

# **Stories as a tool for teaching and learning in CLIL**

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## **Introduction**

The implementation of CLIL, in its dual-focused perspective, calls for the need to attend not only to the linguistic, content, communicative and cognitive components involved in this approach but also to intercultural factors (cf. Johnstone et al. 1998; Marsh 2000; Mehisto et al. 2008; inter alia). Presenting new content and language to young learners from a cognitively challenging perspective can foster their interest and motivation, two fundamental principles involved in any learning. In this chapter we deal with the use of stories as a fundamental learning tool which facilitates access not only to language and content but also to culture and cognition. Their effectiveness, however, highly depends on the careful selection of materials and the application of appropriate methodology in each case. The first part of this chapter presents a general framework for the use of stories in CLIL featuring their main characteristics, dimension and potentiality in the classroom. The second part of the chapter provides guidelines regarding the effective implementation of stories in pre-primary and primary education CLIL programmes and is illustrated with examples of stories, activities and tasks used in PROCLIL.

### **1. Stories in CLIL: A Framework from theory to practice**

Stories can prove to be effective tools for children to develop those essential principles involved within a CLIL approach that include not only language and content but also communication, cognition and culture. Stories, hence, can contain the key 4Cs to make any CLIL experience succeed (cf. Coyle, 1990). More specifically, stories can provide a natural and meaningful learning context to learn about a particular content using specific language within a CLIL perspective (cf. Curtain 1995; Dickinson 2001; Richards & Anderson 2003; inter alia).

## **1.1. Stories and Language Learning**

For young learners, stories can offer a valuable way of contextualizing and introducing new language, making it comprehensible and memorable (Wasik & Bond 2001; Wright 2000). Frequently stories are associated to daily life experiences, children's feelings and memories, and to cultural and intercultural values which enrich and expand the classroom world. They also deal with a variety of topics which directly relate to curricular content: animals, family, traditions, emotions, environment, history, experiments, etc.

Linguistically, stories present grammar, vocabulary, and formulaic speech within a meaningful and structured context that supports comprehension of the narrative world and the content the story is related to (Glazer & Burke 1994; Jennings, 1991; Koisawalia, 2005). Reading or listening to a story offers a joyful experience in 'feeling' the sounds and 'viewing' the form of a new language. Stories are often about interesting topics which may serve to present, practice, consolidate or extend children's knowledge on a particular thematic area related to any school subject.

## **1.2. Stories and communication**

Stories also enhance children's interaction and communication not only with their teacher but also with their peers. Reading or listening to a story related to a specific content can make children react to it verbally or non-verbally. This enables them to construct knowledge and express ideas, even with the very limited language they may have at the early stages of a CLIL programme. In fact, stories prove to be fantastic resources in a CLIL context to provoke children's reactions to meaning, content and form. Stories provide learners with a reason to participate in the classroom, to repeat certain formulaic phrases, chunks or words, to role play part of a dialogue, or to express what and how they feel. The use of stories in the classroom can encourage children to interact with each other and communicate their feelings, ideas and knowledge. Stories give children opportunities to retell the story and to talk about alternative endings, for instance. As a consequence, stories can help learners increase language fluency and advance in their content knowledge. A story can serve to

introduce, practice or review any content covered in the curriculum and related to diverse subjects. In sum, stories become fantastic bridges to use and understand a new language and a great source of content which will progressively prepare students to interaction and global communication about a large variety of themes and topics discovered through stories in the CLIL classroom.

### **1.3. Stories and Culture**

Stories are windows open to the world. They bring in views about different people, new countries and diverse cultural values. Stories help children show a curiosity about other cultures, far-off lands and ‘exotic’ peoples from other parts of the planet. Using stories in the classroom can prepare learners for openness, awareness, tolerance and acceptance towards other ways of understanding life. In this sense, learners can gain sensitive attitudes towards others which will make them better prepared European citizens for trans-national relationships. In addition, and related to this intercultural dimension, stories about different cultures can help integrate children from different migrant backgrounds attending the CLIL classroom. In fact, stories can reveal themselves to be excellent resources for explaining and understanding cultural and historical backgrounds, processes, actions and consequences involved in a wide number of topics while at the same time the children are experiencing an enjoyable learning atmosphere.

