Summary

From Learners' Needs to Positive Attitudes – Can CLIL Work Miracles?

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CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) is a rewarding and challenging practice from both the teacher's and student's perspective. Focusing on language learning within a content course helps to support deeper learning, which results in a better understanding of the subject. A better grasp of the content together with needs-based tasks can boost students' sense of success and increase their motivation. The presentation focuses on how the CLIL approach can facilitate deeper learning and thereby lead to better understanding and increased motivation.

One of the goals of contemporary curricula is to enable students to acquire transferable skills, such as critical thinking, conceptual understanding, and the ability to communicate across languages and disciplines, which are required in both general educational settings and real-life situations. Given that the focus of CLIL is intrinsically on the development of such key competences, the approach may yield good results in the acquisition of the content as well as language skills.

Those fundamental, transferable competencies can be better acquired by deeper learning as it combines knowledge construction and communication (Coyle and Meyer 2021: 42-78). For better internalisation of conceptual knowledge, students have to be able to communicate the knowledge to others. Communication of the acquired knowledge is crucial for learners to gain control over a concept and its use through language. However, learners often struggle to communicate their subject-related conceptual understanding appropriately, be it in their mother tongue or in a foreign language. To overcome this problem, cognitive discourse functions (CDFs), such as explaining concepts, defining and classifying them, describing, giving examples, demonstrating the cause and effect relationship (Coyle and Meyer 2021: 78-85; Dalton-Puffer 2007: 127-71), can be used as a basis for task design in a CLIL class.

CDFs are essential tools for designing tasks for deeper learning because they offer ways of integrating both the conceptual as well as the communicative dimensions of learning. CDF-based *languaging* activities, in which students use language not only for mediating knowledge but also for meaning-making (Swain 2009: 95-97), support conceptual understanding and are thus indispensable for knowledge construction and communication (Coyle and Meyer 2021: 48-50). One of the most effective methods to improve students' *languaging* skills in a CLIL class is through topic-related questions that require the use of CDFs. For example, a set of pre-reading questions can be supplemented with language support materials demonstrating how each question can be paired with a corresponding CDF and lexico-grammatical patterns that can be used to formulate answers to the questions. Such needs-based *languaging* activities help to make CLIL classes more output-oriented, which contributes to higher motivation and better understanding of the subject.

References

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