

Integrating a Content and Language Integrated Learning Approach into a University Language Program

Clayton A. Campbell* and Gregory A. King**

1 Introduction

Changes in language programs are only natural as we discover effective ways to learn languages. The Department of English Language and Culture at Chubu University is no different and in 2018 changed the way four of their core classes were taught-Integrated English A, B, C, and D. Prior to 2018, these were facilitative courses. “Facilitative teaching seeks to help [learners] ‘construct’ meaning and come to an understanding of important ideas and processes. Teachers in this role guide [learner] inquiries into complex problems, texts, cases, projects, or situations. Their principal methods are questioning, probing, and process-related commentary, with little or no direct instruction” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2007). Through the 2017 school year, these courses were based around a standard textbook series, but were not coordinated between teachers.

In 2018, the approach was moved to a content and language integrated learning (CLIL) one that is coordinated so students in all sections are being taught the same information on the same day and being tested with the same tests. It should be noted that these classes meet twice a week in 90-minute periods. The aforementioned change in curriculum was motivated, in part, by a desire to accommodate the needs of the large number of students who study abroad each year. The CLIL design better serves to prepare students for the type of educational experience that they will receive in the foreign university classrooms in which they will study. It not only gives them background information about the culture they will be visiting, but also provides them with presentation skills they will need in their classes overseas.

This paper will provide the rationale for this approach and a detailed description of each of the components of these courses. The development of this curriculum continues to be an ongoing process with improvements being implemented on a semester-by-semester basis.

*人間力創成総合教育センター 語学教育プログラム（英語）

**人文学部 英語英米文化学科

2 The Essence of CLIL

What exactly is CLIL and does it promote general and specific language competence? Brown and Bradford (2017) provide the following definition for CLIL:

CLIL is an approach to education that integrates language and content learning; planning for, fostering, and assessing both, though the focus may shift from one to the other. CLIL is also a method of teaching which draws heavily on constructivist and socio-cultural notions of learning to provide students with opportunities for meaningful input and output in L2 and meaningful engagement with content.

Blower, Rozsnoi, and Smith (2017), who have all taught courses similar to the one we are describing in this paper, add further to the definition of CLIL as:

According to Meyer (2010), CLIL material should be meaningful, challenging, and authentic. Authentic here means not tailored for language students: The teacher scaffolds learning, allowing authentic materials to be “a rich source for designing challenging tasks that foster creative thinking and create opportunities for meaningful language output.” (p. 14) It should engage Coyle’s “four Cs” of content, communication (unrehearsed, yet scaffolded, production), cognition (development of thinking skills) and culture (under- standing and tolerance of alternative culture perspectives (Wiesemes, 2009).

This is exactly what we have implemented in our Integrated English A through D classes. Students are learning about English-speaking countries, primarily the United States and the United Kingdom, in English. That is the content learning, and they are assessed on that learning via multiple-choice tests and the preparation of and implementation of presentations based on research. Language learning is done through the study and testing of vocabulary, reading, and presentations. The remainder of this paper will lay out a typical cycle for one unit from the book. We are using three units consisting of two readings each for a total of six readings for each semester in each class.

3 Introduction of the topic

The first class in the cycle begins with a video that is related to the topic students will be reading about. For example, in Integrated English C, the first unit is titled Flags and Symbols. The first reading is about the British flag. This reading explains how the current flag, also known as the “Union Jack,” came to be in its present form. Before students read that passage, we have them watch a short video (42 seconds) that shows them the history of this iconic flag. Students are also given a handout that asks them questions about the video and has a QR-code that links to the video (fig. 1). Unlike many of the other videos, this particular video has only music and no listening comprehension.

History of the Union Jack

1. When did Scotland and England join?
2. When did Ireland join Great Britain?
3. How many colors does the flag have?
4. Which of these is correct?

