

Differentiation in CLIL:

Methods and challenges

Bachelor's Thesis

Janita Raskala

University of Jyväskylä

Department of Languages

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) -opetus eli vieraskielinen opetus tähtää sujuvaan kommunikaatioon ja monipuoliseen kielenkäyttöön ja tuo mukanaan uudenlaisia haasteita eriyttämisen saralle. CLIL on kohtalaisen uusi metodi Suomessa, eikä yksittäisiä opetuksen osa-alueita kuten eriyttämistä ole tutkittu sen osalta kovinkaan laajalti. Eriyttäminen antaa jokaisella oppilaalla mahdollisuuden kehittyä omalla lähikehityksen vyöhykkeellään ja siksi eriyttämistä on tärkeää tutkia myös vieraan kielen kannalta CLIL-opetuksessa.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää, minkälaisissa tilanteissa ja mitä keinoja käyttäen alakoulutason CLIL-opettajat eriyttävät omassa opetuksessaan ja mitkä heidän mielestään ovat eriyttämisen suurimpia haasteita. Tutkimuksessa lähetettiin kyselylomake CLIL-opettajille eri puolilla Suomea ja tarkasteltiin kahdeksan opettajan vastauksia.</p> <p>Opettajat olivat yhtä mieltä siitä, että eriyttäminen on osa jokapäiväistä opetusta, muttei suinkaan helppo osa. Eriyttämistilanteet koostuvat lähinnä kahdesta ääripäästä, joista toisessa oppilas tarvitsee lisätukea pystyäkseen käyttämään kielitaitoaan ja toisessa enemmän haasteita kehittääkseen kielitaitoaan pidemmälle. Opettajat mainitsivat käyttävänsä monimuotoisia eriyttämiskeinoja aina tukisanalistoista eritasoisiin aihepiireihin ja yksinkertaisista keskusteluista vaativampiin pohdintoihin, mutta pitivät ajanpuutetta ja sopivien materiaalien vähyyttä suurimpina haasteina eriyttäessään CLIL-opetuksessa. He kokivat myös joutuvansa ajoittain tilanteisiin, jossa keinot eriyttämiseen loppuvat ja oppilaiden tarve räätälöityyn opetukseen jää taka-alalle.</p> <p>Tutkimus osoittaa selkeän tarpeen lisätutkimukselle ja eriyttämisen keinojen sekä vieraskielisten oppimateriaalien lisäämiselle CLIL-opetukseen.</p>	
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1 Introduction

The topic of the present study is CLIL, a dual-focused form of teaching. CLIL stands for Content and Language Integrated Learning, which in practice means teaching a non-language subject, such as geography or history, in a foreign language, usually English. The present study will leave aside the situation in Europe and in the world in general and rather target CLIL teaching in Finland and, furthermore, specifically focus on differentiation in a CLIL classroom. Differentiation is a way of assuring that students can develop their language skills in their own zone of proximal development. Differentiation is more challenging in CLIL than in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) as the ways and aims of differentiation are more complex. The present study will introduce and discuss differentiation in CLIL from the perspective of language learning and demonstrate the various ways of differentiating as well as the challenges it generates.

Offering clear statistics about CLIL in Finland would be a rather difficult task as with the term CLIL one can refer to any kind of teaching happening in a foreign language in any level of education from kindergarten to universities (Leppänen and Paaso 2013). However, according to the CLIL Network of Finland (n.d), approximately 26 cities offer some form of CLIL teaching. This is a rather new method in Finland and thus it has not been unified that much yet. It can be stated, though, that at the moment not all schools nor even all cities in Finland offer an opportunity for students to study English in a CLIL classroom. One of the aims of this study is to possibly offer gateways of developing CLIL towards being a comprehensive method of teaching and a more wide-spread method in Finland.

The main aim of the present study is to demonstrate concrete ways of differentiating in a CLIL classroom, which ultimately hopefully leads to an increase on ways for making it a permanent and easy part of CLIL. One way of achieving this goal is to indeed provide teachers with tools of offering effective education for their students as individuals with different kinds of competence levels and thus that is what this study aims to initiate.

In the following section previous studies and the key concepts of CLIL and differentiation will be introduced more thoroughly. The background section will be followed by the presentation of

the methods of the present study and the analysis of its results.

2 Uncovering CLIL and differentiation

In this section I will first introduce CLIL as a teaching method and explain why a language learning environment like this carries along with it additional challenges for differentiation. I will then offer definitions for differentiation and reasons for its importance especially in language learning. The need for the present study will also be discussed.

