

What Do CLIL Teachers Actually Do?

Practical Lessons from CLIL Classrooms

in Barcelona

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What makes CLIL difficult?

- “Students’ English level is too low.”
- “Students’ cognitive skills in English are limited.”
- “The language needs to be simplified.”
- “Group work means losing control.”
- “CLIL collaboration is too difficult to manage.”

But are these concerns really limitations of CLIL?

Or are they assumptions about *how CLIL should be taught*?

Where do these insights come from?

Language and Education (LED) project

Barcelona, Spain | 2006 - present

- **University–school partnership:** university lecturers + CLIL teachers as co-researchers
- **Action research:** design, implementation and evaluation of CLIL programmes in public secondary schools
- **Classroom-based research:** classroom data from the LED corpus
- **Teacher education:** postgraduate and MEd programmes in FLE and CLIL
- **Professional development:** collaboration with the Catalan Department of Education



From assumptions to classroom evidence

Assumptions & Classroom challenges →

Good CLIL practice →

Evidence from CLIL classrooms
in public Catalan-medium secondary schools
in Barcelona
(content subjects taught in English/L3)



ASSUMPTION 1

Students' English level is too low to learn through CLIL

CLASSROOM CHALLENGE:

Students cannot learn through CLIL
because their FL proficiency is too low;
therefore, teachers frequently use L1

PRACTICE 1: Students can learn in CLIL classrooms

Good CLIL practices

- Pedagogical use of L1 (purposeful translanguaging)
- Accepting L1 as a legitimate resource for students
- Longer wait time
- More content feedback
- Positive feedback
- Effective management of classroom interaction

EVIDENCE 1

Source (LED Corpus): Escobar Urmeneta, C. (2013). Learning to become a CLIL teacher

1. TEA do you remember the flat shoes? (.) and the high heeled shoes?
2. ((writes 'flat shoes' and 'high heeled shoes' on BB))
3. now which is the difference? (0.3) which one (.) hurts more?
4. Extended wait time
5. S1 no se (.) tacons↓
6. I don't know. high heeled
7. (1.0)
8. TEA what did we:: (.) say ya
9. S2 ((raises her hand))
10. S3 ((raises her hand))
11. Turn allocation to S3
12. (.) en les sabates de tacó es concentra: la pressió
13. that in high heeled shoes pressure is concentrated
14. TEA ((nods))
15. S3 es concentra en un sol punt (.)
16. is concentrated in one single point
17. i la: sport shoes es es conc
18. and the sport shoes is is concentrated
19. TEA very good↓
- Acceptance of explanation in L1
- Positive FB on L1 contribution

20. S2 ((keeps left hand up, signals at herself with right hand))
21. °yo lo digo en inglés° S2's self-selection to provide a TL version
22. I'll say it in English
23. TEA what do you want to say (.) S2?
24. S2 ((smiling)) **yo en inglés**↓ Private turn captured
25. me in English
26. TEA really? Turn allocation to S2 through positive FB
27. S3 ((smiles))
28. TEA ok (.) very good
29. S2 because the pressure (.) [to conc- Explanation in TL
30. [((reads from her dossier))]
31. concentrate in one point
32. TEA is concentrated↑ (.) yes Acceptance of contribution in TL
33. S2 ((nods))
34. TEA in=
35. S2 =in one point
36. TEA <in one point↓> Positive FB through teacher echo

ASSUMPTION 2

*If students' English is limited,
their thinking must be limited too*

CLASSROOM CHALLENGE:

Teachers often see students' low linguistic proficiency
as low cognitive ability;
therefore, they assume that they cannot challenge learners
and should mainly focus on lower-order thinking skills

PRACTICE 2: Students can think in CLIL classrooms

Good CLIL practices

- Questioning techniques:
 - Open vs closed questions;
 - Referential vs display / factual questions
- Offering a wide range of cognitively challenging activities (use Bloom's Taxonomy verbs!)



REMEMBER

Retrieve relevant knowledge from long-term memory.



- Can you recall...?
- Where is...? Who is...?
- Can you list four...?
- How would you describe...?
- How could you explain...?
- Which of these is true...? false...?