A



B





Figure 1 Handout for a video about the history of the Union Jack

The second unit is about leaders. There are two readings; one is about Winston Churchill and the other is about John F. Kennedy. This video is slightly longer (2 minutes 55 seconds), and is an introduction to a documentary about JFK. This video is a bit difficult for students to follow, so we have developed a cloze exercise in which students watch the video and listen to what is being said and fill in the blanks with the words that they hear. With this handout we have used the QR code to link to the entire documentary in case students wish to challenge themselves and watch it in its entirety. Figure 2 shows the first page of the handout given to students.



John F. Kennedy

Watch the video and fill in the blanks with the words that you hear. The QR code will take you to the entire documentary.

There was something about John F. Kennedy from the very beginning. The way he came across, his _____, the notes of idealism that he struck.

Every one of us will go home with the most profound impression of what a strong vital people can accomplish.

There was substance there, but it was much more than substance, it was reaching the public and especially _____ emotionally in a way that's lasted for a lifetime.

I don't think you can separate the _____ tie that the public had. You have an intellectual tie, you admire his vision, his knowledge, his judgment, his strategy, his eloquence. But the _____ tie through the family I think was really a very important one.

He _____ us all to be better people. He _____ us to try to work to make this country better. He _____ us to seek things that we didn't think we're ever possible.

Figure 2 Handout for a video about John F. Kennedy

4 Study of Vocabulary

Upon initiating the CLIL course, the study of vocabulary occurred traditionally (the English word with the corresponding Japanese word), based on vocabulary lists printed at the beginning of each unit. The vocabulary for the two subunit stories within each unit was represented as a single block (English and Japanese) and one test was created per unit (English-Japanese/Japanese-English). It was quickly determined that teaching vocabulary within discourse and context would likely be a more effective way for students to benefit from their studies. As well, there was an emphasis to utilize high-frequency vocabulary whenever possible. At this point, we made

vocabulary lists with English words and the definitions written in English.

Two vocabulary tests were created for each unit (one for each reading passage). Given that the tests came more frequently, this allowed for more focus on the vocabulary presented in each story and a better recall for students. Tests were created for vocabulary to be used in context (sentences with blanks and vocabulary to be chosen from a small list) and in English only.

A more effective way for students to study was investigated and a website/app solution called Quizlet was chosen. The vocabulary lists were posted to Quizlet with definitions written in English. Also, instead of having one large vocabulary list like what is found in the textbook, lists using vocabulary from each reading were put on Quizlet (see figure 3). Students make an account and join a class on Quizlet via smartphone, tablet, or computer. This allows students to easily study during their commute to and from school. In addition, there is a portion of the software dedicated to collaborative study in the classroom called Quizlet Live. Used during class time, it is a game that reinforces vocabulary while creating a study atmosphere that is exciting and one that students enjoy.

