

**CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING
(CLIL) “IN USE”: IDEAS FOR A CROSS-CURRICULAR
ACTIVITY FOR STUDENTS IN THE 5TH GRADE
*THE LITTLE LINGUISTS AND EXPLORERS***

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Abstract: CLIL is a comprehensive, interwoven method of teaching, in which certain contents, coming from cross-curricular fields, are taught in a foreign language. The knowledge that students acquire is, thus, supplemented by a new way of storing and using information, which also involves participation of the foreign language skills, creating new competence both in the language and the respective fields of knowledge. This is a model curriculum for the 5th grade students, in which they are taught history, geography and a little environment and biology, using English. The proposed theme is *The Little Linguists and Explorers: Following Christopher Columbus*. The project takes place in Borșa, at the Gymnasium-Highschool, and is the result of the collaboration between the two authors of the article.

Keywords: *CLIL, curriculum, competencies, skills, methods, subject fields, teaching language*

CLIL (Content and language integrated learning) represents not only a new area of teaching languages, but an acknowledgement of the fact that language teaching has always been a means of transmitting information beyond language. Obviously, with teaching language there also comes teaching culture and civilisation, notions of geography and history, literature, the arts, as well as knowledge coming from biology, anatomy, construction, building, etc. Teaching vocabulary in a language means touching all these subjects, and more, sometimes the knowledge of the world around in the foreign language somehow exceeds the knowledge students have in their native tongue.

Nevertheless, as a theory of language teaching, CLIL has been devised with its own categories, in order that teachers should be more aware of the advantages of such approach, and propose specific activities within the normal classes of language, as well as specially designed courses that might comprise cross-curricular subject matters. This means that the language teacher becomes a teacher of other subjects, as well, because there is a

difference between CBLT – Content based language teaching – and CLIL – Content and language integrated learning.

....CLIL deals with teaching a subject at the same time as teaching language. CLIL is also different from immersion, where learners learn all their subjects in another language and there is no focus on language in subject lessons, for example as in an international school. (Dale & Tanner, 3)

There are a few very important features of CLIL methodology: *multiple focus, safe and enriching learning environment, authenticity, active learning, scaffolding, co-operation* (Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols). The idea of *multiple focus* mainly refers to the fact that learners are exposed to a variety of subjects, coming from various domains, and that cross-curricular widening helps them improve their cognitive processes. Students will be able to link their previous knowledge with the foreign language, but, what is more, they will improve their knowledge about the world, they will also reflect more on their own learning process, and they will be involved in all sorts of projects that will also motivate them. Such learning environment will make students ‘forget’ about the difficulties of language learning in a way, but will also increase their *language awareness*, as authentic learning always does. The concept of authenticity is very important, especially in teaching, because it is very often that students complain that school seems to be somehow far from reality, from the things they encounter every day, and from their interests, likes and dislikes.

Of greatest importance, especially for the language teacher, *active learning* is enhanced during CLIL classes: the students' communication time will increase, they will work more in pairs and groups, they will have to think about meanings, look in dictionaries and encyclopedias, and they will find their own interests and paths to learning. Consequently, in such classes, the teacher will only be a guide, a facilitator, and a source of stability, but he/she will give much more freedom to students. This is an ideal of language teaching that is really difficult to get to in traditional language teaching, or any of the other subject- matters, as in most cases in such traditional classes the teacher has to speak more, present, explain grammar rules, activate vocabulary, etc.

Nevertheless, we should bear in mind that this is not just *language through learning*:

Language through learning is based on the principle that effective learning cannot take place without active involvement of language and thinking. When learners are encouraged to articulate their understanding, then a deeper level of learning takes place. The CLIL classroom demands a level of talk, of interaction and dialogic activity

which is different to that of the traditional language or content classroom [...] In CLIL settings, new meanings are likely to require new language. This emerging language needs to be captured, recycled and developed strategically by teachers and learners. (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 37)

When students are given enough freedom in class, they should also be given challenging activities, which develop their creativity, their imagination, but also their critical thinking. The fact that information comes in friendlier manners, or the fact that such knowledge is sometimes based on the students' experiences, does not diminish the value of such classes. On the contrary, it takes students out of their comfort zone, and helps them build on their knowledge as well as on their language competence and performance.