Showing
Naming
Listing

Restating
Finding
Recognizing

Choosing
Matching
Relating

ANALYZE

Separate a whole into parts and determine their relationships.



- Why do you think...?
- What is the relationship...?
- Can you compare...? contrast...?
- What idea is relevant to...?
- How would you categorize...?
- What can you infer...?

Classifying
Investigating
Distinguishing

Experimenting
Dividing
Discovering

Implying
Differentiating
Researching

BLOOM'S TAXONOMY VERBS

REMEMBER

define
memorize
repeat
copy
define
state
list
quote
find

UNDERSTAND

summarize
compare
describe
explain
discuss
recognize
report
translate
categorize

APPLY

determine
present
examine
implement
solve
use
demonstrate
interpret
reenact

ANALYZE

organize
compare
contrast
experiment
test
question
connect
deduce
link

EVALUATE

argue
defend
judge
support
value
weigh
reflect
review
grade

CREATE

design
compose
construct
develop
formulate
blog
build
write
simulate

UNDERSTAND

Construct meaning from instructional messages.



- What is the main idea of...?
- Can you find an example...?
- How would you summarize...?
- What might happen next...?
- How do you explain...?
- What ideas or facts show...?

Organizing
Discussing
Interpreting

Paraphrasing
Extending
Outlining

Reviewing
Inferring
Showing

EVALUATE

Make judgments based on criteria and standards.



- Which is more important?
- Is there a better solution to...?
- Can you defend...?
- What are the pros of...? cons...?
- Why is... of value?
- How would you feel if...?

Validating
Debating
Assessing

Justifying
Monitoring
Prioritizing

Critiquing
Selecting
Rating

APPLY

Carry out or use a procedure in a given situation.



- What would happen if...?
- How could you clarify...?
- Who do you think...?
- Which approach would you...?
- How would you use...?
- What is a situation like...?

Practicing
Choosing
Planning

Implementing
Operating
Developing

Interviewing
Solving
Generalizing

CREATE

Combine elements or ideas to form a new whole.



- What is an alternative...?
- Could you invent...?
- Can you compose a...?
- What is your theory about...?
- How can you imagine...?
- What could you design to...?

Building
Combining
Formulating

Constructing
Devising
Improving

Changing
Adapting
Producing

PRACTICE 2: Students can think in CLIL classrooms

Good CLIL practices

- Questioning techniques:
 - Open vs closed questions;
 - Referential vs display / factual questions
- Offering a wide range of cognitively challenging activities (use Bloom's Taxonomy verbs!)
- Withholding immediate feedback to pursue further answers
- Allowing time for students to discuss



EVIDENCE 2.1

Source (LED Corpus): Canet Pladevall, R. & Evnitskaya, N. (2011). *Rethink, Rewrite, Remake or Learning to Teach Science Through English*

Open question: 'Which are the characteristics of living things?'

Choose the correct answers:

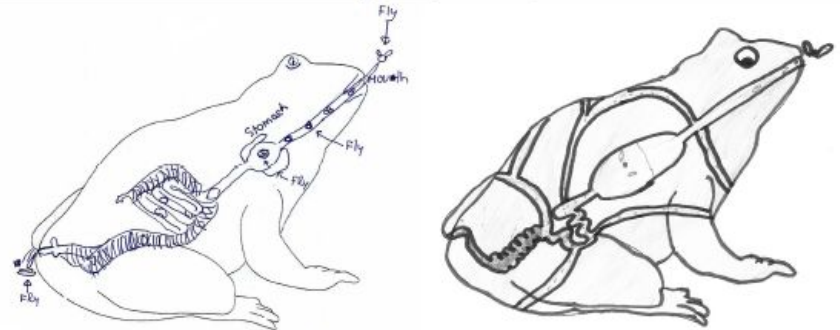
All living things:

- a) eat to get energy
- b) can move
- c) can grow
- d) die
- e) interact with the environment

