

Moving Toward CLIL for Early Childhood Educators in a University

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In this paper, a specific example of the development, implementation, and preliminary evaluation of a content and language integrated learning (CLIL) curriculum for early childhood education and care majors in their university's required freshman and sophomore English classes in Japan is described. The choice of learning goals, materials development, and teacher training, in particular, are the focus. Results from a survey given to teachers after completing one semester under the new curriculum as well as data from the teachers and the university's library as to their use of the selected children's songs and picture books in class are discussed. From these results, further steps in materials development, continued teacher training, and evaluation of student learning under the new curriculum are explained.

本論文では、日本の大学1、2年生必修英語クラスにおける保育・子供教育専攻向けのCLIL(内容言語統合型学習)カリキュラムの開発、実施、予備的評価の具体的な事例について述べる。中でも学習目標、教材開発、教員養成に焦点を当てる。新カリキュラムでの前期終了後、担当教員に行った調査結果及び、教員が授業用に選んだ子供向けの歌や絵本について、本人及び大学図書館から得たデータについて論じ、これらを踏まえ、さらなる教材開発、継続的教員養成、新カリキュラムの学習評価の方法について説明を行う。

Even a cursory search reveals that in recent years, content and language integrated learning (CLIL) approaches to second language teaching and learning have been receiving much attention in Japan. New research groups into CLIL practices are being formed, such as the one I was invited to join at my university in 2015. At that same

time, curriculum reform was being planned in my department, the Department of Early Childhood Education and Care.

Students in this department need to obtain two licenses in order to teach both in Japanese kindergartens and also in childcare centers. Required courses not related to licensing were reduced, and the number of foundation English class sessions for freshman and sophomore students was changed from three to two 90-minute periods per week. It was then imperative to make the two remaining class sessions per week as effective and useful for students as possible, and I was asked to design a new curriculum to do this. Because I also was part of the newly formed CLIL study group, movement toward creating a CLIL curriculum was started, with its implementation beginning in academic year 2017 (AY2017) with the freshman class.

In this paper, further rationale for choosing a CLIL curriculum and the choice of learning goals for this particular context, that of English for early childhood education (ECE) majors at a university in Japan, will be explained. Then, information on selected content to be taught, materials development, and how teacher training has been organized will be described. Finally, results from a survey given to teachers after completing one semester under the new curriculum as well as data about their use of the selected children's songs and picture books in class will be discussed. From these preliminary results, further steps in materials development, continued teacher training, and evaluation of student learning under the new curriculum will be stated.

Why CLIL?

There are several strong reasons why a CLIL curriculum is particularly suited to this specific context, the required English classes for ECE majors in a university in Japan. According to Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010), CLIL is a "dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content *and* language" (p. 1). This exposure of students to relevant content is the first of

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these reasons. Upon entering the university, almost all of the students in this department have already decided on their career path. In their 2nd year, ECE majors embark upon the first of their 2-week practical teaching experiences in Japanese kindergartens and childcare centers. Therefore, content and activities such as learning children's songs, reading picture books aloud, and researching topics related to their future careers in their required English classes have the potential to be immediately relevant and support what they are studying and the skills they are practicing in their core content classes in Japanese.

CLIL is distinct from communicative language teaching in that it has the potential to provide more authenticity and naturalness in language use in the classroom. It is also different from content-based instruction (CBI) in its holistic approach that integrates content and language learning through activities in which the four skills are practiced and there is equal engagement of productive and receptive skills (Brown & Bradford, 2017). This integration is represented in a framework containing the four Cs of CLIL—content, communication, cognition, and culture—all interrelated within specific contexts (Coyle et al., 2010, p. 41).