The educational role of CLIL classes is completed with their formative value. Most of the projects and activities that they have to carry out will be designed to be done in co-operation, as we have already stated. This collaboration does not stop in class, though. As the previously mentioned authors (Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols) show, to plan courses and lessons with CLIL means that teachers come together and cooperate in such planning. They will come with their own experience from teaching their subjects; they will share knowledge, think about the most appropriate contents, and will get to work closely together. The next steps of co-operation refer to the involving of parents and even the local community, depending on the subject and amplitude of the projects.

In Romania, such teaching is at the beginning. Teachers of English have just begun to think of cross-curricular activities, and – truth be told – the pioneers are the teachers of English, who seem to be open to the ideas advanced in the CLIL teaching theory. As professor and teacher of English, the authors of the present article began our co-operation this year, with the implementation of a cross-curricular subject: one class a week for the 5th grade entitled *The Little Linguists and Explorers*, in which we proposed a year-long activity. The students will follow Christopher Columbus and his journeys to the New World.

The curriculum for *The Little Linguists and Explorers: following Christopher Columbus* represents an offer for the students of the 5th grade, which may help students blend their natural curiosity, their wish to know more, their pleasure to discover new places, with their wish to learn about animals and plants, to find out how various discoveries have been made in the history of humanity, etc. The general frame for these inter-woven pieces of information will be English language, and the CLIL theoretical approach to teaching. This theory brings – as we have shown – many arguments in favour of connecting the learning of foreign language with the learning of some very diverse contents (elements coming from environmental studies,

biology, geography, history, sciences, culture and civilisation, etc.) Such integrated curriculum will answer one of the most important requirements of modern teaching: centering teaching on the students' needs and inclinations.

The curriculum is such designed as to revolve around skills; thus, the elements that constitute new acquisitions of the students, will be based on the CLIL approach, and on the *Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union regarding key skills from the perspective of life-long learning* (2006/962/ EC). The curriculum takes into consideration both the specific competencies of the disciplines involved – history, geography and biology – and those of language teaching. Thus, we would consider the basic competencies in science and technology, which are derived from lessons referring to world geography and history. At the same time, we will also give much attention to the competencies that are generally in view of teachers of foreign languages. At the same time, this subject will also try to develop other general educational competencies, referring to learning how to learn, using the newest informational and communication technologies, as well as social and civic competencies. Another component will refer to the the cultural sensitivity of the students, as well as to artistic communication.

Having in view the fact that this is a trans-curricular class, we will also follow general and specific competencies, goals that belong to the intersecting disciplines, and integrate them in a type of learning that is active and authentic. This optional course, dedicated to the 5th graders will try to present information in its integrity and integrality, and not divide the four domains of study such information refers to (geography, history, biology and English). Even if the curriculum will observe and borrow competencies and targets from all the four domains, the ideal is to keep them together, inter-woven and consider them not as "slices of reality", but a holistic approach to reality, history, etc. The competencies and abilities will be the outcome of using information and specific themes to the four areas of knowledge, but it also be more complex and satisfying than the mere sum of information. Students will be much more involved in their own study, and will be more capable to see things in their complexity, to form original ideas, correct and clear concepts and attitudes. They will also be more able to adapt to things they might consider new and unusual, to other cultures and traditions, and to a world view that is more accurate. Consequently, students will develop certain attitudes towards life and reality, which – we think – will be the main gain of such cross-disciplinary endeavour.

Such attitudes may refer to:

1. A wish to know facts and realities that are part of another historical space and time, different from what the students might consider as familiar;

2. Curiosity and a wish to investigate, to find out more, to discover interesting and inciting worlds;
3. A spirit of adventure, of investigation and new experiences, accompanied with the desire to share such experiences with others;
4. Flexibility and adaptability to novelty, to diverse mentalities and customs, to what other places in the world may offer as surprising and interesting;
5. A desire to communicate, to make themselves understood, and to transmit what they are thinking and feeling in a free manner;
6. The formation of intellectual abilities which are based on facts, direct observation, research, argumentation and logical thinking.

In this way, general competencies which we have in mind, will be derived from all the four subject-curricula, and also from their specific ones. Then, we have designed specific cross-curricular competencies, which individualise this curriculum and give contour to its aims.

General Competencies.

Integrated English language: receiving oral messages in situations of communication that are usual and specific to the cross-curricular fields; oral expression in situations of communication that are usual and specific to the cross-curricular fields; receiving written messages in situations of communication that are usual and specific to the cross-curricular fields; writing messages in situations of communication that are usual and specific to the cross-curricular fields.