2.1 The basic concepts of CLIL

A CLIL classroom differs from an EFL classroom in its methods and focus: grammar lessons and word-to-word translations are set aside while concepts such as discourse and motivation-building are brought forward. Leppänen and Paaso (2013) note in their study that one of the most important things speaking for the CLIL method is the idea of language learning being easier in authentic situations, “in the street”, rather than in a regular classroom setting. CLIL encourages students to move from *how do I say this* to *what am I saying*: the focus is rather on the meaning than the form (Dalton-Puffer 2007). CLIL offers students an environment where they can use language in meaningful ways and in meaningful situations (Kovanen 2011), in comparison to language drills and gap-exercises conducted in regular EFL classrooms. Using English or any other foreign language for communication can at times be a distressing and unpleasant thing for students (Roiha 2012) and thus the role of differentiation in CLIL from the perspective of language learning is to support and encourage the use of English at all times.

According to the CLIL network of Finland, in the beginning students might use their mother tongue where their competence in the target language is not sufficient enough, and this is allowed, but the aim of CLIL is to communicate as much as possible using the target language, with other students as well as the teacher. CLIL challenges teachers to differentiate in an environment designed to emphasize such communication: here, the aim of differentiation is to support weaker communicators by giving them models for discussion or set dialogs, for example, and allowing more narrow answers, while directing stronger communicators towards more complex language use (Moilanen 2002).

Planning and executing language teaching in a CLIL classroom is not an easy task: combining content, language and the different working methods of these two is challenging for a teacher (Mehisto, Marsh and Frigols 2008). Even with language not being the primary subject taught, the quality of teaching and learning a language cannot suffer.

2.2 Definitions and the importance of differentiation

Differentiation is a process which involves acknowledging the different competence levels, interests and learning methods of students and taking these, among others, under consideration whilst aiming towards effective education. A CLIL classroom is a rather challenging setting for a language teacher, but they should be able to create a stimulating learning environment and to take under consideration the different competence levels of their students (Leppänen and Paaso 2013). Differentiation should not be mistaken to be merely about giving the faster or “brighter” students extra tasks and exercises: Roiha (2012) notes in his study that the three most central dimensions of differentiation are the extent, depth and pace of studying. The term differentiation refers also to taking into account the different learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic etc.) and the interests of students. The aim, anyway, is to maximize the learning capacity of each student (Tomlinson and Strickland 2005).

In Finland, as well as elsewhere, it is customary to have an interview or an entrance exam before one is allowed to attend a CLIL class. However, Kovanen (2011) highlights that classes are heterogeneous and thus the language abilities of students might differ rather widely. It is also customary for CLIL classes to have students who do not speak Finnish as their native language, which in turn affects the need for differentiation.

The terms CLIL and differentiation are closely related to the principles of Krashen’s theory on language acquisition. Differentiation allows students to work more individually according to their different levels of competence: according to the input hypothesis, students make maximum progress when they receive language input that is slightly more advanced than their current level and not too much under it (Krashen 1985). Thus, in a CLIL classroom where the focus is on communication, differentiation has an important role as this method should offer opportunities for the students to develop their language skills in the same way as EFL teaching does. This is

also important as, according to the CLIL Network of Finland, the goals set for CLIL from the perspective of content learning are the same as for normal classes, but from the perspective of language learning they are higher than for teaching EFL. In addition to being a tool for maximum progress in language learning, differentiation is a way of assuring every student has a chance of developing their language skills with any method of learning and teaching, in this case, CLIL.

Krashen (1985) speaks for authentic language use and motivating learning environments: he states that a lack of motivation, low self-esteem and the fear of one's weaknesses being revealed in class are some of the main obstacles for learning. One of the core concepts of CLIL is to create a motivating and positive learning environment where students can use language naturally without being afraid of mistakes. Differentiation should also happen naturally in this environment without students having to be afraid of their weaknesses of any sort being revealed.

2.3 "In an ideal world this would be easy"

In Finland there have been numerous case studies where CLIL has been tested in action in schools where this method is not being used and studies where students' perceptions of themselves as learners of English in a CLIL classroom (Kovanen 2011) or their experiences and thoughts on CLIL (Pihko 2010) have been under investigation. A few researchers have also compared CLIL to EFL. Differentiation has been studied even more, usually in EFL classrooms, but the combination of these two is not a widely studied topic, especially in Finland. With CLIL being a rather new method in Finland, studies of concepts like differentiation in this environment have not yet been conducted in wide numbers.