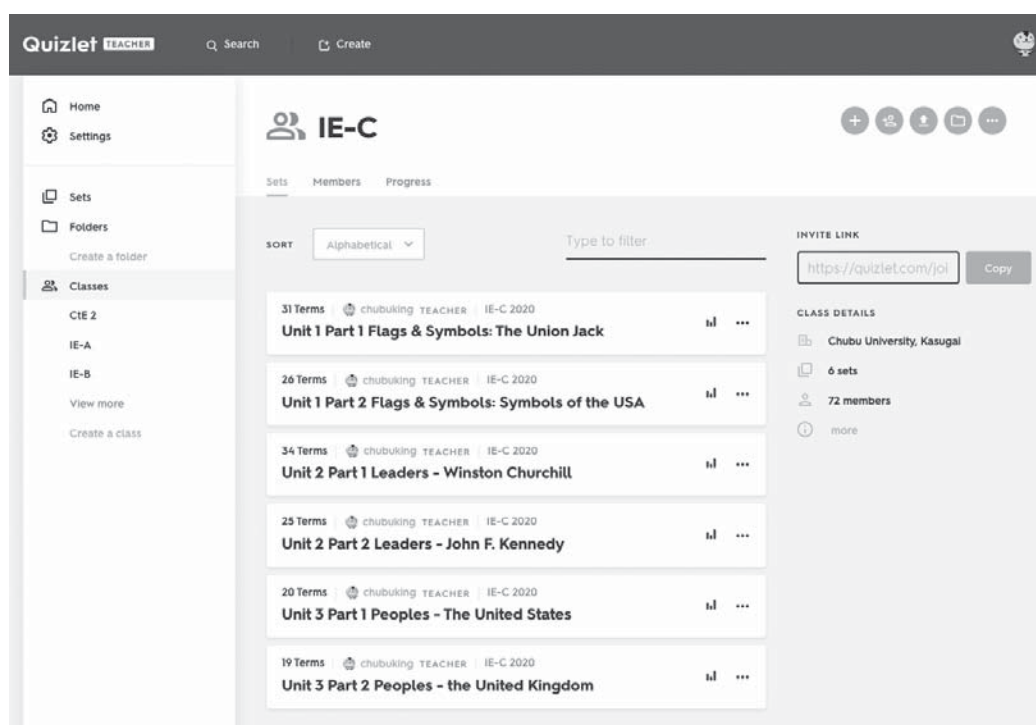


Figure 3 Vocabulary lists on Quizlet for Integrated English C

5 Readings

A typical reading from book one or book two is usually from five to seven paragraphs in length. There are two readings per unit, usually one focusing on the U.K. and the other on the U.S. After taking a test over the vocabulary they will encounter in the reading, the class goes over a brief introductory page that introduces the main topic. The students are then divided into small groups of three or four and each student in the group, in turn, reads a paragraph out loud. Students are encouraged to work together to understand the text and to seek the instructor's attention regarding pronunciation questions. Upon finishing the reading, the instructor may ask a series of short questions to help students focus on the main points within the reading. Thereafter, students will answer seven to ten comprehension questions and a few discussion questions in class or as homework. The instructor will then proceed to draw students' attention to some central ideas/questions that should be addressed in the presentation. In the class following the reading, there is a content test consisting of seven questions that are central to the main ideas that, ideally, should be derived from the story.

6 Choosing a topic

After completing both readings in the unit, instructors again focus the students' attention on the main ideas of the unit, e. g., flags and symbols. The students are then encouraged to research a country that they are interested in presenting about. Often a predetermined list is offered to help guide the students to make an informed choice on countries (usually commonwealth) that may be easier to research and report on. Students bring their computers to the following class and are given the entire period to research their topic with the instructor assisting them in the process. The subsequent class period is dedicated to the production of a poster and practice of their presentation.

7 Preparing a presentation

Presentation preparation is divided between three class periods. Two of those are dedicated to topic research with students using their computers to investigate the topics in Japanese and English. Students explore their given topics with specific questions in mind that they need to

address (for example, flags and symbols of a country, region, or city):

- What are the symbols and images that you chose for your country, region, city?
- What symbols are on the flag of that country, region, city?
- What is the history of these symbols?
- What do these symbols mean or represent?
- How are these symbols connected to the country, region, city?