+ follow-up whole
class discussion



A: Empty image of a frog



B: Students' drawings

+ follow-up whole class discussion

EVIDENCE 2.2 Lesson A: Steel

38 TEA: ((reads)) steel has become the most used (.) metal
39 SS: tru[e
40 SS: [false
41 SS: [true false
42 TEA: ((turns to screen, coughs fakely)) what?
43 ((points to column 'True' on screen)) what?
44 SS: ((keep repeating 'true' and 'false'))
45 SS: (it's true or false?)
46 TEA: ((smiles)) okey
47 ORI: ((to another student))
48 **por eso te preguntaba qué era** (.) steel (.)
Translation: ORI: that's why I was asking you what was (.) steel (.)
49 **no sé (.) creo que-**
Translation: ORI: I don't know (.) I think that-
50 SS: xxxxx false
51 ORI: **es false**
52 TEA: ((looks at ORI))
53 ((to students)) it's **TRUE**
54 TEA: it's true, ok? ((looks at handout)) it's **true**

Source (LED Corpus):
Escobar Urmeneta, C. & Evnitskaya, N. (2013). Affording Students Opportunities for the Integrated Learning of Content and Language

Lesson B: Amoebas

9 TEA: Jaume (.) the first one?
10 JAU: ((reads)) amoebas have a nucleus and a cytoplasm. e::
11 TEA: is it true or false?
12 RIC: true
13 JAU: true
14 ARN: no false
15 QUI: no false false
16 JAU: a:: true
17 TEA: why? is true or why is false? you have to tell me why (it)-
18 JOA: it's true
19 MIQ: it's true
20 TEA: why it's true? ((turns to RIC and JAU))
21 JOA: becau::se
22 JAU: I found i::t ((looks at TEA, raises shoulders and hands))
23 TEA: ((laughs, shakes head)) no no this is not a reason ((looks at JAU))
24 JOA: they are:: <eukaryotic cells>
25 TEA: very good ((nods)) amoebas are:: or have got eukaryotic cells.
26 so they have got a nucleus and a cytoplasm. it's true
27 QUI: **molt bé**

Translation: QUI: very good

ASSUMPTION 3

*CLIL language needs to be simplified,
and so does the content*

CLASSROOM CHALLENGE:

Academic English is too difficult for CLIL students;
therefore teachers should simplify both the language
and the content

PRACTICE 3: Making content and language accessible in the CLIL classroom

Good CLIL practices I

- Moving strategically across literacies and languages (purposeful translanguageing)
- Bridging academic and everyday English and students' L1
- Using gestures and classroom objects to support integrated learning

When comparing, defining, describing and explaining facts, phenomena, people, events, processes... (= Cognitive Discourse Functions, Dalton-Puffer, 2013)

Cognitive Discourse Functions (CDF)

What language is used for content learning goals, teaching and learning, knowledge construction, and meaning-making?

(Dalton-Puffer, 2013)

Type	Members
categorize	<i>Classify, compare, contrast, exemplify, match, structure, categorize, subsume</i>
define	<i>Define, identify, characterize</i>
describe	<i>Describe, label, identify, name, specify</i>
evaluate	<i>Evaluate, argue, judge, take a stance, critique, comment, reflect, justify</i>
explain	<i>Explain, reason, express cause/effect, deduce, draw conclusions.</i>
explore	<i>Explore, hypothesize, predict, speculate, guess, estimate, simulate</i>
report	<i>Report, inform, summarize, recount, narrate, present, relate</i>

PRACTICE 3: Making content and language accessible in the CLIL classroom

Good CLIL practices II

- Modelling how to use academic language appropriately
- Transforming students' everyday wordings into appropriate statements
- Explicitly discussing key structural and linguistic elements of different CDFs
- Establishing similarities and differences between different ways of talking about academic knowledge (everyday vs academic)

EVIDENCE 3.1

Sentence: *Elephants and earthworms belong to the animal kingdom because they have some common features, but elephants have a backbone and earthworms do not*

01 TEA can you tell me why elephants and earthworm

02 *belong (.) both to the animal kingdom?

tea *makes a grasping gesture with right hand

03 what do they (0.5) have in common?

