

A Design of Content and Language Integrated Learning for Elementary School Students

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“A Design of Content and Language Integrated Learning for Elementary School Students” was presented at the Akita Association of English Studies (AAES) Annual Conference in November of 2022. In this presentation, I discussed how elementary school teachers could provide lessons that combine “Content and Language Integrated Learning” (CLIL) with intercultural understanding to students in order that elementary school students feel more motivated to learn English and broaden their international perspective.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

CLIL is an English teaching method that offers “a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language (Coyle et al., 2010, p. 1)”. As a teaching method, CLIL is characterized by the 4Cs Framework as described by Coyle (2007):

“The 4Cs Framework focuses on the interrelationship between content (subject matter), communication (language), cognition (learning and thinking) and culture (social awareness of self and ‘otherness’), It takes account of ‘integration’ on different levels: learning (content and cognition), language learning (communication and cultures) and intercultural experiences” (p.550)

An Important feature of CLIL is that it integrates various skills which are acquired in compulsory education in Japan. Moreover, according to Waizumi et al. (2012), CLIL focuses on not only the educational approach of language learning, but can also improve students’ thinking skills or the ability to make decisions and so on. As a teaching method, CLIL could be an essential element of mandatory education in Japan.

CLIL Lessons With Intercultural Exchange

My focus is on intercultural understanding and intercultural exchange using CLIL based teaching methods for elementary school students. I conducted CLIL classes in a public school with 5th grade elementary school students based on my CLIL teaching plan. Twenty-nine Japanese students and 6 Australian students took part in the experimental classes, where the goal was intercultural understanding, specifically getting to know about Australia. The pupils interacted

with Australian primary school students on the Internet. This experiment was divided into 3 class periods.

In the first class, the pupils were separated into groups of 3 or 4 students, which chose topics about Australian culture. Then, each group searched on the internet to find out about Australia, and finally they shared what they had learned about Australia with each other.

In the second class, the students prepared for an intercultural exchange in the final lesson. They thought together about the questions that they wanted to ask the Australian students based on their findings about Australia. The questions they made were as follows:

How many students are in the school?

How many grades are there in an Australian primary school?

What subjects do you study?

Do you have a school lunch in cafeteria at school?

Are there convenience stores in Australia?

Do we find a lot of animals near school, like koalas and kangaroo?

In the last class, the students experienced an interaction with the Australian students for twenty minutes on the Internet. They asked questions about each other. The Australian students started by asking questions in Japanese because they also learn Japanese in their school. Then, the Japanese students answered the questions in Japanese. And then, the Japanese students asked their prepared questions to the Australian students in English. After that, I conducted a questionnaire about the classes to the Japanese students.

The Most Rewarding Parts of my Intercultural Exchange in CLIL

The pupils showed interest in intercultural exchange with the Australian students in the classes. It was apparent that many of the students were actively engaged in learning English. When they were choosing a topic to find out about Australia in the first class, they came up with several questions about the topic and they had own guessing about their wondering. Their attitudes toward learning English indicated that the contents of the class—intercultural understanding—promoted students' deeper learning.

In the interaction with Australian students, the Japanese students seemed to be excited to learn about Australian culture. They were quite surprised at the answers from the Australian students, and they were more willing to communicate with the Australian children. Their behavior suggested that the questions based on the students' own curiosity about Australia must have stimulated their minds through the communication with Australian students.

According to the results of the questionnaire, all the 29 students felt at the CLIL classes were fun. The top reasons given for why the class was fun were learning about Australia, being able to interact with Australian primary school students, and understanding the differences

between Australia and Japan. Moreover, 93% of the students answered that they came to like English more than before. The main reasons can be divided into 2 categories: The first one is that they could interact with Australian students. Some students noticed that they could talk with a lot of people from abroad and get to know about other countries if they speak English more. For the students, there are few chances to talk with native students around their own ages in their daily life. They noticed that the Australian students also learn Japanese and they were quite surprised that the Australian children spoke Japanese well. I guess that they were also stimulated by the Australian students' Japanese, and they were more motivated to learn English. The other category is about intercultural understanding. The students were quite curious about Australian culture like school life, animals, and food. They could get a lot of new ideas about Australia through CLIL classes that included intercultural exchange. There could be little value for the elementary school students only to talk with the students from abroad. They seem to feel satisfied with the English classes when they gain new knowledge that satisfied their curiosity through communication in English with the people from abroad. Intercultural understanding and intercultural exchange can make elementary school students feel so much more fun and fulfillment in English class.

Improving Part of my Intercultural Exchange in CLIL

One point which teachers should be careful about with intercultural exchange is that some students did not seem to answer the questions from the Australian students in Japanese during the intercultural exchange. The students got nervous at that time. One solution could be expressing their own ideas or feelings using picture cards or sign cards for the first time. It might be too difficult for the elementary school students to talk with the native students only in the oral communication even in Japanese. Teachers should help elementary school students to progressively practice intercultural exchange step by step by thinking about the students' actual level of communication skills.

Conclusion

In conclusion, intercultural understanding and intercultural exchange can be valuable for elementary school students. They could become more motivated to learn English, and it could promote in-depth learning through intercultural exchange through CLIL. Experiencing Intercultural exchange should become an essential part of English education in Japan.

References

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