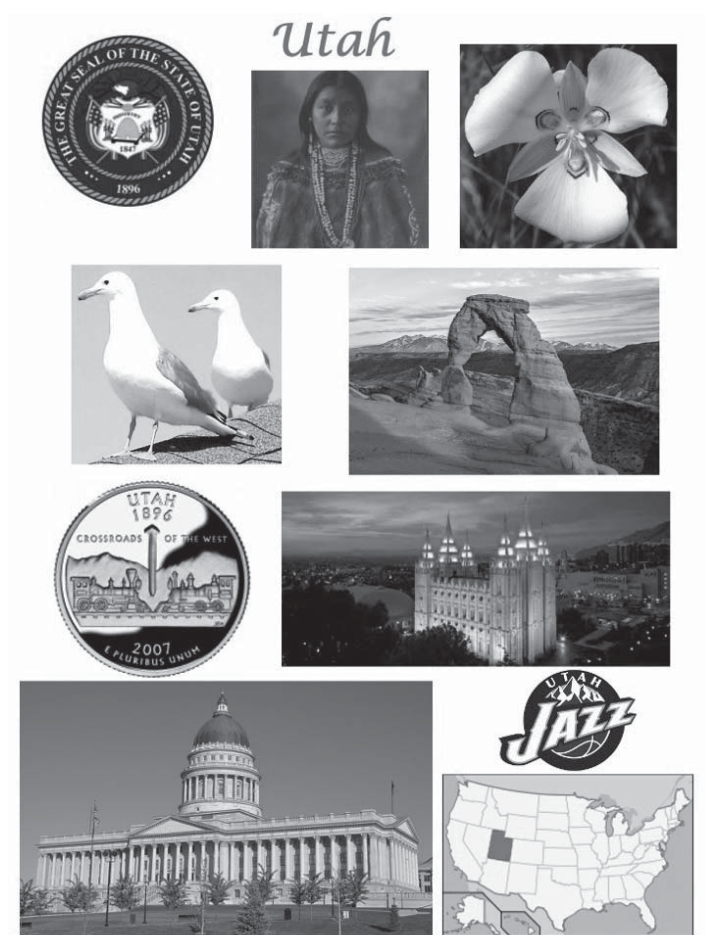


Figure 4 Sample poster on flags and symbols.

Students download their pictures/images during the third of these presentation preparation periods. They are required to produce an A3 size poster on their computer, to be printed out and utilized while presenting. A sample poster on flags and symbols is shown in figure 4. Students must choose at least eight pictures and place them on the poster template, minimizing

the surrounding white space. In the following class period, students practice giving their presentations to others in the class. As well, instructors review the posters that were produced by students giving ideas and feedback. Students are also required to produce a practice video on their smartphone and submit it prior to presentation day.

8 Presentations

The final class period for each unit is dedicated to presentations. Students are placed in groups of four or five (typically six to seven groups) and listen to each other's presentations. Smaller presentation groups help to mitigate the anxiety that many students experience in whole-class presentations. Classes are mixed so that students are presenting to those from other classrooms. The presentations are usually from five to seven minutes in length. Presenters stand while delivering their presentations. Students are not allowed to read from scripts and are penalized points if they do. The challenges of eliminating script reading, along with another issue, incomprehensible pronunciation, (Blower, Rozsnyoi, Smith, 2017) are greatly reduced due to the luxury of having double the number of class periods per week, which provides the extra time needed to address and provide appropriate feedback to students.

Audience members are required to write six keywords and a question about each presentation and direct it to the presenter. Additionally, they must also complete a peer evaluation sheet for each presenter. The presenter must also complete a self-evaluation immediately following their presentation. Both the self-assessment and the peer assessments are then uploaded via a Google Forms assessment page. Instructors monitor all of the presenters and complete evaluations for each presenter's performance based on poster quality, fluency, enthusiasm, eye contact, and general pronunciation. The aforementioned luxury of time afforded by two full class periods per week allows for an increased level of student focus in the preparation of both the visual aspect of the presentation (poster), and the verbal element in the live delivery of the presentation to peers.

9 Conversation Recordings

At the beginning of each unit in the first semester for new freshmen, students are assigned partners by teachers and required to record a conversation in English about three predetermined topics they choose themselves from a list. Students can also come up with their own topics, but should add them to their list so as to not repeat a topic. The students determine an appropriate

time to get together and have the conversations outside of class. These conversations must be fifteen minutes long and be given to their instructors when finished. Since the majority of students have iPhones, they are asked to record their conversations on the preinstalled Voice Memos app. They can then use the AirDrop function to transfer the file to their teacher's iPad, iPhone, or Apple computer. New partners and topics are assigned for each unit. The recordings are checked by teachers and feedback is given regarding conversation tips and techniques.