### **1. 4. Stories and Cognition**

Stories often involve multimodality since the linguistic and thematic information is commonly complemented with pictures and, in some cases, with sounds, which help children reconstruct the storyline (Kellerman, 1992; Meyer, 1990). Stories involve predicting, guessing or searching for meaning and linking it to prior knowledge on a topic. In this sense, stories become scaffolding tools for the learning process which, first, help children feel supported by listening to or reading about a topic from a partly familiar framework, that is, a story or a tale. Second, stories allow learners to progress step by step in their own construction and reconstruction of knowledge (cf. Gibbons 2002).

Retelling or remembering the plot individually or in a joint task can enhance learners' cognitive and social skills. Identifying characters, comparing behaviours, contrasting actions or defining terms or concepts, for instance, clearly develop concrete thinking skills. Reasoning, finding alternative and creative endings or solutions, evaluating happenings or attitudes can also improve creative and abstract thinking. Stories, therefore, promote the incorporation of cognitive and learning strategies in the CLIL classroom resulting in better understanding and learning.

### **1.5. Stories, multiple intelligences and individual learning styles**

This account of the potentiality stories can bring in a CLIL setting also reflects the notion of incorporating the idea of attending to individual learning styles together with multiple intelligences. As was discussed here, and will be developed in the second part of this chapter, stories are defined as multimodal entities which can cater to linguistic, visual-spatial, musical, sequential or logical, kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences. Stories allow children to create movement, drama and dance, to focus on pictures and art, to listen to music and sing along. Stories permit learners to focus on interpersonal environments, solving problems, setting goals or expressing emotion. Stories also provide possibilities of curriculum development, while expanding learners' knowledge on a particular theme. They can also provide opportunities for assessment of the learning process and learning outcomes. All of these are examples of a multiple intelligence approach to learning which also recognizes individual learning styles, capacities and perceptions as regards understanding and responding to the same experience, content, topic or story (cf. Campbell et. 1996; Gardner 1993, 1999; Richards and Rodgers, 2001; Nolen, 2003).

It is clear then that stories have the potential to be an invaluable tool in the practical implementation of CLIL. As with any tool, however, the realisation of its potential lies in how it is applied. Consequently, the second part of this chapter presents some general guidelines on how stories can be included in CLIL programmes. It begins by discussing key principles which should guide story selection and then presents some general guidelines as regards the classroom implementation process for stories.

Examples are shown from PROCLIL classes which also exemplify the points made in the general framework presented above.

### **How to choose a story**

One of the most important factors in the success of storytelling-based lessons is the actual choice of story. Perhaps initially a teacher might wonder whether to choose an original, authentic story written in the target language or whether to choose a story written or adapted especially for language learners. Although there might be occasions where the latter option would be acceptable, there are numerous advantages in using authentic stories. Perhaps the most important advantage is the fact that children are offered an early chance to become familiar with and participate in one of the main aspects of a culture: that of its literary heritage. Authentic stories are valuable artefacts of a foreign culture – either the CLIL language culture or other cultures which may be addressed during lessons – and thus help in promoting the intercultural learning aspect of CLIL.

There are a number of points a teacher should take into consideration when selecting a story. These differ according to whether the story is aimed at pre-primary and young primary students or whether it is aimed at older primary students. The students' age, interests and developmental level should always be taken into consideration. For younger children, in particular, the selected story should have:

- A clear storyline: This is very important in that it allows the children to follow and understand the story without being entirely dependent on linguistic input but allowing them to use their existing knowledge of the world and already acquired frames of reference.
- Plenty of repetition: What is meant here is the type of repetition that comes naturally in a story and not repetition that is artificially manufactured for language learners. Traditional stories often have this type of repetition, as for example “Goldilocks and the three bears” (*‘too hot’*, *‘too soft’*, *‘too hard’* and *‘my porridge’*, *‘my chair’*, *‘my bed’*), “Chicken Licken” (“Where are you going?”/“What’s the matter?”/ “I’ll come with you”) or “The Gingerbread

man” (“You can’t catch me”). Repetition can also be found in modern children’s literature. Examples are books such as “Brown Bear, Brown Bear” and “Polar Bear, Polar Bear” by Bill Martin and Eric Carle.

