

Anthony Ryan

Introduction

The CLIL methodology was 'imported' from Europe by forward-thinking academics for the initial purpose of methodizing selected content courses at tertiary level at Sophia, Toyo Eiwa Jogakuin and Waseda universities (p.c. Prof. Makoto Ikeda, Prof. Shigeru Sasajima), three private universities in the top echelon of private universities in Japan. The continuing efforts of these academics to 'spread the CLIL word' led to the 2017 establishment of the JCLIL Association, which as of the end of 2019 had a membership of more than 400. Through its regular symposia and research meetings, the association has rapidly expanded its membership base and advocacy for the CLIL methodology has filtered not only horizontally across other tertiary institutions but also vertically into secondary and primary levels of education. The association currently has dedicated teams of researchers and practitioners working designing, implementing and researching CLIL lessons at high school, junior high school and elementary school levels.

Elementary school CLIL?

It is perhaps fair to say that as it pertains to elementary school, the notion of integrating subject content and language learning has only gained traction since the August 2016 decision by MEXT to implement English-as-subject in Years 5 and 6 from April 2020. In preparation, and in an attempt to cast the net as wide as possible, MEXT called for and funded various research proposals aimed at exploring alternative elementary school English education methodologies. CLIL featured in a number of successful applications, including this one. Currently, it is believed that while the term itself, 'CLIL' and its meaning (*i.e.* the teaching of content through an additional language) may have been heard of by most teachers, the vast majority of them have little concrete knowledge of its rationale, actual theoretical basis or its practices. In Aichi prefecture at least, teachers are about to come face to face with CLIL. The 'New Horizon Elementary' (Tokyo Shoseki) school English textbook for Year 6, now contains a unit emblazoned as 'CLIL' in large type on its first page. CLIL is to go 'mainstream' in public elementary schools throughout the prefecture. However, this is very definitely the language-driven 'soft' version of CLIL, with the subject content being used as the raw material for the English language-driven programme.

Ikeda (2013) states that "for CLIL to take root solidly in the Japanese educational climate, the 'soft' version of CLIL should be recognized as an adapted, contextualized breed while, at the same time, its authentic, universal model (i.e. European CLIL) is pursued as the norm" (p.41). According to this view, the 'soft' CLIL model—which as we have seen is typified as taught by language teachers who use subject content as material for language-driven lessons—should only be a stop on the line towards hard 'CLIL': typified as taught in an additional language by subject teachers who use the content of their individual subjects as material for content-driven lessons. However, whether or not 'soft' CLIL should eventually transition into 'hard' CLIL is still debatable given there are serious doubts over whether CLIL meets its rationale.

Soft CLIL

A number of authors (Bruton, 2011; Morton, 2013; Cenoz, Genesse, & Gorter, 2014) have pointed out that there are numerous anomalies regarding the research literature that supposedly shows encouraging outcomes of CLIL courses in the European context. Bruton (2011) is particularly skeptical as to whether or not CLIL meets its rationale: that by integrating foreign language and content learning, there will be improved foreign language learning with at least no cost to content learning. His analyses of research methodologies and results in the Spanish CLIL context pinpoints serious validity issues. He concludes that while CLIL students exhibit elevated levels of language acquisition, the research does not significantly back the claim that CLIL students have acquired similar levels of subject content as non-CLIL students taught in their L1. Moreover, he argues that even the levels of elevated language acquisition cannot fully be attributed to CLIL: perhaps it is merely the extra exposure to the L2 that CLIL students received.

Until valid and comparative research studies in the Japanese public elementary school context can definitely prove that 'hard' CLIL methodology results in no cost to content learning, there is little justification to push for 'hard' CLIL at elementary school level. That being said, this does not rule out the possibility that 'soft' CLIL could result in equally valuable gains in language learning. If 'soft' CLIL methodology can be shown by research to result in similar or elevated L2 levels when compared with traditional language programmes, or even increased levels of learner interest in and motivation for the L2, it would be foolish to exclude it from elementary school curriculums. However, a number of contextual factors already mentioned by previous authors in this volume (including the articles by Robins and Venema), negatively impact a greater presence of 'soft' CLIL at this time.

As of April 2020, 'English-as-a-subject', was added to public elementary school curriculums for years 5 and 6. There are two 'hours' (in actual fact, 2 x 45 minutes) per week over a period of 35 weeks making a total of 70 hours per year. Years 3 and 4 will continue with 'Foreign

Language Activities' (FLA) for the foreseeable future, utilizing one 45 period per week. Beyond the 8 hours already included (taking the New Horizon Elementary course as the example) among the 140 'English' hours over two years there is little if any 'time' for teachers to delve further into CLIL, either 'soft' or 'hard'. Moreover, asking teachers to be the designers of lessons and materials which meet both language and content learning outcomes is a big ask, given that teacher workloads are already onerous and they are grappling with the content of a new subject (English) that requires not only a degree of L2 proficiency but also entails new methodological practices and skills.

That being said, the future for 'soft' CLIL in public elementary schools is not a lost cause. There are a number of factors in its favor and avenues that are open, a number of temporal-dependent factors that are necessary, and a number of measures that can be taken now to ensure it does become part of the future of English education at elementary schools.