The reason for having students complete these conversation recordings is to get them talking. Many students do not get much speaking practice before entering the university and this is a way to force them to speak in the target language and have real conversations. It is also a way for the students to get to know other students within their major.

10 Extensive Reading

In addition to the unit readings, vocabulary study, and topic research, the Department of English Language and Culture employs a department-wide extensive reading objective of 50,000 words in the first semester and 75,000 words in the second semester for freshmen, and a goal of 100,000 words for sophomores in both the first and second semesters. The department has also instituted midterm reading goals for students in an attempt to remedy the tendency of some students to wait until the final week to meet the entire semester reading goal. If a student fails to reach the midterm goal, their final grade for the class is reduced by ten percentage points. If the final goal is not met, their grade is lowered by twenty-five percentage points, which represents the maximum possible deduction from their grade. For example, if a student does not meet either goal and their grade at the end of the semester is 80%, their final grade will be lowered by twenty-five percentage points and they will fail the class with a final grade of 55%. Students can also increase their grade by reading more books during the semester. For every 10,000 words over the goal for the semester, they get one percentage point added to their grade. Therefore, if a student has a goal of 100,000 words and they read 159,235 words, they will have five percentage points added to their final grade.

Students are encouraged to borrow books or graded readers from either the school library or the graded reader section of our Multi-Media Room (MMR). They then proceed to take tests for the books they have read on a website called MReader. When the department first started using MReader, students had no time limit on when they could take a test. This led to the problem of some students simply taking one test after another to try and pass the tests for books they did not read. After that problem was discovered, a time limit was placed on when students could take a

test. Generally students must wait between one and three hours to take another test depending upon the level of the book on which they have previously tested.

With reference to levels, students should be reading at or below their level. They should not be struggling to read. If a student has to consult their dictionary to look up unknown words, or the grammar is too difficult for them, reading is likely to become a chore. Students should be able to read the books with relative ease and if they are having problems reading a book, they should change to a different level or even publisher. On MReader, students are placed at a level when they enter the university. If they pass the tests for six books at their level, they are elevated to the next level. Students are able to take the tests for two books at one level above their own, and one test for one book at two levels above their own. They can also read all levels below their own.

11 Final Assessments

The final weeks of each semester include two important evaluations, a test on the posters that the students produced for their presentations in each unit, and a final exam that includes content and vocabulary questions from each unit. Students are given one class period to practice asking questions about the posters to each other in groups. In preparation for the poster test, students are divided into two groups and sent to different teachers to be evaluated. The students bring the three posters that they created for the three units studied during the semester. Posters are placed on a table and the teacher proceeds to ask questions about each poster and determine the level of understanding that the students possess. Each student poster test takes from four to five minutes to complete. The poster testing process is divided over two class periods.

12 Conclusion

Having utilized the CLIL curriculum for two and a half years, we have observed that it is superior to the previous curriculum in the following ways. First, the way in which the course was designed allows the department to centralize instruction for all of the instructors who are teaching the course. Additionally, the course is taught during the same periods for all teachers. This has led to increased teacher collaboration and sharing of problems encountered in the classroom. Instructors typically meet prior to each class to discuss aspects of that day's class and to make sure that they are ready to present the same video activity, quiz, material, etc. Second, students

are guided towards and expected to engage higher order thinking skills, in particular, creativity in the production of posters, and the delivery of presentations in a peer setting. We have witnessed an increased comfort level from the vast majority of students when they are asked to utilize creativity in poster design, and specific speech skills and strategies when presenting. Finally, students are challenged by the deliberate integration of two subjects, British and American culture/history, and English. A good number of these students will choose to study abroad in the U.S. and this curriculum provides them with confidence in both English language skills and knowledge of the country in which they will be studying. Providing this broader picture of reality assists students in reaching a higher goal and can be seen as the genuine strength of a CLIL curriculum.

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