



Asia capable teacher

Mount Waverley Secondary College VIC

Nick Creed

It is great to be challenging the students and trying something new. CLIL [Content and Language Integrated Learning] can be hard work; 'fail to plan' does equate to planning to fail. I am learning again, not just about teaching, but the language and the content.

Nick Creed, BALGS Project leader, Japanese Language teacher

Pedagogies for the 21st century connect students with prior knowledge, identities and contexts outside of the classroom, and with multiple ways of knowing and cultural perspectives (Stevens, 2011). Schools have an urgent task to 'cultivate in students the ability to see themselves as members of a heterogeneous nation ... and a still more heterogeneous world, and to understand something of the history and character of the diverse groups that inhabit it' (Nussbaum, 2010, cited in Stevens, 2011).

The BALGS project at Mount Waverley Secondary College aimed to trial a module of learning based on the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) method (Maljers, et al., 2002). Through CLIL, language is taught in an integrated way with disciplinary content, giving students the opportunity to increase their language learning and their intercultural communicative competence.

The five-week module Let's CLIL the Renaissance! was designed to provide Year 8 students with the option of studying The Renaissance in Japanese. Students used their target language with authentic materials and a real-world topic that opened them up to a range of cultural beliefs and viewpoints (Dalton-Puffer, 2011). The BALGS Project Leader and teacher of Japanese, Nick Creed, reported that he was inspired to trial a CLIL module with his students because of his desire to add 'authenticity to student learning' and capitalise on what he observed as the students' strong interest in language learning beyond 'core grammatical and vocabulary' activities. Thus, he designed the module with a view to:

- promote creative and critical thinking about the Renaissance from a non-European perspective in order to transform student thinking
- develop students' higher-order historical inquiry skills
- develop students' intercultural competencies, largely through bi-lingual language use and bridging the gaps between historical worldviews and paradigms
- develop students' Japanese language abilities
- add authenticity to student learning (via language immersion).

Other catalysts for the trial included the interest already shown by the school to utilise CLIL as a new form of curriculum design; Mt Waverley had, for example, previously collaborated with other schools in the Innovative Language Provision In Clusters (ILPIC) project. In addition, Nick had been trained in CLIL through the University of Melbourne (Professional Certificate in Education-CLIL).

Specifically, the module invited students to explore significant developments and/or cultural achievements during the Renaissance, and their development within contemporary Japan.

Nick described this focus:

Starting with the very definition of the Renaissance, it is interesting to look at a society 'reborn', connecting the people and places of the late Medieval Period in Europe to many of the concepts and knowledge we use in everyday life. The ideas of studying, experimenting, creating and sharing with the world is one that resonated with me ... Through their study of the Renaissance in Japanese, hopefully the students will go through each of those phases themselves.

It was also important that best practice pedagogy for teaching History was referenced in the design of the unit to ensure that the key objectives of Historical studies were also met, as Nick elaborated:

Synthesis and analysis, as well as continuity and change, are prime areas of study in History. For the CLIL unit to be successful students must be able to not just describe the lower-order processing skills, such as what occurred; they must also be applying higher-order skills about why ... with an appropriate 'tool-kit' of skills they will be able to take the facts, concepts, and text-type skills and apply them meaningfully.

Further, the CLIL module was planned with a strong intercultural understanding focus in mind. Students analysed modern applications of Renaissance discoveries and inventions, for example, Japanese woodblock prints compared to the Printing Press of Europe, and the very notable similarities between the pre-Renaissance feudal systems of Japan and England. Students also compared the use of culturally appropriate conventions when using spoken and written scripts.

This space for the simultaneous development of language fluency and historical knowledge resonates with Cross' (2012) metaphor of CLIL as a 'sandpit.' Here, language is not viewed as an object of study; rather, a tool subtly worked into content-based tasks. As a form of curriculum design, CLIL allows students to be creative in using the language they are learning and to extend and deepen their language knowledge without formal instruction (Dalton-Puffer, 2011).

This transformative approach to language and intercultural understanding (see Banks, 2004) was not without its challenges for both teacher and students. Achieving a balance between content and language learning was informed by student feedback at the completion of each lesson. Evaluation data on the effectiveness of the trial was obtained through students' self-assessments. The data indicated that students identified considerable improvements in their knowledge and understanding of History and Japanese.

Key impacts include:

- On average, CLIL student results on a standardised English test in History that required analysis and interpretation were higher than the results of students in mainstream classes.
- CLIL student perceptions of their Japanese and History competencies both increased over the duration of the course, from a mean competence ranking of 7.2 (out of 10) to 8.2 by the end of the unit.
- CLIL student perceptions of their Historical ability increased from a mean of 7.7 at the beginning of the unit to 8.2 at the end.
- Students began the unit with the main language of discourse being English; by the last lesson only Japanese was being spoken in the class.
- All students articulated that their language confidence and communication skills had improved over the course of the unit.

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The willingness of the school to support an innovative method that integrated language learning with content learning is reflective of Nussbaum's call for a 21st-century education that views diversity as a given (see Rizvi, 2006, 2012). Students learnt at the same time a language through which to communicate cross-culturally and Historical content relevant to understanding both the past and the present, and how different worldviews have shaped cultures and identities.

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