WHAT CAN CLIL LEARN FROM IMMERSION?

Cet article, écrit par un coach en immersion, aborde tout d'abord la question des différences entre un enseignement de type EMILE et un enseignement immersif. Quelles demandes de formation linguistique des enseignants en immersion peuvent être appliquées aux enseignants d'EMILE? Et, plus généralement, comment l'expérience de formation des enseignants en immersion peut-elle être récupérée au profit de la formation des enseignants d'EMILE?

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Before I attempt to answer this question from an immersion coach's perspective, a clearer picture of what CLIL and immersion entail is judicious when discussing the two approaches simultaneously. Research has shown CLIL and immersion to be exemplary ways of improving foreign language competence. Not only are the concepts of CLIL and immersion internationally recognised but they also present themselves as viable additions to traditional foreign language teaching.

Moreover, CLIL is accepted as the umbrella term covering a wide variety of educational approaches, including the likes of: bilingual instruction, content-based language teaching, languages across the curriculum, language-enriched content instruction, language shower, multilingual education, and "teaching through a foreign language" programmes. This is only a fraction of the overwhelming myriad of terms but what does become clear is that the basic concept of bilingual learning is interpreted in different ways. Despite these multifarious interpretations, it is really the term 'CLIL' that has stood the test of time and is seen to do some justice to the diversity inherent in the various approaches.

However, it would be dangerously naive to label immersion programmes as CLIL, despite the apparent links between the two concepts. In fact, more often than not these terms are used indiscriminately, although in reality there are more differences than similarities in practical terms. I posit that the distinction between these disparate concepts of bilingual education is apparent when comparing the classrooms in the two settings; in one, formal instruction of language, grammar and phonology fosters bilingualism (i.e. implicitly acquired competences in two languages) whereas in the other, bilingualism is not fostered in the curriculum. CLIL differs from immersion in which instruction as a whole is often carried out in a foreign language without explicitly fostering the development of the students' foreign language competence; foreign language instruction is not effectuated in immersion classes per se. Contrarily, CLIL instruction is accompanied by normal or even partially expanded foreign language instruction, meaning that CLIL instruction is an integrated form of language and subject instruction. More succinctly, immersion sees a focus

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on content, subject-specific meaning and communication instead of the alleged focus on form in CLIL.

Despite this crucial difference, CLIL teachers and immersive teachers still have much in common as far as the language demands of their challenging roles are concerned. With this in mind, some of the main findings from my Master's thesis (*The Language Demands of Immersion Teaching from the Teacher's Perspective in German-Speaking Switzerland*) are equally applicable (if not even more so) to trainee and practising CLIL teachers.

The majority of teachers in my study (conducted at upper secondary schools in the cantons of Aargau, Thurgau and Zurich) expressed the need for having support from an English assistant (or from the English department) from the very beginning instead of it being introduced at a much later stage or of course not at all. The teachers (whom all had been teaching immersively for at least three years) felt that receiving language feedback on their lessons and having their handouts and exams proofread would provide them with extra security, especially in the first execution of a course. A common theme arising from the extensive interviews with the immersive teachers was the importance of schools allotting them sufficient time to engage in the necessary language training beforehand. Various time scales were proposed here ranging from two to six months in the Anglosphere, depending on the individual needs. Linked to this extended language stay was the importance of partaking in some shadow-teaching, either in Switzerland with experienced or native-speaking teachers, or in the Anglosphere. Not only would this allow teachers to hear native (or near-native) speakers teaching their subject but it would give them a potential colleague to network with. Moreover, some teachers wanted to not only observe but teach the class themselves and receive feedback from the native (or near-native) speaker. A further advantage of this addition to the training is hearing classroom English, an area where many immersion teachers have problems, in practice. This issue could still be relevant to some CLIL teachers, despite their three or four-week placement at a school in the English-speaking world during their teacher training.

The main language concerns expressed by the teachers included the ability to speak spontaneously in the classroom when unprepared questions or topics arose. The same was true when they had to engage in general conversation with the students which was unrelated to the subject. It was a similar story in the case of general classroom English required to manage the classroom successfully in that this was problematic at times. Additionally, some teachers, depending on the subject, explicitly mentioned that both pronunciation and subject terminology were a source of concern. Linked to these concerns in the classroom was the fact that teachers had limited authentic contact with English outside the classroom. This was in stark contrast to their students who in addition to their regular English lessons and all their immersion lessons, had the opportunity to go on extended language stays.

In sum, despite the various differences between CLIL and immersion highlighted at the beginning of this article, I would suggest that the language demands are even greater for CLIL teachers in a way because they not only have to focus on form but also cover a wider range of subjects. With this in mind and what I have extracted from my study, CLIL teachers should be given sufficient time before embarking on their CLIL career to become much more comfortable with general, subject-specific and classroom English through language stays for example. Following on from this, CLIL teachers should have access to an English teacher or assistant from the beginning whom they can contact for proofreading, receiving feedback on lessons or general language queries. Even after several years of CLIL teaching, I would also recommend some form of language refresher, perhaps in the form of a homestay with an English teacher to maximise their own immersive experience and receive tailor-made private lessons to address any areas requiring attention. The sooner the teacher is unencumbered by the language, the easier it is to concentrate on teaching the diverse topics to the best of their ability. As is the case in immersion, the teachers are undoubtedly the most important players in CLIL programmes and their pivotal role dictates its success, hence actuating the need to address the language demands more effectively. That is, to ensure that CLIL teachers achieve the requisite language level and surmount the language demands they face, significant effort must be expended in their training and continual professional development.

Reference

Browne, C. (2012). *The Language Demands of Immersion Teaching from the Teacher's Perspective in German-Speaking Switzerland*. Norderstedt Germany: Grin Verlag GmbH.