A second reason for CLIL in this context is that verbal communication skills in particular are necessary for ECEs. It has been long documented in the field of child development that preliterate children's interaction with skilled adults using speech is crucial in their development (Black, 2015; Luria, 1961, 1979/1982; Luria & Yudovich, 1957/1971; Vygotsky & Luria, 1930/1993). By focusing on oral communication skills integrated with content in CLIL English classes, ECE majors have the potential to gain a greater awareness of the levels of language that can be used with children at different stages of development. This can give them a clearer idea of how to adjust their language when speaking with children whether they use Japanese or English.

Third, there is evidence that a CLIL curriculum can be adapted successfully to different contexts in many parts of the world. This has been happening since 1994, when the term was first adopted and used to describe practices and educational success in various school environments that had independently come upon similar ways to enrich learning (Coyle et al., 2010). This flexibility allows teachers to help students to personalize the specific content they will learn and explore further the themes that are of most interest and use to them. In doing this, cultural points often naturally arise and can be addressed. As ECE majors in Japan are increasingly more likely to encounter children with multicultural backgrounds in their future workplaces, fostering intercultural awareness and understanding is of importance in their course of study (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2015).

Fourth, following CLIL teaching practices does not exclude classroom practices and teaching strategies that have been demonstrated to be effective, such as project and cooperative learning (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2014). Additionally, CLIL is a means for teachers to examine more closely how they interact with students using language, with special attention paid to helping students practice and build cognitive skills and understand themselves as learners. Particularly as future teachers of young children, students in this department can benefit from a deeper understanding of language, human learning, individual differences, and how they might interact with children in ways to promote language development no matter what language is used (Black, 2018).

Curriculum Development

Overall Learning Goals

With the four Cs of CLIL in mind and in consultation with professors teaching the core content subjects in my department, five overall learning goals were selected for the new curriculum. They are:

- a. To raise all students' levels of speaking, listening, reading, and writing in English, but with a main emphasis on improving speaking skills;
- b. To help students learn basic information about topics related to their major in English;
- c. To improve skills they will need as ECEs in the future; these include leading songs and imagination activities, reading books with children, explaining and demonstrating concepts in science and math, and selecting and creating appropriate learning materials for children;
- d. To develop cognitive skills such as summarizing, critiquing, and comparing and contrasting information through their individual research and analysis of topics they have selected; and
- e. For the advanced-level students, to develop a strong enough base of language skills to participate fully in the overseas fieldwork class when 3rd- or 4th-year students.

Selecting Content

Children's Songs and Action Games

The first content selected was children's songs and action games. Since AY2015 I have been more systematically introducing these in my English classes for ECE students. In

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AY2015, 83% of the students in one of my classes ($N = 21$) chose learning the songs as one of the three activities that had helped them learn the most. In AY2016, learning children's songs was again the most frequently chosen activity. Students saw a strong link between this activity and their future as childcare workers.

The songs are easy to memorize and students often sing them unconsciously outside of class. They can be used for pronunciation practice, and five to 10 songs can be learned per semester, spending only 15 minutes of class time per lesson. Students will remember them for years with little prompting. By introducing them over the course of the year teachers can, with not much extra preparation, have a significant effect on student learning. Therefore, 25 traditional children's songs and actions games were the first content and materials selected for the new curriculum.

Children's Picture Books

For many years I have also been using children's picture books in English classes with ECE students for various learning purposes. The main advantages of using the books are that they can be employed in different ways to practice all four skills and can engage all levels of students. Furthermore, some English translations of classic Japanese children's books are available, such as *Guri and Gura* (Nakagawa, 1963/2003), which are already familiar to the students. Cultural points also arise from their use. Selecting a set of children's picture books for use in class was the second area of content prepared for the new curriculum.

Content Themes

Using children's songs and picture books can be easily added to lesson plans, and by doing so can quickly raise the level of engagement of students in using English. However, using them may not adequately address all the four Cs of CLIL, especially the aspect of cognition, which includes the skills of dealing with concepts and consolidating information. Therefore, in consultation with the ECE faculty members, content themes (Table 1) have been suggested for each semester around which teachers can select reading passages, present information orally, and have students individually choose research topics for short written reports and presentations.