This kind of repetition is particularly helpful in that it offers the child more opportunities to hear the language and to view the language in action in various contexts.

- Opportunities for participation: A teacher needs to always create such opportunities in order to keep the children engaged in the storytelling process, to maintain their attention as well as to check their understanding. It is, therefore, very helpful if the story lends itself to such opportunities. These may include the children guessing what will come next, discussing the picture, repeating a key phrase along with the character or replying to characters’ questions.
- Helpful illustrations: Illustrations are an art form so teacher preferences will undoubtedly come into play and it is important that the story selected is one which the teacher likes and enjoys reading. It is, however, also important that one takes into consideration the clarity of the illustrations, whether the book pages seem cluttered or not, whether the illustrations are appropriate to the specific children (not scary or culturally-inappropriate) and whether they actually support the understanding of the text by offering valuable contextual information.
- Appropriate linguistic level: The language used in the story should be at a level where children can understand most of it (with appropriate help). It is important that the children are able to understand most of the language in the story. Research shows that students need to know about 75% of the vocabulary in a text in order to understand it. With younger learners the stories are either narrated or read to them so the percentage of known words need not be so high if the teacher can support understanding through linguistic modifications, enhanced intonation, facial expressions and use of visuals.

Many of the points presented above can also apply to older learners. Nevertheless, children's interests change as they grow older and the story selected for older learners, should not only be at an appropriate language level but also cater to their particular interests and be stimulating and attractive to them. If an older learner is a beginner in the L2, finding such a story might be difficult and teachers might resort to adapted/simplified versions of stories. There are however numerous suitable authentic stories and the variety increases as the learner's L2 competence develops.

Finally, in a CLIL framework it is important for all learner ages alike that the topic of the story is linked to curricular content and aims. In the framework of CLIL teaching where language is combined with content learning, the story can either be the content itself, a springboard to content-focused work or perhaps an additional supplement to the main content of the lesson. A general objective which always underpins the use of stories is of course that of encouraging children to develop positive attitudes towards books and reading.

Examples of stories used by teachers in PROCLIL and the subject and linguistic goals which they were used to achieve are shown below:

Story	Subject Goal	Linguistic Goal
<p><b>The hungry caterpillar</b> by Eric Carle</p> <p>(unit taught in 4 lessons)</p>	<p>The children should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-consolidate the life-cycle of a butterfly</li> <li>-be able to make and explain a chart using numbers from 1 to 10</li> <li>-be able to sequence a story</li> <li>--be creative through drawing</li> <li>-learn a song</li> <li>-respond rhythmically and with appropriate movements to the lyrics of a song</li> </ul>	<p>The children should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-become familiar with the names of fruits (apple, pear, plum, strawberry, orange)</li> <li>-be able to recognize and name the above fruits.</li> <li>-become familiar with the phrase "I'm hungry"</li> <li>-become familiar (passive learning) with the names of the week</li> <li>-revise numbers, colours and the structure "I like..."</li> </ul>
<p><b>Polar Bear, Polar Bear</b> by Eric Carle and Bill Martin</p> <p>(unit taught in</p>	<p>The children should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-become familiar with a number of jungle animals (lion, hippopotamus, flamingo, zebra, snake, elephant, leopard, peacock)</li> <li>- acquire positive attitude towards the animals</li> </ul>	<p>The children should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-identify the animals based on aural input</li> <li>- name at least three of the above animals</li> <li>- follow and comprehend a</li> </ul>

