



# Viking Day at Szabó Magda School: A Successful Project

*Kovács, Judit<sup>1</sup>*

## **Part 1: The School's Pedagogical Program. What is a CLIL School Like?**

It has been a tradition for decades at the Szabó Magda Hungarian-English bilingual primary school, Budapest, to organize an English-language 'Professional Day' every school year. These events usually focus on a different aspect of English-language culture, such as the USA Day, with the presence of staff from the country's embassy, who treated the students as equal conversation partners, as the school's students are confident users of the English language. Last year, the focus was on Robert Burns, the great poet of the Scots, and Scotland. This guiding principle was also reflected in their appearance: most of the girls showed up in tartan skirts for the class, and the activities included students baking 'shortbread', a typical Scottish pastry in the classroom, for which the teacher provided a portable air fryer.

On March 26th of this year, the school announced its program under the name 'TES&L Day – Teaching English: Sharing and Learning', organized by teacher Zoltán Bede. A bilingual school, where students experience their lives in two languages every day, has a good chance of organizing such an event. For them, it is natural that any topic can be discussed in English. The application of the 'learn as you use, use as you learn' principle (see below) explains why even first graders, who have only started learning English six months ago, are willing to participate in the project.

However, the secret lies not only in the high number of lessons in the target language. Language acquisition is also helped by the fact that English is not only learned as a foreign language, but also some subjects are taught in this language. The fact that teachers and students can implement such a successful project lies in the essence of the bilingual programme. Educational bilingualism began in both Europe and Hungary in the 1980s. The antecedents outside Europe (the USA, Canada, Australia, etc.) are only slightly relevant from our point of view, because there the target language is widely

<sup>1</sup> ELTE Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education Department of Foreign Languages;  
[kovacs.judit@tok.elte.hu](mailto:kovacs.judit@tok.elte.hu)

spoken and used in the environment. In Hungary, like in most European countries, the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) model has spread, the essence of which is that students encounter English neither in their environment, nor in the parental home, but exclusively at school.

The first bilingual programmes in our country were launched in 1987, first in six secondary schools, and two years later, in 1989, in some primary schools. It soon became clear that CLIL, in addition to its linguistic benefits, significantly contributes to the achievement of general pedagogical goals and the all-round development of personality. The relationship between the dual goals are presented in the table below:

**Table 1**

*Relationship Between Content-Based Language Acquisition and General Skills Development*

(Source: Kovács, 2018)

Characteristics of CLIL	General Skills Development Areas:
Content-based language acquisition.	Learning strategies.
Decoding the message.	Taking both verbal and non-verbal input into account.
Perceiving rules .	Directed attention, drawing conclusions independently.
Risk-taking. <sup>2</sup>	Being initiative. Developing autonomous learning styles.
Communication in the target language seen as a process.	Constant motivation due to low stress levels striving to use the language as a tool.
Integrative nature.	Developing a broader horizon and global perspective by transcending subject and language boundaries.

Based on the above, we can conclude that the success of CLIL is due to the basic principle that knowledge and skills are not separated, i.e. language learning and language use occur simultaneously. Its motto is: “Use as you learn, learn as you use”, i.e., use the language while you learn, not first learn

<sup>2</sup> An example of risk-taking and the higher level of autonomy that characterizes CLIL students is from my own teaching practice: once, when I was planning to make my students create a poster for a British civilization class, I forgot to provide them with pictures and texts that the students could choose from. In another class, this would have caused a problem. Here, however, one of the students said: “It’s okay, we’ll do it from our own wellhead”, and they immediately started to search for pictures and texts on the Internet, print them out, and find English-language literature from the free shelf library of the special education classroom. The proactive attitude of not expecting everything from outside and not demanding teaching in such a direct way as in regular curriculum classes helped them to activate their own knowledge.

and then use it. Since there is no need for a two-phase instruction, this complexity can also contribute to the development of skills in several areas at the same time.