Teachers sometimes may be hesitant to teach a particular topic in their language classes as they feel they do not have adequate knowledge of the subject. However, by having the students choose research topics from among the themes, the teacher's role switches from that of the purveyor of information to a guide in helping students express

the information they find more clearly. Thus, teachers do not necessarily need to be experts in the content and can be learning along with their students about the topics chosen (Coyle et al., 2010). In addition, they can use their skills to help students judge the quality of information they find and check their facts for accuracy. Students then share this information with others in the class in English through their short written reports and oral presentations. In this manner, there is the potential for students and teachers to learn about a richer and wider variety of topics than are usually available in any one textbook.

Table 1. Content Themes for Required English Classes

Semester	Themes
Freshman English I, Spring	Adjusting to university life, health, family, creating a positive environment for children's growth
Freshman English II, Fall	Education systems, teaching children with different abilities, current social issues surrounding children
Sophomore English I, Spring	Famous children's picture book authors and illustrators, child educators, creating and evaluating learning materials for young children
Sophomore English II, Fall	Prejudice and discrimination, issues involving children's human rights, government policy toward children in Japan and other countries

Materials Development

Creating a Teachers' Handbook

To guide teachers in implementing the new curriculum, an in-house 52-page booklet, *English Teachers' Handbook of Activities for Early Childhood Education Majors*, was prepared for AY2017. It contains an explanation of the overall learning goals, suggestions for learning activities in both the speaking/listening and reading/writing classes, tips for introducing children's songs in class, eight different lesson outlines for using children's picture books in class, 25 traditional songs and action games (see Appendix A for an example), and a list of the set of selected children's books.

Though the principles of CLIL are not explicitly explained, by doing the activities and following the lesson plans in the ways suggested, teachers will be moving toward adding

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appropriate content to their teaching in ways that can be adapted later, according to the levels and needs of their particular students, to conform more strictly to CLIL principles. The booklet was distributed to all those teaching freshman and sophomore ECE English classes and made available to any other teacher who wanted one, including all the members of the Department of Early Childhood Education and Care. Furthermore, it could be accessed from the university's online learning system for easy use in class.

Sets of Selected Children's Picture Books

Two sets containing 80 selected children's picture books each were prepared. One set was placed on the reserve shelf in the university's library and the other in the teachers' resource room. The sets also contain resource books in English on child development and early childhood education (Bodrova & Leong, 2007), Japanese kindergartens (Hayashi & Tobin, 2015), and some recommended textbooks.

Materials Bank

Soon after the implementation of the new curriculum began in AY2017, teachers started to spontaneously initiate discussion and share materials they had used successfully in their classes, so a materials bank was created. Teachers submit their handouts or other materials. They are checked and then made available in a file that is located on the counter in front of the part-time teachers' room. It is convenient for other teachers to browse and it is a resource from which to get new ideas. This is an informal way for those teaching the same sections or levels of students to share some of what they are covering in their classes and how they are doing it.

Teacher Recruitment and Development

Teacher Interest Survey

No additional teachers were hired and the number of required English classes in the other departments still remained at three per week. Because English instruction was supposed to be equal across all departments for these required classes, priority was given to my department in order for us to choose the most suitable English teachers for the ECE classes from among the current teaching faculty. To help in selection, a teacher interest survey was prepared. A brief explanation of the new curriculum was given and teachers could indicate their level of interest in teaching students in this department.

Any previous experience with teaching children, related interests, the levels of students they wished to teach, and skill area preferences were also noted.

From the results of this survey, more than enough teachers with a strong interest and previous experience in teaching young children were discovered among the teachers currently working at the university and they were engaged to teach the ECE English classes. The same survey has been carried out in preparation for expanding the program to sophomore English classes in AY2018 with similar results.