3 lessons)	- <i>become aware of endangered animals</i>	<i>basic story in L2</i>
<b>Does a Kangaroo have a Mother, too?</b> by Eric Carle  (unit taught in 3 lessons)	The children should: - <i>become familiar with the animals referred to in the book (kangaroo, lion, dolphin, monkey.....)</i> - <i>learn more about the above animals (where do they live?, what do they eat?)</i> - <i>learn that all animals have animal families (mother, father, children)</i> - <i>develop positive attitudes and respect towards animals and all creatures in general</i> - <i>be able to work in pairs</i> - <i>play and speak in a steady beat</i> - <i>clap/move to the rhythm</i>	The children should: - <i>recognize and name at least three of the animals in the story</i> - <i>follow and comprehend a basic story in the L2</i> - <i>make questions about the animals (i.e. Does a lion have a mother too?)</i> - <i>answer the questions about the animals as in the book</i>
<b>The rainbow snake</b> Australian Aboriginal myth (part of unit on Australia)	The children should: - <i>learn more about the culture of Australia's native people, the Australian Aborigines</i> - <i>develop appreciation towards the myths and legends of other cultures</i> - <i>compare creation myths between theirs, the Aboriginal and other cultures</i>	The children should: - <i>be able to understand the main idea in a short story</i> - <i>tolerate unknown words</i> - <i>be able to Infer meaning from context</i>

Table 1: *Examples of subject-specific and language-specific goals in storytelling-based lessons taught by PROCLIL teachers.*

The table above shows sets of curricular aims which were served by storytelling-based lessons for preprimary and early primary age groups, as well as for older children. The examples illustrate how stories can be used to promote curricular aims from a variety of subject areas such as science, maths, music, geography or environmental studies. In the example of “The very hungry caterpillar” shown in the table, the same story was used to promote science, maths, literacy, art and music curriculum aims.

### **How to use a story in class**

Once an appropriate story is selected, the teacher needs to prepare how it is going to be introduced and used in class.

### **Before the lesson**

Before going to class the teacher needs to decide if a story will be told/ narrated or read to the children. Both can be effective options but telling a story creates a

different atmosphere in the classroom which links to the ancient tradition of storytelling and which is popular with children. In addition, telling a story allows the teacher to maintain eye-contact with the children, modify her verbal input by animating her language with enhanced intonation, facial expressions and gestures as well as by pointing to particular objects or characters in the book. Finally, telling a story allows teachers to be more in tune with the children's general reactions and feedback; something which can help the teacher better adapt her input, pace or general storytelling technique to the children.

A key stage in preparing for the story should be a dry-run rehearsal where the teacher actually narrates the story exactly the way it is intended to be done in class; complete with opportunities for participation and adaptations/modifications of the language used. This is very important since often preparing by simply reading the story cannot help teachers to recognize potential difficulties in the narration. Often a story looks misleadingly easy. It is only when the teacher rehearses her role as a mediator between the story and the children that difficulties may appear. A rehearsal allows teachers to find solutions such as simplifying sentences, using known vocabulary items or not including peripheral information in the narration of the story. For example, substituting the words 'boa constrictor' to 'snake' or 'devour' to 'eat' can make the story more accessible to early language learners.

### **During the lesson**

Usually there are three stages in telling (or reading) a story: the pre-storytelling stage, the while-storytelling stage and the after-storytelling stage.

#### ***Pre-storytelling stage***

The *pre-storytelling stage* helps prepare the students so that they can better comprehend the story. It involves raising their interest and motivation to hear the story so that their attention will be focused. It also involves setting the scene and creating the context for the story so that the children can use their existing knowledge and experiences to better understand and associate with the story. Finally, if the story involves vocabulary which is new to the children, this is the stage where certain key words can be introduced in order to make the learning curve smoother.

Sometimes, in order to achieve the above goals, teachers go ‘in role’ and, assisted by relevant props, become a character from the book or a ‘special’ storyteller.



**Source:** story “Brown Bear, Brown Bear”, Preprimary school, ages: 4/5, Teacher: Maria Masoura, Limassol, Cyprus

At other times teachers of young learners use puppets at the pre-storytelling stage. These puppets may be related to the story and serve to stimulate curiosity and interest as well as to set the scene. Examples below show a puppet monkey used to introduce the story “Monkey and me” by Emily Gravett. The monkey resembles the one illustrated in the story and was used to come into class, meet and greet the children and then introduce his friend ‘Mimi’, thus introducing the term and concept of a friend.



