

CLIL at the GHWRS Wolfegg

The GHWRS Wolfegg is a small Primary and Secondary School in the South of Germany. The school has 3 different schoolhouses. There is a small school in the hamlet of Rötenbach with 2 classes (grades 1 and 2). There is the big house with 5 classes of the Secondary School and 2 Primary school classes (grades 3 and 4). In the old Grundschulhaus there are 4 classes (grades 1-4). The school has got about 260 pupils from the age of 6 to 15/16.

Wolfegg is a little village in a very rural area with dairy farms. Some pupils still come from working farms but most of the parents work in the cities of the region.

4 years ago I started to use CLIL in the English lessons. In the Grundschulhaus this term grades 1-4 have CLIL –modules.

I understand CLIL (content and language integrated learning)in the following way: CLIL means new content is taught in a foreign language (English). The foreign language is not the content of the lesson but the tool with which the pupils learn a new content about a topic. I do CLIL – modules in MNK(MNK = Mankind, Nature and Culture). This subject includes Art.

Our pupils have 2 lessons of English a week. The teacher can either do a little bit of English every day or do 2 lessons a week. In the Grundschulhaus we do 2 lessons a week, taught either by the class teacher or the language teacher.

According to the curriculum in grades 1 and 2 there is a lot of oral input: stories, songs, poems, picture books ... There is no reading or writing. At the end of the school year the pupils get a report in which English can be mentioned.

In grade 3 and 4 the pupils start to read and write (= mostly copying). There are no written tests. There should be 6 oral tests. The teacher does not write any marks – only comments – under the different forms of assessments. The pupils get marks in their half term and end of the year reports. The pupils have a textbook and a workbook.

Besides the traditional language lessons I teach CLIL- modules from time to time. A module consists of 2 – 8 or more lessons, depending on the topic. The topics come from MNK (science and art).

In addition to these modules I do some art lessons in English in my own class.

When the students from the University of Education were at the school for their training, grades 2 and 3 had 1 CLIL lesson a week. The second lesson was either a language lesson or we continued with the CLIL - topic.

Topics: 5 Senses, teeth, blood circulation, water, plants, healthy food, life cycle of the butterfly and of the frog, weather and clothes, from seed to sunflower, about the forest, animals (dog, cat,...) different art lessons

In CLIL lessons the focus is on the content and the methodology of the MNK subject and not on the methodology of language tuition. This means no vocabulary training (which we should not do in Primary school at all), no pronunciation training ... The fluency in communication is more important than accuracy. This does not mean that the teacher does not correct mistakes, but this will be done only when necessary and in a very gentle way.

The central theme in the German curriculum for learning a foreign language is to encourage pupils to be open minded about learning a foreign language through a lot of input, through playing with language and – this is where CLIL comes into it – through combining topic with language, wherever possible. Learning language in connection with a topic (content) seems to be very effective.

CLIL and the difficulties with assessment

The conditions for language acquisition at German schools have undergone drastic changes over the last few years. Foreign language learning has become part of the Elementary school curriculum in all sixteen states of Germany from grade 3 onwards.

Baden-Württemberg is one out of three federal states in which foreign language instruction, mostly English or French, begins in grade 1. The pupils are about 6 years old. Primary schools ends after grade 4.

In Baden-Württemberg English was introduced about 5 years ago.

The main aim of teaching English is according to the curriculum to gain speaking competence and confidence.

In the pupil's timetable there are 2 English lessons in a week, each lasting 45 minutes. When English was introduced there were and still are 2 approaches to teaching:

Either you do a little bit of English every day or you teach the 2 lessons in a week.

English should be taught by the class teacher, who quite often is not a language teacher.

During the lessons mother tongue should not be used by the teacher.

Basic principles of early language teaching in Germany are:

1. the use of action- orientated methods
2. the topic- and situation- orientated teaching
3. the integrative language learning which means the foreign language is integrated in the teaching of other subjects and in content based instruction.