Lunchtime Workshops

Part-time faculty members teach over 80% of the required English classes for students in the Department of Early Childhood Education and Care. Therefore, it is crucial to enlist those teachers' full cooperation and maintain their enthusiasm for implementing and providing feedback to further develop the new curriculum. One of the ways this is being done is by holding a series of lunchtime workshops.

Keeping in mind part-time teachers' time constraints, these workshops are strictly limited to 20 minutes during the middle of the lunch hour, open to all teachers, and involve the participants in performing suggested classroom activities in a concentrated way. Attendance is voluntary. The topics of the four workshops in AY2016 were introducing children's songs and action games, using children's picture books in class, introducing the new curriculum through trying out suggested activities, and providing consultation about syllabus writing. The workshops have been well attended and in AY2017 two more had been held as of October 2017: improvising with children's songs and use of AV equipment, and language learning activities using fairy tales.

Teachers' Newsletters

Since the beginning of the implementation of the new curriculum with the freshman ECE students in April 2017, four short newsletters have been sent out by email to the teachers of those classes. The newsletters have included reminders about the overall learning goals and notices of the arrival of new materials and upcoming lunchtime workshops. Although teachers were not required to respond to these newsletters, they often have done so by sending email notes about their classes. In this way, a dialogue has begun through their initiative. In addition, informal discussion of classes is occasionally happening at lunchtime or when teachers meet in the hallways.

Preliminary Evaluation of Implementation

Record of Children's Songs and Picture Books Used in Class

A notebook has been placed on the reception counter in front of the part-time teachers' room containing a checklist of the children's songs from the *Teachers' Handbook*. Teachers can quickly mark which songs they have introduced and learn which have been used by others. There is also space for teachers to enter the names of songs they have used that are not in the *Teachers' Handbook*. It was suggested that they teach five or more songs per semester. From the data collected (Table 2), it can be seen that teachers have surpassed this goal in all of the classes in the first semester. A total of 17 of the 25 songs in the *Teachers' Handbook* have been introduced so far along with 21 additional songs.

Table 2. Number of Children's Songs and Picture Books Reported Used in Class (April-October 2017)

Freshman Class, Level	Children's Songs	Picture Books
e1, Advanced	12	25
e2, Intermediate	9	3
e3, Intermediate	11	14
e4, Introductory	15	8
e5, Introductory	13	5
e6, Introductory	9	5

A similar checklist has been provided next to the set of children's picture books in the Teachers' Resource Room. In the *Teachers' Handbook* it was suggested that teachers try using at least two different books in their classes in two different ways per semester. From the data collected, it can be seen that all reached this modest goal and some have greatly surpassed it (see Table 2). Data provided by the university's library also give some indication of the level of use of the books by students. From April to October 2017, freshmen in the Department of Early Childhood Education and Care had checked out those books 64 times. In addition, sophomores had checked out books 39 times, despite not officially being taught under the new curriculum yet.

Curriculum Implementation Survey

The data above indicate that the use of children's songs and books in classes has been established. However, these data do not provide information on precisely how they are being used and to what extent the other suggestions for learning activities are being implemented. Nor do they provide any information from teachers on how the overall learning goals were being met and student learning evaluated. Therefore, in September 2017, a survey containing six open-ended questions (Appendix B) was sent to the 14 teachers in charge of the freshman and sophomore ECE English classes. Teachers were instructed to write as much or as little as they liked. The rate of response was 71% ($N = 10$).

There were sizeable differences in the amount of detail of each teacher's responses. Nevertheless, some general observations can be made from the information they contained. All the respondents answered the first two questions that pertained to their understanding of the overall learning goals that encompass the four Cs of CLIL to some extent and indicated activities they had used that connected to those goals. The responses of 90% of them demonstrated at least a fair understanding of the goals and described appropriate activities they were conducting in their classes. Only 40% answered the third question about their suggestions for activities for intermediate and introductory levels of learners, and several expressed their desire for more such activities to be included in the *Teachers' Handbook*. Fifty percent of the respondents gave examples of their learner evaluation systems and tools, but these were quite varied and sometimes unclear. This is definitely an area for future development, as a CLIL program should be assessing both content and also language learning (Brown & Bradford, 2017). Finally, 80% of the respondents answered the fifth and sixth questions, relating to the areas of their teaching in which they would like to improve and the topics they would like addressed in professional development sessions.

