

CLIL in Primary school English Lessons: Weather Wonders

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Abstract. CLIL - content and language integrated learning is an approach that promotes the learning of curricular content in tandem with any foreign language (the English Language in this study). Implementing CLIL in primary school has always been a challenge because of obstacles teachers might find using CLIL. Using CLIL in your classes has the dual purpose of serving as a proper language practice and, as primary students grow, apprising the teacher of what students have learned. My experience of implementing CLIL methodology in Primary school indicates that it is a good way of encouraging children to come out of their shells.

Keywords: CLIL, Primary school, integrated learning, support students, Weather Triangle

In Russia as well as in certain European countries primary education refers to learning situations and class teaching where one teacher teaches all subjects to the whole class or group of children aged from 7 up to 10-11. However, teaching English here has always been a little different. Children learn the rules of the English Language, its grammar, vocabulary, spelling, study the topics related to the units from Student's Book and do listening comprehension activities. Today, we are all aware of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). Integrated learning means that the class is aimed to achieve both the knowledge of the subject matter and the target language. It also means that teachers need to teach both at once. In fact, CLIL "placed both language and non-language content in a form of continuum, without implying preference for one or the other" (Marsh, 2002: 58). When it comes to integrated teaching we must be aware of the fact that students (in our case primary students) have not yet gained satisfactory language skills to understand the contents of education which means that all new terms and new content must be based on the skills and language already known and acquired by children aged 9-10 . The integration of usual curricular subject areas into English lessons can increase the interest of primary students in content themes. CLIL, the integrated learning of English in this case, can even help to avoid excessive school timetable. It involves children in cross-curricular learning sequences and leads to purposeful and meaningful learning experiences.

Though primary English education is almost everywhere compulsory and given a high priority in Russia, challenges still exist. One of the challenges in CLIL implementation is the lack of

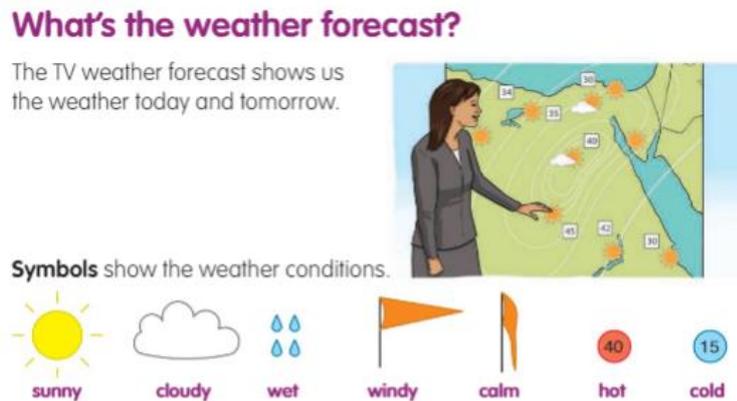
knowledge, and / or methodology in using CLIL approach in primary school. Teachers sometimes see themselves as language teachers only and therefore, CLIL subject is taught through a lot of unnecessary translation. I believe, if concerns are raised while planning CLIL lessons certain aims have to be established (scaffolding is of great help here both for teachers and students) and teachers are usually eager to come up with ideas for CLIL activities to avoid too much translation. Teachers notice that bringing content into the language lessons and using different topics from the content curriculum leads to far more varied activity of primary students. In other words, we enrich cross-curricular opportunities and start using more supporting resources.

Another challenge is the idea that in addition to being a language teacher, you need to be an expert in other subject matters. For example, some teachers still believe that teaching mathematics you have to have a university degree in mathematics, or in order to employ CLIL in classes where students study science you need to go back to university to revise physics and chemistry. As soon as teachers realise that their major issue is giving comprehensible inputs to students, that obstacle vanishes. It might be difficult to teach like that, especially at the beginning, but it makes students concentrate more and use the English language for a purpose, which means both strong and weak primary students can benefit.