Cross-curricular: presenting geographical realities using specific means and meta-language; investigating various subjects from the perspective of integrated education; manifesting civic behaviours, by a valorification of the historical experience of people coming from socio-cultural diverse areas; observing the natural world, with an eye on diversity, as well as on a healthy life style; exploring biological system, processes and phenomena, using adequate language.

Specific competencies and examples of learning activities.

1. Receiving oral messages in situations of communication that are usual and specific to the cross-curricular fields
 - 1.1 Identification of the global sense of certain messages and dialogues based on themes related to nature, specific historical sites, various geographical places
 - identification of the communicative situation
 - selection of the correct image that corresponds to the oral message
 - responses as verbal reactions to non-verbal messages, images or videos

- identification of the linguistic specific items
 - 1.2. Identification of the significance of certain usual and specific verbal dialogues, clearly articulated, in the situation when the interlocutor offers help to facilitate understanding
 - participation with simple retorts, adequate in a dialogue that refers to a theme coming from the cross-curricular reference field
 - laying out an itinerary on a map, or on a plan, according to simple orientation instructions, with the identification of the specific natural geographical elements
 - offering simple answers, non-verbal reactions in usual and specific interactions, within the frame of the cross-curricular reference field (on the shore, at the zoo, in a historical site, on a mountain, etc.)
 - 1.3. Manifesting curiosity for the specific elements that refer to geographical, historical, natural and cultural spaces, proposed in class
 - making up collections of photos from such geographical, natural or historical sites, mentioning their names in the foreign language
 - finding videos, short films, which refer to those specific sites, showing places, animals, etc., with short explanations in the foreign language
 - making drawings/posters/maps specific for itineraries on the globe, which contain images and short sentences of presentation of the sites included, referring to interesting sites, animals, history, cultural and social realities, etc.
- 2. Oral expression in situations of communication that are usual and specific to the cross-curricular fields
 - 2.1. Simple presentation of a place, or of a historical event, of a plant or an animal
 - telling a story using as prompts images, or texts that have missing words
 - offering simple answers to aiding questions, related to what one can see in a picture, where it is, what elements of nature are present, etc.
 - drawing maps, presentations of a certain site, of animals, views, historical characters, etc., in simple words
 - 2.2. Establishing social contacts, based on simple conventional formulae (introduction, instructions, asking and offering indications, etc.)

- simple conversations, asking indications related to transportation, routes, simple questions about the customs and behaviour of people and animals, geographical orienteering, etc.
 - asking/offering simple indications to find a place on the map, for a group game on themes related to the cross-curricular fields.
 - role-playing on various cross-curricular themes (members of an expedition, zoo workers, touristic guides, etc.)
- 2.3. Expressing preferences related to sites and historical characters, geographical sites, animals and plants
- formulating preferences in simple words and sentences
 - putting together and presenting a top of preferences in class
 - making tables, elements of a touristic guide, writing short descriptions in groups, debating preferences in groups
- 2.4. Manifesting a disposition to participating in a dialogue
- using certain simple conversational formulae, adequate for the situations related to the themes in the cross-curricular fields
 - role-plays on various themes: hiking in the mountains, discovering the ocean, watching exotic birds, etc.
 - pantomimes and guessing the mimed action/character
3. Receiving written messages in situations of communication that are usual and specific to the cross-curricular fields
- 3.1. Identification of information on boards and signs that can be found in public space, on the maps, on drawings with animals and plants, short explanations about historical characters and sites
- "Finding the treasure", identification of the animal, of the historical character, of the city, the country, of rivers and seas, etc.
 - exercises of identification of certain information on websites, or based on flash-cards, images with comments, etc.
 - reading in a group and individually of touristic announcement, letters from "a bottle", of short presentations of historical or natural sites
- 3.2. Extracting information from a short, illustrated text
- ordering/grouping images, on the basis of the information in a text
 - offering short answers to questions regarding details (Who? Where? What?)
 - associating certain sentences with images from a set
- 3.3. Identification of information in simple written messages, coming from friends or colleagues
- engaging in activities according to instructions they find in a message they receive (a note from a mate, a simple map, an e-mail message, an SMS, a letter in a box, etc.)
 - offering short answers to messages