04-12. Students suggest 'they reproduce' and 'they move'

13 and what about their nutrition? (2.5) animals?

14 AND they- they find their nutrition (.) they don't make it

15 JAU they-

16 JOA they don't need-

17 JAU they eat other::=

18 MAR = (pla[nts])

19 AND [animals]

20 TEA yes (.)

21 JAU and ↓plants

Source (LED Corpus): Evnitskaya, N. (2019).
Constructing Cognitive Discourse Functions in
Secondary CLIL Classrooms in Spain

22 TEA they are not (0.3) *'auto' what? *auto-?
tea *stands up *goes to the blackboard

23 JAU autoserves?

24 S? auto-

25 S? °autotrophic°

26 TEA trophic (.) plants are *auto-

tea *writes 'auto' on the blackboard

27 GUI tra:(h)phic

28 TEA *tro::phic (1.0)

tea *writes 'trophic'

29 MAR yes

30 TEA 'trophos' means 'alimentar' (0.5)
'feed'

31 JAU yes

32 TEA *↓ 'feed' (1.0)

tea *writes 'feed' under 'trophic'

33 MAR ja (0.5) yes
'yeah'

22-26. Scientific term
(orally)

26-28. Scientific term
(written form)

30-32. Unpacking semantic
density of academic L2:
- Orally (Greek -> everyday
L1 + everyday L2)
- Written form (everyday L2)

34-35. Unpacking semantic density of academic L2:
orally (Greek -> everyday L2) + Written form (everyday L2) + Gesture

34 TEA and *'auto' (0.3) ↓ 'self'
tea *writes 'self' under 'auto'

35 *<plants make their own food> (0.3)
tea *turns to the class, presses both hands to her chest

36. Repacking & providing formal
classification:
orally (academic L2, X is Y) + gesture

36 they are *autotrophic.
tea *points at 'autotrophic'

37 S? ↓m::

38 TEA animals are all (0.5) *<hetero: (0.5) trophic>
tea *writes 'hetero' on the blackboard

39 because they feed on others.

TEA *ok?

tea *turns to the class, nods

41 S? yes

EVIDENCE 3.2

Problematic statement: *Euglena can change its shape*

01 QUI ((to JAU)) ↑change the shape

02 JAU ((to TEA)) Eug↑lena=

03 QUI ((to TEA)) =change the shape?

<...>

04 TEA ↓a:: (0.5) if it changes its ↑shape
'oh::'

05 JAU yes

06 TEA I think so (0.5)

07 but we cannot see it today.

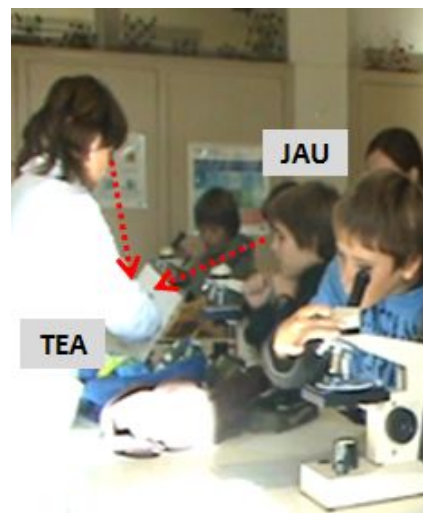
Source (LED Corpus): Evnitskaya, N. (2019).
*Constructing Cognitive Discourse Functions in
Secondary CLIL Classrooms in Spain*

08 TEA but if you (.) *look here (2.0) Euglena (3.2)
tea **takes a reference book,*
searches through it

09 FIG1 is like this
10 (in) this:: (0.7) book.
11 and FIG2 your:: Euglena
12 *is not like this (0.5)*
tea **points at the image-->**

13 it's not FIG3 so: long (0.5)
14 it's FIG4 rounded.

15 TEA ↓so (0.5) FIG5 what does it mean?
16 QUI change the shape?
17 TEA *it can change shape.
tea **nods*



08 TEA but if you (.) *look here (2.0) Euglena (3.2)
tea **takes a reference book,*
searches through it

09 FIG1 is like this

10 (in) this:: (0.7) book.