In grade 1 and 2 the main focus is on:

listening,

understanding of information, situations and different kind of texts (stories, songs, poems...),

combining everyday knowledge with the actual situation and respond to it,

talking about themselves and their families,

knowing little rhymes/songs by heart and answering closed questions like:

What colour is...?

At the end of grade 1 the pupils get a written report where English should be mentioned and at the end of grade 2 they get a written report, where again English should be mentioned, with marks in German and mathematics.

In grade 3 and 4 reading and writing is introduced. But writing only means copying, labelling or filling gaps. The pupils should not write something of their own.

There are no written tests like there will be in secondary schools. To complete written tests is not allowed. (Verordnung über die Schülerbeurteilung in Grund- und Sonderschulen §2 Abs.4)

There are only comments written above the pupils work.

In grade 3 and 4 there should be 6 oral assessments. The main instrument of assessing is regular observation of the pupils. There can be oral comprehension tests. But the teacher should not create a testing situation which means the teacher should not carry out a formal test.

At the end of grade 3 and 4 the pupils will get marks in English in their school reports.

Criteria for language assessment are – according to our curriculum:

- + pronunciation,
- + vocabulary,
- + competence of grammar and
- + the actual use of language.

Main parts of assessment are:

- + motivating speech tasks like "What is your favourite free time activity?"
- + arranged and well planned occasions for speaking like role play, short dialogues, reading out , presentations, short descriptions and finally free speech.
- + writing down what the pupils are saying.

These are the guidelines for language teaching in Baden-Württemberg. The good news are: There are no guidelines for CLIL teaching at the moment – only a lot of problems and questions:

Although it can be argued that the advantage of content-based teaching is to allow children to familiarize quickly with the foreign language, its realisation has not yet been satisfactorily carried out.

A number of problems might account for this:

- + the lack of CLIL methods adequate to Elementary school
- + the lack of teacher training courses that focus on CLIL
- + the lack of adequate teaching materials for young learners
- + the lack of instruction time in the timetables.

In the daily work at school the following questions come to my mind:

How can I assess content and language- and get marks which are "objective – unbiased" and "transparent" for the pupils and the parents.

Where do I lay the emphasis on:

- * is it on language – does the pupils understand? Can the pupils react to what I said? Can the pupils produce chunks of language ... or
- * is it on content – did the pupils understand the topic, the problem? Did the pupils find a solution? Did the pupils know where and how to get information? Were the pupils able to carry out an experiment?

There are more questions:

What do I assess? – language knowledge, content knowledge or the pupil's world knowledge.

How will content and language fit together?

Do I allow the pupils to use mother tongue?

How important is the correct spelling?

How can I assess when the pupil's reading and writing capabilities are so limited and do not fit the level of the content?

How can I assess the learning process?/ Can I assess the learning process?

One option is to look very carefully at the tasks we use in other subjects, too

To assess content and language we can use:

- + drawings
- + colouring a picture while listening to a description
- + the combination of drawing and writing or speaking
- + all kind of presentations like posters, little booklets, acting out
- + different types of tasks like : fill the gap
 - colour in correctly
 - connect pictures and words/sentences
 - label pictures
 - put in the right order (pictures or sentences)
 - listen and tick/number

Having talked about assessment to colleagues from Spain and Great Britain I recognized that the difficulties with assessment lay in our way of organizing the teaching of English.

I can teach English as a language teacher or a class teacher.

As a language teacher assessment is not really a overwhelming problem. I can use the whole variety of assessment tasks and solve the problem by doing language modules and CLIL modules.

The difficulties arise when I am the class teacher, which means I teach language, science and the whole range of subjects. Teaching a certain subject like science in English causes the conflict:

I have to teach content on a certain level, use methods belonging to the subject, write tests and give marks to the pupils. Science is one important mark in the end of the year report.

My very personal conclusion is at the moment:

CLIL stands for Content and Language integrated learning – Therefore I try to create assessments in which there are content based tasks, language based tasks and sometimes it is a combination of content and language based tasks in mother tongue (technical terms or tasks which include difficult explanations) – and here the pupils can switch codes.