- identification of the addresser, in an exchange of notes, letters, or other simple forms of writing in class
- 3.4. Manifesting curiosity for the reading related to the themes in the cross-curricular fields
 - orientation on the map, on a plan, in real and imaginary spaces
 - making itineraries to get to certain natural, geographical, historical, or cultural objectives, using various sources of inspiration
 - reading short texts from children's encyclopedias – in books or on the Internet
 - reading simple texts describing certain sites on the planisphere, animals or historical characters, drawn by classmates and published on the walls of the classroom
- 4. Writing messages in situations of communication that are usual and specific to the cross-curricular fields.
 - 4.1. Writing short and simple messages
 - writing sentences describing an image
 - formulating short messages on Whatsapp, SMS, e-mail, notes, etc.
 - creating a publicity logo, a collage with images that have short explanations (related to geographical, natural, or historical sites, animals and plants)
 - 4.2. Describing aspects and features of the places and times explored (in imaginary voyages)
 - putting together an album about the "expedition", with images, explanatory labels, presentations of animals and plants, related to places that were visited, of historical characters that were followed, etc.
 - writing a team magazine, or journey account, diary, entitled "On route with Columbus", containing the most interesting pages taken from the students' diaries and albums, and a travelogue
 - 4.3. Manifesting disponibility for the writing of short messages, but a little more complex
 - competition of touristic logos, referring to expeditions
 - short compositions proposing new expeditions – related to other characters, other moments in the history of humanity, other places on the Earth

Contents

<i>Domains of contents</i>	<i>The 5th grade</i>
1. Learning support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cardinals, maps - Written messages regarding plants, animals, geographical sites, elements of biography - Web pages about geographical,

	historical sites, brochures, maps, touristic posters, traveling diaries
2. Suggestions of contexts of communication and vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Historical characters - Expeditions, places to visit, preferred countries, animals, seas and oceans - Elements related to transportation on water
3. Functional grammar (speech acts/functions of the language, including socio-cultural conventions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To ask and give information - To express preferences - To describe places, characters, plants and animals - To re-tell short events in the present tense - To participate to simple oral/written dialogues

Examples of themes for the 5th grade – English language integrated in the cross-curricular field (history, geography, biology)

Themes: Italy and Genoa, Spain and Cordoba, Geography and environment of Italy and Spain, Where is America?, Who is the character?, What animal is this?, Seas and Oceans, Christopher Columbus and his boats, Sailing to America, The Watling Island in the Bahamas, Animals on the Watling Island, The Hispaniola, Plants and animals in the Bahamas, The people living in the Bahamas in Columbus's times, The Dominican Republic of today, Finding our way to the Bahamas by plane

Elements of construction of communication

- Expressing instructions, giving directions – The Present Tense Simple;
- Telling stories starting from pictures – The Present Tense Simple;
- Writing invitations, e-messages, thank you notes, labels/tags – The Present Tense Simple
- Describing actions in progress, present temporary activities – The Present Tense Continuous
- Expressing instructions, giving directions, performing commands – The Imperative
- Expressing ability – The Modal Verbs (can, cannot);
- Expressing permission, The Modal Verbs (can, cannot, may, may not);
- Expressing amount/quantity/numbers – Countable and uncountable nouns;
- Matching information - Countable and uncountable nouns;
- Identifying objects – Definite and Indefinite Article;

- Identifying objects – The Demonstrative pronouns and adjectives (this/that/these/those);
- Describing places, people (characters, historical figures, animals and plants) – The Adjective
- Expressing possession – The Possessive Adjective;
- Expressing order, date – The Ordinal Numeral;
- Placing objects - Prepositions of place and movement;
- Placing objects – Structures with *there*
- Expressing instructions, giving directions – The Present Tense Simple;
- Telling stories starting from pictures – The Present Tense Simple;
- Writing invitations, e-messages, thank you notes, labels/tags – The Present Tense Simple
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- Placing objects - Prepositions of place and movement;
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Examples of learning activities

- What is in the picture
- Following geographical instructions
- Find on the map
- The weather, short descriptions of animals, of geographical places, of a historical character, asks simple questions about images referring to Columbus and his time, to Genoa, to Spain, to his boat, about America, indicates certain elements of history and nature of the Bahamas, etc.
- Let us follow Columbus to "Asia"

- Animals in the Bahamas – a Beauty Pageant
- Listen to the story – a story of the voyage of Columbus
- Spot the place – after a short description of the American Islands
- A letter in a bottle from Columbus's ship
- All about your favourite place on Hispaniola
- You are an explorer! – Propose an exploration trip
- Guess who the character is
- Get on the right plane/train/boat to get to America today
- Write a diary of your expedition along Columbus
- Create the album of the voyage with the most impressive sights, animals and fish
- Go on a virtual tour of the Genoa Columbus Sea-World

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