11 and FIG2 your:: Euglena

12 *is not like this (0.5) *
tea **points at the image-->**

13 it's not FIG3 so: long (0.5)

14 it's FIG4 rounded.

15 TEA ↓so (0.5) FIG5 what does it mean?

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11 and FIG2 your:: Euglena

12 *is not like this (0.5)*
tea *points at the image-->*

13 it's not FIG3 so: long (0.5)

14 it's FIG4 rounded.

15 TEA ↓so (0.5) FIG5 what does it mean?

16 QUI change the shape?

17 TEA *it can change shape.
tea *nods



13-14: Explicit difference
(it's (not) + ADJ x2)



08 TEA but if you (.) *look here (2.0) Euglena (3.2)
tea **takes a reference book,*
searches through it

09 FIG1 is like this

10 (in) this:: (0.7) book.

11 and FIG2 your:: Euglena

12 *is not like this (0.5)*
tea **points at the image-->**

13 it's not FIG3 so: long (0.5)

14 it's FIG4 rounded.

15 TEA ↓so (0.5) FIG5 what does it mean?

16 QUI change the shape?

17 TEA *it can change shape.
tea **nods*



17. Acceptance (nod) +
correct language form

ASSUMPTION 4

*To assure effective learning, CLIL teacher should
maintain control of the class*

CLASSROOM CHALLENGE:

Group work makes classroom interaction noisy and difficult to control, students may go off-topic, and the teacher cannot monitor what happens in every group

PRACTICE 4: Creating opportunities for interaction and participation

Good CLIL practices

- Pedagogical use of L1 (translanguaging)
- Using cooperative learning strategically:
 - Setting up clear and realistic objectives
 - Providing step-by-step guidance
 - Providing necessary language support
 - Accepting L1 as a necessary but temporary resource for students
- Using different classroom layouts to support different types of interaction and learning

EVIDENCE 4.1

DAILY LIFE IN THE UPPER PALAEOLITHIC

Session 4: Tools and Jobs

Activity 1: TOOLS COMPETITION

PHASE 1: Form *HOME* groups

Student 1 is student *A*.
Student 2 is student *B*.
Student 3 is student *C*.
Student 4 is student *D*.

PHASE 2: Form *NEW* groups

All students *A* sit together.
All students *B* sit together.
All students *C* sit together.
All students *D* sit together.

PHASE 3: Become an *EXPERT*

1. Together **READ** the text.
2. Together **UNDERSTAND** it!
3. Together **LEARN** the text.
4. **PRACTISE** saying aloud what you have learned.
5. Go back to your place.

PHASE 4: *TEACH* and *LEARN*

1. Students *B*, *C* and *D* listen to student *A* and fill in the chart.
2. Students *A*, *C* and *D* listen to student *B* and fill in the chart.
3. Students *A*, *B* and *D* listen to student *C* and fill in the chart.
4. Students *A*, *B* and *C* listen to student *D* and fill in the chart.

Source (LED Corpus):
Evnitskaya, N. (2012).
Learning about our
ancestors, learning about
ourselves in English



PHASE 4: *Teach and learn*; In groups of FOUR fill in the Tools Chart. The words in the boxes can help you!

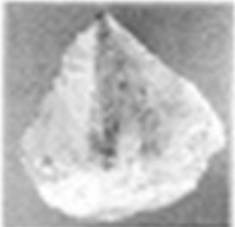
REMEMBER, YOU ARE ARCHAEOLOGISTS!

TOOL	TOOL'S NAME	MATERIAL (IT IS MADE OF...)	FUNCTION (IT IS USED FOR...)	HOW DID THEY MAKE THESE TOOLS?
	Hand Axe			
	Bone Awl			

HANDLE = the part of an object by which it is held

TO SHAPE = to give a form to an object

HOOK = a curved piece attached to an object

TOOL	TOOL NAME	MATERIAL (IT IS MADE OF...)	FUNCTION (IT IS USED FOR...)	HOW DID THEY MAKE THESE TOOLS?
	Bone awl	(Animal) bone	for cut and make dinner and purgery of to carving sides.	they made this tool killing animals and taking their ribs and antlers.
	Hand axes	flint	cut the fur and chop it.	