The Next Steps

In the responses of the teachers from the survey, it is clear that more specific learning objectives need to be set and appropriate assessment tools suggested. These tools are particularly lacking when evaluating speaking skills, a main focus of the classes. Furthermore, not only language skills, but also the content learned and skills students will use when teachers of young children need to be assessed in a more systematic way.

The second priority is to add to the materials bank. There is no textbook available that allows enough flexibility to explore in depth all of the topics that might arise

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when introducing the content themes. Therefore, samples of reading passages, short presentations, and other learning materials related to the content themes and suitable for various levels of students are needed and will be made available to teachers in the materials bank.

As for teacher development, building on the collaborative environment that has been created this year is key. Providing more lunchtime workshops on topics suggested by teachers in their survey responses and encouraging their contribution of materials and ideas for CLIL activities will be continued.

Conclusion

This example of developing a CLIL curriculum for English classes for early childhood education majors in Japan is still a work in progress. Nevertheless, there is evidence, as explained in the previous sections, that after only one semester of implementation a strong start has been made through the use of children's songs and picture books, in particular. Furthermore, the response of teachers to implementing the curriculum, as demonstrated by their attendance in the lunchtime workshops and their taking initiative in materials development for the materials bank, is a sign of their interest and willingness to improve their teaching.

In fact, promoting the development of part-time university teachers in this type of supportive, collaborative setting could benefit a Japanese university's English program in the long term as much as or possibly more than any other measures taken to improve it. That is because this method of curriculum change has the potential to be sustainable and ongoing. In this example, despite having to work within the time constraints and limited chances for contact with a group of part-time university teachers, a strong response was seen. This may have been due in part to the fact that guidance for curriculum implementation was suggested, not imposed, and teacher participation in development activities was voluntary. Examining further such a professional development environment is one area for future research and exploration that has arisen from this example of the development of a CLIL curriculum.

Bio Data

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Appendix A

Sample Children's Song Page From Teachers' Handbook

1. Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star

Twinkle, twinkle, little star
How I wonder what you are
Up above the world so high
Like a diamond in the sky
Twinkle, twinkle, little star
How I wonder what you are

*Pronunciation Points:

- Short *-i* in "little"; also the *-tt* is pronounced as /d/, especially in American English.
- "What you" sounds closer to "wa-chyu."
- With the *-ar* in "star" and "are," make sure the /r/ is pronounced distinctly.
- "Diamond" is usually pronounced in only two syllables. NOT: Di/a/mo/n/do
- The *-o* in "wonder" and "above" are pronounced the same.

Appendix B

Curriculum Implementation Survey Questions, September 2017

- Which learning activities that you used in your "e" classes last semester do you think particularly fulfilled some or all of the overall goals? Please explain. (See p. 6 of the *Handbook* for a more detailed description of these goals.)
- Did you try out any of the suggested activities from the *Handbook* for Speaking/Listening classes (p. 7), Reading/Writing classes (p. 8), or using children's picture books in class (pp. 13-23) this past semester? If so, how did they go?
- Do you have suggestions for other such activities that are not included in the *Handbook*, especially for Intermediate and Introductory level classes?
- Did you use any methods of evaluating student learning or develop any evaluation tools that you found particularly effective and would like to share with other teachers? If so, please explain and/or attach the files.

- What teaching skills, English language skills, or content areas do you think you might need to brush up on to implement the new curriculum more effectively?
- What kind of professional development and support activities would you have time for and benefit you most in the future? Please be specific about your wishes.