**Source:** Puppets used for the pre-storytelling stage of “Monkey and Me”, pre-primary school, ages: 4/5, Teacher: Stella Michaelidou, Engomi/Nicosia, Cyprus

Along the same lines, the first storytelling-based lesson for “Handa’s surprise” introduced a black female doll. The children were encouraged to discuss where they thought she could be from, what her name could be, what kind of house she probably

lived in, what could possibly be her favourite fruit and what kind of pets she had. This discussion was mainly in L1 and activated interest, set the scene, actively involved the learners in bringing all their pre-existing knowledge on the surface. Furthermore, during this discussion the teacher reviewed known and relevant vocabulary (colours and fruit) and introduced key new vocabulary which would later appear in the story (wild animals).

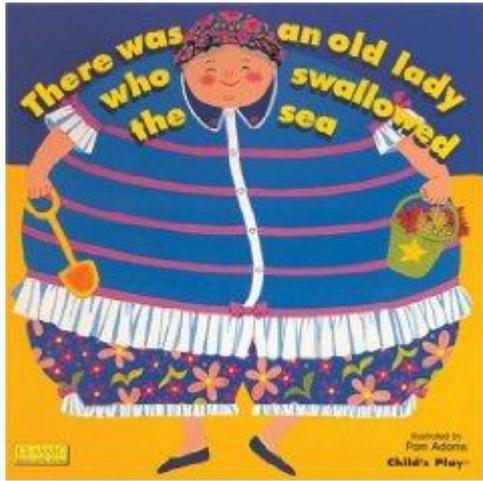
### ***While-storytelling stage***

The *while-storytelling stage* mainly involves activities which aim to engage the students, maintain their attention and assist them in understanding the story. Basically these are activities which aim to position the learners as active participants in the storytelling (or story reading) process rather than have them being a passive audience. Older learners can also read stories by themselves and can be assisted through activities such as filling in diagrams or tables or completing pictures or lists based on the story.

Nevertheless, even older learners are appreciative of a good oral narrative and opportunities for an oral narration of a story can have the same type of while-reading activities as the ones recommended for younger learners. Such activities are asking the students to guess the continuation of the story, identifying and discussing pictures or characters in the story or asking about possible justifications of character actions in the story (perhaps in L1).

There are also activities which involve movement and action and which may be more suitable for when the students are listening to a second reading of the story. Students can, for example, be given cards representing characters or objects in the story and they have to get up whenever they hear their character/object, or they might be given cards which they need to place on a picture or on the board to represent events as these are being narrated in the story.

An example here is a while-storytelling activity carried out during the second reading of "*There was an old lady who swallowed the sea*" by Pam Adams.



**Source:** While-storytelling activity for “There was an old lady who swallowed the sea”, Unit: “The sea”, grade 2: age 7, primary school in Nicosia, Cyprus.

The picture of the old lady was placed on the white board and the children were given cards with the different sea creatures. When the story mentioned that a creature was swallowed by the old lady, the children with cards representing that creature would come up and stick their cards in the old lady’s tummy.

Another example of a while-storytelling activity is for students to be given masks relating to characters in the story and for them to get up when these characters are mentioned and perform certain actions.

If the students are listening to a narration of a favourite and familiar story which they have been working on at school, a while-storytelling activity might be to perform the story actions in the form of a ‘silent’ play. The students are given roles and as the teacher narrates the story, they perform the play.



**Source:** Preprimary school, ages 4/5, students perform to an oral narration of a musical story. Teacher: Maria Masoura, Limassol, Cyprus.

### *After-storytelling stage*

Finally, the *after-reading / after-storytelling stage* is a chance to check students' understanding but also to engage further with issues presented in the story either by relating them to the students' own lives or by exploring them further through suitable content-related activities. This is usually where further work promoting and expanding the subject content goals takes place. The story can act as a springboard for a wide range of curricular activities.

One of the after-storytelling activities a pre-primary class engaged in after reading "The very hungry caterpillar" was to discuss about their favourite fruit. The students were later assisted in creating their own chart and engaged in discussion and analysis of their results.



**Source:** *After-reading activity (creating and analysing a graph) for the story "A very hungry caterpillar", pre-primary school, ages: 4/5, Teachers: Maria Sieli, Maria Themistokleous, Tseri/Nicosia, Cyprus*

Another story used was "The Gruffalo" by Donaldson and Scheffler. It helped to review the topic of animals and plants in the forest. A big book and flashcards were used as resources and a final performance was prepared as an after-storytelling activity. The performance, which dramatized the story, further consolidated the children's knowledge in the area under focus.