The aim of this current study is to describe my approach to teaching the topic Seasons and Weather to primary students. The age of my students is 9-10 years, they all are from Grades 3 and 4 and started learning English from Grade 1. They have three classes of English per week and one class of CLIL as required in their curriculum. Those two grades are chosen because students already have sufficient background to follow CLIL Science classes and CLIL Science ideas and themes can be closely linked with the aims and objectives of their English classes (we study living and non-living things around, analyse the ways of caring for pets, study the importance of plants, explore different ways of caring for our bodies). Seasons and Weather is the topic studied in current textbooks where lessons are designed in the same format for students of different levels. As a rule, students learn the 12 months of the year, they know the four seasons and typical weather for each season. When we talk about the weather primary students can say that the weather is sunny or windy, warm or cold, snowy or rainy. More than that, primary students as well as secondary students usually say that Seasons and Weather topic seems to be rather boring. I decided to change that matter and make the topic enjoyable for my students.

Primary students love drawing painting and working with pictures thus, my **first step** was to ask them to draw the Sun, a snowflake, a raindrop, a cloud and ice. I explained that if we take the noun CLOUD and add suffix Y to it, we get the adjective: CLOUD + Y = CLOUDY. My class loved making adjectives and soon we had their pictures and words below SUN + Y = SUNNY, SNOW + Y = SNOWY, ICE + Y = ICY. Repeating words or phrases gives primary students a nice chance for

auditory practice and when we repeat crucial phrases, we are actually supporting students in getting the definition of the words and their usage right. The page from our Student's Book helps implement the words, the symbols and new terminology.



In Grade 3 primary students study Degrees of Comparison of Adjectives. My **next step** was comparing the weather today and the weather yesterday. The students saw the questions on the board and I read them out, too. Is it COLDER today than it was yesterday? Were the raindrops yesterday WARMER than today? Is the night SHORTER or LONGER than the day? All students' answers prepare them for making a nice weather report, that is why I usually repeat questions and we compare different opinions.

Step three was about the temperature. Here we use the Celsius temperature scale, where water freezes at 0°C and boils at 100°C. I explained to my students what the words ABOVE and BELOW meant and they all practised saying different temperatures I showed to them on the World Weather Information Service site (<https://worldweather.wmo.int/en/home.html>). We didn't forget to compare different temperatures; in fact thinking about how to bring the content to each student's skill level I was aimed to build in my primary students a stronger understanding of the issues we were covering.

Our next thing that led my students to detailed description of the weather, **step four** was observing the weather conditions that day. We were looking at the trees and the sky and the yard out of the window and I proceeded with the following questions: Do you think you will need an umbrella today? Will it rain? Will the weather be rainy? Are the leaves shaking? Is it windy? Is the wind stronger today than yesterday? Does it look like stormy weather? Can you see the objects in the street clearly? Is it foggy now? Was it foggy in the morning? My students were answering the questions and I implemented the usage of at least three Grammar Tenses – Future Simple, Present Continuous, Past Simple, my primary students used modal verb CAN in their answers and we repeated and revised the things I described in my step one (FOG + Y = FOGGY).

Step five was the final one, when I suggested my primary students drawing a nice triangle and making their own weather forecast (or weather description) for today. I showed that the most

significant information should be up - the season, the month and the night / day temperature. Then, going down inside the triangle, we started putting the adjectives or verbs to make the weather observation for the day. Every line written in the triangle was followed and supported with my questions and even class discussions. However, for primary students who found it too difficult to write the words, it was possible to draw a raindrop / the sun / clouds/ an umbrella / leaves of the trees. We got that Weather Triangle:



After making the nice Weather Triangle all primary students in my class were ready to give quite a sufficient talk on the weather that day, comparing the night and day temperatures, differences between three spring months and covering each “line” in our Weather Triangle. The story could even last 3 or 3,5 minutes and did not seem to be boring or complicated for them, on the contrary everybody wanted to give a more detailed weather forecast and explain why they thought the weather was cloudy or it would rain soon. The hearts on the board were the signs whether the child liked the weather or not.

References

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