I will always want to know:

Have the pupils understood the content?

Have they learnt the words/ structures to understand the content?

Can they talk about the content either in mother tongue or in the foreign language?

Evaluation CLIL

The evaluation was done through interviews, questionnaires and feed backs.

(smiling or not smiling faces, short sentences, drawings ...).

After 4 years of using the CLIL methodology at the primary school I am still convinced that it is a very good way to teach a foreign language.

I made the following observations:

- the pupils were very open to CLIL.
- they enjoyed the lessons.
- they were not afraid of using an English word.
- they sometimes switched language but tried very hard to stick to English.
- very soon they wanted to start writing/ scribbling.
- at the beginning they used 1 word and in the second year their language use developed from 1 word sentences to 4 to 5 word sentences.
- they were not irritated when I used English in other subjects and switched very naturally from one language to the other.
- they loved to present their work in English.

CLIL is very good for the children who are able to listen carefully, who like to think and are good learners. For the pupils who have difficulties with learning, concentration etc. it is pure frustration. This is one reason why I mix language lessons and CLIL- modules.

Some parents like CLIL (especially those parents who use a foreign language in business and know how important it is to be able to communicate). Other parents do not like it because they feel that they can not support their children. These parents long for vocabulary lists. I try to satisfy this need by the introduction of a language frame for each topic. My colleagues are not keen on CLIL. The secondary school teachers think they could not do it with their pupils and the primary school teachers prefer the traditional way of teaching.

It is the pupils who started in grade 1 with CLIL and have had a lot of CLIL input who amaze me the most. Now they are in grade 3, they know a lot of vocabulary and are able to formulate good sentences independently. Being a language teacher for more than 25 years, I have never observed this before.

Being the only English teacher in our school house some pupils now almost perceive me as "English" and greet me only in English even when I

greet them in German. In grade one the pupils had to keep a fruit diary for one week. During break some pupils came to me to tell me which fruit they had for their break snack. This went on for quite a while after the unit about fruits had been finished. Especially the young pupils sense the teacher's commitment.

Evaluation in Oktober 2008 – year 2 and 3

After one year of CLIL – modules I noticed that the pupils of the 2 classes start to speak in sentences. They are very keen on using the words they learnt.

In year 2 the task was to describe the cat they had drawn. The pupils used sentences like "My cat is brown. – My cat is black und white. – My cat is stripy."

In year 3 the theme of the art lesson was "Joan Miro" – one pupil tried to explain the important features in English. " Miro...a painter ...Spain. There is red, yellow, blue and green. I can see stars, moon und Linien und Punkte".

This step from hearing to speaking I never experienced in this way before.

Observations in January 2010

In grade 3 and 4 the pupils had to write a test. In grade 4 the topic was about five senses and in year 3 the topic was writing an invitation for a birthday party.

The pupils in grade 3 had had the following tasks: Tell when and where you will celebrate, what the guests will do and which food and drinks you will offer. Most of the pupils scribbled, but I could "read" most of it. Some pupils wrote with hardly any mistakes. They all were very honest and thought carefully about the food, drinks and birthday games/activities.

The test in grade 4 was more or less a vocabulary test. The pupils had to know the right verbs according to the sense. "I can see with my eyes" and they had to name 5 adjectives how things can be: soft, bitter sweet ...

Another task was to name food which is sweet, sour or salty. Here they had to give two examples. At the end of the test they had to write whether they prefer sweet or salty food. Here I got very amazing answers. The pupils did not only write " I like sweet." They tried to give real and true answers. They wrote: " I like sweet and salty food" or "I like (to) eat salty food."

To try to write real, true and honest answers is one side effect of CLIL. The pupils made the experience that CLIL lesson have to do with themselves. The topics in the books, even when they are the same, are less meaning full than the same topic done in a CLIL lesson.

One pupil told me that CLIL lessons mean learning for life.