**Source:** Story “The Gruffalo”, Primary school, ages: 6/7, Teacher: Carmen Marcos, Tres Cantos, Madrid, Spain

The after storytelling/reading activities mainly depend on the curricular aims the teacher aims to achieve. The aims for using “Handa’s surprise” by Eileen Browne were mainly intercultural as can be seen from the teachers’ planning below:

Story	Subject Goals	Linguistic Goals
Handa’s surprise by Eileen Browne  (unit taught in 4 lessons)	<i>The students should:</i>  -develop intercultural awareness -become familiar with the African environment (fruits, animals, landscape, music) -become familiar with the way of life of children from African countries -be able to understand not everyone lives under the same conditions (i.e. understand there are different types of houses, styles of nutrition, pets, ways of dress, music, etc.) -be able to distinguish wild from domestic animals	<i>The students should:</i>  -become familiar with the names of wild animals: monkey, ostrich, zebra, elephant, giraffe, antelope, parrot -revise colours: black, brown, red, blue, orange, white, green, purple -revise fruit: pineapple, apple, strawberry, plum, banana, mango, kiwi - revise animals : dog, horse, duck, cat, bird

**Source:** Teachers’ planning: Maria Sieli and Maria Themistokleous, Tseri Preprimary School, Nicosia, Cyprus

The story was revisited during the four lessons. There was no need for extensive pre-storytelling activities in the later lessons but the while-storytelling and after-storytelling activities changed in every lesson. After-storytelling activities included listening and dancing to African music (Kenyan), classification of wild and domestic

animals, creation of an African landscape (see below) while working in pairs and having to select what objects, animals and people, were appropriate for their African landscape.



**Source:** *Creating an African landscape, Unit “Handa’s Surprise”, Teachers: Maria Sieli and Maria Themistokleours, Sophie Ioannou-Georgiou, Preprimary school: ages 4/5, Tseri/ Nicosia, Cyprus*

Finally, another after-storytelling activity was for the children to create jewellery for the story’s main character, Handa. The children worked with clay and created necklaces which they all wore while they danced and sang a Kenyan song which was again taught as an activity linked to “Handa’s surprise”.



**Source:** *Creating jewellery for Handa, Unit “Handa’s Surprise”, Preprimary school, ages 4/5, Teachers: Maria Sieli and Maria Themistokleous, Tseri/ Nicosia, Cyprus*

Children enjoy stories and often want to continue working on them. If the classroom has English (or other activity) corners which the children may use during free-activity time, it is a good idea to have activities related to the story they have been working

with. Working on these activities is optional for the children but experience has shown that children enjoy revisiting the stories. Story-based activities for the activity corners may involve drawing pictures from the story, flicking through the pages of the actual book, working on puzzles based on the story or dressing up as the characters in the story.



*Source: Children drawing in the activity corner and children's paintings created during free activity time, from a variety of pre-primary schools and inspired by different stories.*

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has argued for the value of stories in CLIL programmes for young learners of preprimary and primary education. When young learners are faced with new content in a foreign language, stories represent an excellent opportunity for teaching and providing comprehensible input in a coherent, meaningful and pleasant way. Stories link to a variety of curricular aims and involve willingness to listen to the storyline which is a prerequisite for engagement in a rich motivating language experience (cf. Wright 1995). Stories also provide many opportunities for the provision of a cluster of important factors central to CLIL: content, communication, cognition, and culture (cf. Coyle, 1990).

Moreover, this chapter has discussed how storytelling-based activities can encourage language and content learning by providing opportunities for rich experiences where the students' characteristics as young learners but also their learning styles and intelligences are catered to. Finally, practical guidelines which can assist teachers in effectively selecting and employing stories in their CLIL teaching were presented and these were illustrated with a variety of authentic examples from CLIL classrooms. It is hoped that both the discussion and the examples have made clear how valuable a resource stories can be and that teachers may be motivated and encouraged to employ this rich resource in their teaching.

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