the basic lesson words were shown up quickly on the screen. The task was to find a letter or word.

2) For a musical pause the students listened to the recording of the poem and repeated the teacher's movements to react to verbal input (TPR).

3) While-reading activities

"In 1492" poem performance was done in groups: every crew had the name of Columbus' ships - Santa Maria, Nina and Pinta. The students turned their chairs into ships and presented their reading while standing on them.

4) After reading activities

The students tried to identify words from the poem that were meaningful for the historical context. One more challenging task was to compare Columbus discovery with Ermak Siberia conquest (the regional history component). The key question for the final discussion was "Can one man change history?".

7. Scaffolding

The term *scaffolding* appeared in the educational sense about fifty years ago (Mohan, 2020) and meant interactional instructional relationship between adults and learners that "enables a child or novice to solve a problem" (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976). Some researchers connect the term with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (Ellison, 2018). Anyway, today it is an essential part of any CLIL project (Meyer, 2013) as it is a possible way of overcoming most CLIL challenges especially in the primary school.

During the lesson, further scaffolding techniques were used:

- PowerPoint presentation
- handouts with text
- inspiring pictures (Columbus's ships)
- comprehension breaks
- vocabulary key (list of irregular verbs on the desk)
- translanguaging and codeswitching during the discussion
- "huddles" trick, with each group sitting next to one another to discuss the poem with peers to make the meaning of all words clear, before performing the poem

8. Criteria Assessment

The question of assessment for CLIL lessons remains open. In the recent CLIL assessment pilot study, G. Laborda states that brief research on assessment in Content Language Integrated Learning testifies to a lack of references that specifically address this topic (Laborda, 2020). Concluding that efforts should be made to ensure the right combination of language and content in assessment practices, the author calls the CLIL assessment a neglected area and opens a line for future research. As Ellison underlines, the focus of assessment in any given context will be determined by the main goals of the program (Ellison, 2017)

Taking into account such a specific situation with an atheoretical base, the cornerstone for our assessment criteria became the equal attention to content and language segments that were evaluated separately. The content segment learning was scored on the basis of discussion participation: 2 points for asking and answering the questions, 1 point for answering the questions and zero points for non-participation. The language learning criteria consisted of several criteria items: accurate reading (0-2 points depending on mistakes, reading speed (0-2 points compared with reading in the mother-tongue), expression (0-2 points) (Table 2).

Criteria	2 points	1 points	0 points
Content	active participation in discussion	partial participation in discussion	non - participation
Language (reading fluency)	4-5 reading mistakes	less than 10 reading mistakes	more than 10 mistakes
Expression	+		-
Tempo	Comparable with the tempo of reading in the mother tongue	Slower than the tempo of reading in the mother tongue	Much slower than the tempo of reading in the mother tongue

Table 2. Assessment criteria for CLIL lesson

6-8 points matched the mark “5”, 3-5 points matched the mark “4”, 2 and less points were not evaluated as educational purposes were not achieved.

9. Results and Reflection

The lesson was a success as the children were active and inspired by it. The content and language aims were reached in general. It is important to mention that we did not use direct translation of the poem and the context helped the students to catch the meaning. The discussion was interesting to children and contrary views were expressed. The assessment showed the following results (Fig.1)

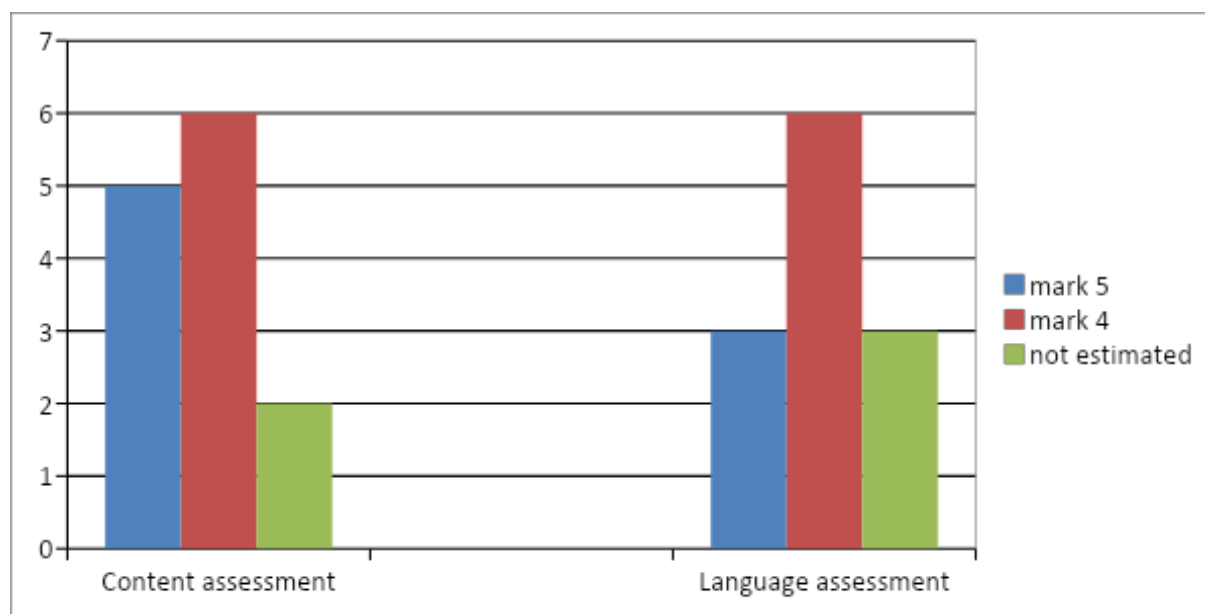


Figure 1. The assessment results of the CLIL lesson

But there obviously were some weak points. Regrettably, there were mistakes in reading words that had been revised before the activity. Apparently, extra time and tasks are necessary for the pre-reading stage. And there were children who proved that they needed more individual work. It seems that a mind map or fact box could be a good improvement for the content aims.

10. Conclusion

The preliminary results of CLIL approach implementation in a Russian primary school show a great potential for motivating both students and teachers. The lesson “Meet Columbus” with the integration of history and the English language was a positive experience. History context immersion and reading aloud mutually influenced each other making the learning more meaningful and lasting.

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