EVIDENCE 4.2



ASSUMPTION 5

*CLIL collaboration is too difficult and
time-consuming to be practical*

CLASSROOM CHALLENGE:

Collaboration between CLIL content and English teachers
is too time-consuming;
having two teachers in the classroom is difficult to manage

PRACTICE 5: What teachers can do together and what schools/institutions need to do to make this possible

Good CLIL practices

- Collaboration between CLIL content and English teachers on planning, teaching and assessing
- Co-teaching (Friend et al., 2010) between CLIL content and English teachers
- Receiving appropriate teacher professional development support
- Obtaining institutional support for collaboration

EVIDENCE 5.1

Source (LED Corpus): Canet Pladevall, R. & Evnitskaya, N. (2011).
Rethink, Rewrite, Remake or Learning to Teach Science Through English

A **close coordination among teachers** with different backgrounds is a powerful strategy as CLIL is an interdisciplinary endeavour. English teachers could, for example, cover **grammar forms typical of science**, the way of **formulating questions and logical relationships**, useful expressions and **connectors for arguing, reasoning, predicting, summarising**, etc. in order to help students progress.

For example, in the first unit, **students had to compare things**. So, **they needed to learn to compare and become familiar with comparative and superlative forms of adjectives**. However, according to their English syllabus, they first had to learn simple adjectives. The English teacher's collaboration and the work done with students on the use of the passive voice, the imperative, the conditional, prepositions, **resulted to be very useful and important because it equipped them with linguistic resources and skills necessary for our science lessons**.

In English classes, the teacher can take advantage of CLIL approach by **connecting language learning to its usage in a real and meaningful context**: reading texts from scientific journals, watching popular science films, playing cognitively and linguistically demanding games, preparing Powerpoint presentations, doing speaking/listening activities on scientific topics.

PRACTICE 5: What teachers can do together and what schools/institutions need to do to make this possible

Good CLIL practices

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EVIDENCE 5.2

Sources (LED Corpus): Escobar Urmeneta, C. (2020). *Coteaching in CLIL in Catalonia*; Evnitskaya, N., & Escobar Urmeneta, C. (2026). "You don't say 'tempo, allegro'"



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PRACTICE 5: What teachers can do together and what schools/institutions need to do to make this possible

Good CLIL practices

- Collaboration between CLIL content and English teachers on planning, teaching and assessing
- Co-teaching (Friend et al., 2010) between CLIL content and English teachers
- Receiving appropriate teacher professional development
- Obtaining institutional support for collaboration

EVIDENCE 5.3

- Pre-service CLIL teacher education programs
- In-service CLIL teacher education professional development programs:
 - Some practical sessions / workshops run by CLIL teachers
 - Teacher trainers and participants engaging in co-teaching practices, lesson peer observations and video-recordings, reflective practice, etc.
 - Collaboration on writing teacher dissemination articles
- Institutional support to teachers and schools

**The question is not “Can students do CLIL?”
but “How can we make CLIL work for them?”**

Rethinking CLIL: Five takeaways

1. Language difficulty ≠ learning difficulty

Create opportunities for students to make meaning through interaction, feedback, and wait time.

2. Limited English ≠ limited thinking

Keep challenging students cognitively, and use questioning to support higher-order thinking.

3. Accessible ≠ simplified

Support students in navigating academic language and content rather than simplifying them.

4. Productive learning ≠ teacher control

Use cooperative learning and classroom space strategically to create opportunities for interaction and participation.

5. Effective CLIL ≠ one teacher doing everything

Collaboration, co-teaching, professional development and institutional support can expand what is possible.

So... what can we do differently tomorrow?

- Talk less, but interact more.
- Ask questions that make students think and challenge them cognitively.
- Don't simplify everything - support access.
- Let students learn with and from each other.
- Don't do CLIL alone.

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