We get even closer to the success of CLIL if we also consider the following components:

**Table 2**

*Components Underlying the Success of CLIL, Compared to the Components of Traditional School Teaching/Learning.*  
(Source: Kovács, 2018)

The Most Common Characteristics of Schools	Factors That Work Against Success in Traditional Education	Components Contributing to Success in CLIL
The Atmosphere	The hierarchical relationship between teacher and student and the memory-based assessment might make the atmosphere tense and demotivating.	Stress-free, friendly, motivating. Based on constructive cooperation between teacher and student.
The Lesson	Lessons take place almost exclusively within school setting.	The framework of the lessons is expanding: learning takes place in other locations as well, in exchange programmes, camps, other extra-curricular events.
The Curriculum	Stays within the discipline. Textbooks, workbooks.	The concept of the curriculum is expanded. Authentic materials, tasks, projects.
Ways of Knowledge Acquisition	Receptively, through teacher communication or reading texts.	Productively, through interactive learning.
Assessment	It happens lesson by lesson, separated from the transfer of new knowledge and practice.	Continuous, not separated from other class activities, an integral part of the lesson.
The Context in Which Learning Takes Place	Local, national. Crossing national borders is not typical.	Broader than local and national. Its essential element is: opening towards linguistic diversity.
Composition of Teachers and Students	The group of students and teachers is linguistically homogeneous.	Linguistic heterogeneity among both students and teachers.

At the end of the second decade of the 21st century the number of CLIL programmes in our country was 290 in total, their distribution by school level is as follows: 157 primary schools, 133 secondary schools (KIR Institutional Database, Public Education Statistics, 2017 13 28, and own research). In recent years, we have no knowledge of termination of CLIL programmes, but we do know of the launch of new ones. The exploration of these and their inclusion in the statistics is ongoing.

## Part 2: The Events of the Viking Day: Seven 45-Minute Sessions of Professional Enjoyment

This school year focused on the Vikings, the Norse people (actually pirates) who threatened the British Isles between the 8th and 11th centuries. The school's seven teachers undertook to present different aspects of the Viking lifestyle to the students in one lesson each. In the lessons for the youngest, the first and second graders, we learned what life was like in a Viking family, how they dressed, and what they ate. Another group of first graders chose a very warlike topic: under the guidance of their teacher, Kenneth Friis, who is half-Danish, half-English, and therefore an 'authentic' Viking descendant, they imitated a battle scene with shields and axes they had made themselves. The students especially enjoyed the Viking battle cry: ho-haa, ho-haa! The fourth graders introduced the Vikings as seafaring people, analyzed the characteristic Viking ship, all its parts, and how they used their navigational skills: for trading, fighting, and sea adventures.

A group of fifth graders talked about the characters of the Viking literary legacy Edda and Viking mythology, based on pictures. The sixth graders, led by teacher István Mihály, transformed the classroom into a kitchen this year as well, this time baking Viking bread on site. We tasted it, it was delicious. The oldest students of the school, the eighth graders, hit the nail on the head. Teacher Kadosa Gy. Molnár implemented a very ambitious plan with them: he introduced them to the Old English language and literature. After the teacher's presentation and demonstration, the introduction of the geographical-historical context, the linguistic affinity of the Old English language, and the discussion of some of the characteristics of Old Norse and Old English poetry, the students' jointly created poems written in Old English were born.

It is worth mentioning a bunch of original ideas that helped realize the authentic Viking world. We saw teachers and students dressed in animal skins, typical Viking hair band with horns, and one group even sang Viking rock (!) accompanied by dancing. Teacher Kenneth had the letters of the runic ABC on his sweater. From a linguistic point of view, it is particularly fortunate that the theme of the project provided an opportunity to expand vocabulary in areas that would be appreciated even by adult language learners, for example: buckwheat among the grains used for Viking bread, or a list of Viking weapons.

Finally, the names of all the teachers who planned and implemented the Viking experience with their students should be mentioned here: Zoltán Bede, István Mihály, Kadosa Gy. Molnár, Gabriella Schneider, Orsolya Kamrás, Kenneth Friis, Luca Rózsahegyi and Eszter Kispál-Katics.

## References

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