Factors in favor of soft CLIL

(a) Robins (this volume) makes the point that elementary school HRTs are perhaps the best placed to be able to utilize content as language teaching material. After all, they are trained to teach all subjects so they are aware of content and methodologies within each subject area and can best decide what content can 'cross the divide' and be used as language teaching material.

(b) Subjects such as social studies and science make heavy use of Katakana English (KE) so there is already a large body of the 'language of learning' in particular subjects. An analysis of the Year 3 and 4 science textbooks revealed a total of 169 KE words. One assumes that the Year 5 and 6 textbooks would add further to the bank of KE words. If teachers were to 'anglicize' KE, much of the content vocabulary would already form part of the soft-CLIL lexicon.

(c) How teachers implement the years 3 and 4 curriculum and what they teach in their syllabuses is relatively 'free' compared to years 5 and 6. Moreover, there is no summative assessment of L2 at these levels, unlike years 5 and 6. For example, the 'Let's Try!' series suggests how to teach the primary colors but as shown in chapter 1 (this volume), teaching them in a lesson designated as 'art' works just as well.

(d) The article by Wakita, Ryan, M. and Okayama (this volume) showed that open-minded and forward-thinking education authorities (in this case, Toyohashi City and its Board of Education) are an invaluable asset to improving English education and, for our purposes, in aiding the 'soft' CLIL movement. 'Let's Try!' and find more open-minded BOE.

(e) The relative freedom of private schools to interpret curriculum, vary class size and choose textbooks and materials independent of a regional board of education is an avenue through which soft CLIL is being implemented (as in the article by Robins this volume) and could be further explored.

(f) By far, the greatest asset to advancing soft-CLIL in Japan, is its human resources: not only the JCLIL advocates and members, but more particularly the skills and dedication of elementary school teachers in general. The drive of Japanese teachers to improve their own skills, learn new knowledge, take part in voluntary professional development seminars and symposia, and their work ethic is unparalleled in the view of the author who has observed teachers in Europe, across Asia and in his native Australia.

Temporal-dependent factors that are necessary

The most obvious factor that is needed is 'time' so as to:

- (a) enable current in-service teachers to increase their own levels of English proficiency.
- (b) enable current in-service teachers to improve their English teaching methodological prowess so that they become confident enough to go 'beyond' the language content, and
- (c) enable universities to develop comprehensive pre-service CLIL teacher-training programmes.

Teacher training institution measures to advance soft CLIL

Perhaps the greatest by-product of the study of CLIL methodology is the spotlight it shines on 'cognition'. Teacher-training institutions, which also run English education re-licensing and licensing programmes for regional teachers, need to implement preservice and in-service English education courses that

- (a) teach how to break the 'PPP cycle' for English lesson structures by inputting a 'Processing' stage when planning lessons.
- (b) train teachers to write lesson objectives (based on the RBT categories of Anderson et al. 2001) that are more specific about the levels of cognition that will be engaged by the learners during a lesson. In the vast majority of lessons plans viewed by the author, if (and only 'if') 'thinking ability' (思考力) is included, it is restricted to (i) judgement ability (判断力) or (ii) ability to articulate/express (表現力等, *hyogen ryoku to*)
- (c) focus on questioning techniques and designing learning activities based on the above cognitive levels.
- (d) train pre-service subject teachers in the 'language *for* learning' (i.e. classroom language etc.), how English interacts with their particular subject (such as the KE language *of* learning), and awareness of and techniques of teaching language. For example, at present two of the current authors in this volume (Ryan and Venema) recently completed a course with undergraduate math subject education majors in which the students learned how to teach basic math in English.

Teacher-training institutions can lead the way by teaching the above.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that aspects of the CLIL methodology are penetrating the Japanese educational landscape. However, one wonders just far down the educational 'tree' it should filter and what forms of CLIL should be implemented along its journey. Without hesitation, I can say that the 'hard' CLIL version is eminently suitable for tertiary education, and given time and the continued efforts of the JCLIL Association members, it will spread. However, it is vital that valid and comprehensive research accompany implementation and clear advantages for learners across both language and content be forthcoming. In regard to elementary school, however, at the present time public school education, its teachers and learners, are not ready for CLIL beyond sporadic one-off lessons to fill schedule gaps, and given time (more so than secondary and tertiary levels), an increase in teacher L2 proficiency and confidence, soft CLIL might be able to take a greater role.

Bruton, A. (2011). Is CLIL so beneficial or just selective? Re-evaluating some of the research.

Cenoz, J., Genesse, F., & Gorter, D. (2014). Critical analysis of CLIL: Taking stock and looking forward. *Applied Linguistics*. Vol. 35 (3). pp. 243-262.

Ikeda, M. (2013). Does CLIL work for Japanese secondary school students?: Potential for the 'weak' version of CLIL. *International CLIL Research Journal*, Vol. 2 (1) pp. 31-43.

Morton, T. (2013) Critically evaluating materials for CLI: Practitioners, practices and perspectives. In J. Gray. (Ed.). *Critical perspectives on language teaching materials*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 111-136.