One of the few studies is that of Anssi Roiha (2012), who combined these two terms and studied differentiation in CLIL classrooms. In his study he targeted first to sixth graders and their teachers and aimed to find out how the teachers define differentiation, how they implement it and what challenges they have come across. He focused mainly on finding ways for students of low competence levels and learning difficulties to study in a CLIL class and thus also introduced the concept of inclusion. He found out that the teachers had quite good perceptions of differentiation

as a concept, but they felt that in real life theory and practice cannot meet that easily. They noted that differentiation is important and should be implemented, but that it is not always that easy and simple in real life when one has to plan the lessons according to the dual-focused form of CLIL. They wished for more knowledge of the subject and more useful tools and guidelines to actually implement differentiation in practice.

While the effects of differentiation on students and on learning results might have been studied somewhat and the term has been defined in numerous studies, there is a noticeable gap in research of its practical side. The present study aims towards providing teachers with tools of offering effective education for their classes and their students as individuals with different kinds of competence levels.

3 Methods

The aim of the present study was to survey the different challenges and methods teachers have come across when planning, encountering and conducting differentiation in CLIL teaching. The study is qualitative and thus aims towards mapping the current forms and challenges of differentiation in CLIL in Finland.

The precise research questions of the present study are the following:

1. What kind of methods of differentiating are currently being used by CLIL teachers in Finland?
2. What are the main challenges of differentiation in a CLIL classroom?

In order to achieve a wider perspective, instead of interviewing merely a few CLIL teachers, the data for the present study was collected through a questionnaire (see Appendix). The questionnaire was sent to 50 CLIL teachers teaching CLIL in primary schools in different parts of Finland. The number of teachers was selected keeping in mind the rather low percentage of schools that offer CLIL and thus the estimated number of CLIL teachers in secondary schools in Finland in total. The questionnaire contained open-ended questions, which in part affected the number of expected answers as the teachers were assumed to answer the questionnaire in their spare time. The questionnaire was answered by eight CLIL teachers, which produces a replying percentage of 16%. Five of these teachers said they have been CLIL teachers less than five years, while two of them have been teaching CLIL for 6-10 years and one of them for over 15 years. The questionnaire aimed towards surveying the overall perceptions and experiences teachers have of differentiation in CLIL and the challenges they feel they have encountered with it and thus the teachers were given an opportunity to reflect on their own teaching and their experiences. The questions were designed to focus on the subject and to assist the respondents to reflect on their experiences. Due to the open-ended questions, and the fact that experiences and perceptions of the topic of the present study evolve, develop and change during the career of a teacher, this study is qualitative rather than quantitative as it does not aim towards repeatable results.

The questionnaire was designed in February 2014 and sent to CLIL teachers in different parts of Finland. The program which was used to create the questionnaire filed the answers as they came in and organized all answers under each question.

The collected data was then looked at one question at a time and the results were analyzed keeping in mind the aims of the research and thus trying to find some unity, repeated points or recurring viewpoints.

4 Analysis and results

In this chapter I will present and briefly analyze the results of the questionnaire. The main topics of discussion were definitions of differentiation, the role of differentiation, ways of differentiating and finally, challenges and ways of improving.

All of the teachers mentioned that they themselves are allowed to choose the lessons and subjects in which they use English. Only one of the teachers said they use English with almost every subject, while others claimed it is rather important to choose the right subject to use English with. All of them listed math, history and biology as ideal subjects in this matter, but also mentioned art, domestic science and music to be easy choices to use English in. Their choices were mainly affected by the age and interests of their students as well as the degree of difficulty of needed vocabulary: in a way, the choosing of the subjects is an act of differentiation in itself. One of the teachers added to these and also pondered about the role of native language in subjects like religion.

”With younger students we use a little bit less English and thus I mostly try to do small-talk and short conversations around topics that interest them, as well as things like music. With older students we can use much more English and take on more complicated topics, since they have skills to use their language in wider contexts. I tend to use English in theoretical subjects, such as geography, biology, history, physics and chemistry. I rarely include English in subjects like religion, where we usually have open discussions about rather personal topics: the students seem more open to talk about these in their native language and I try to avoid making it too stressful for them”

The teachers also mentioned that they do not like to use English with subjects like physical education and crafts. It seems that the concept of CLIL is well embedded in their teaching as the focus is on communication and there might not be too much of that in crafts, while history and biology offer interesting topics to talk about. The need for differentiation, however, can be seen here as the idea of language use being stressful is brought up.

4.1 Defining differentiation

The teachers were asked to list key words and things which come to their mind when they think of differentiation. All of the teachers brought up three of the same key concepts in their

definitions of differentiation: *individual skill level*, *different students* and *individual needs*. One of the teachers said they could define differentiation in one simple sentence.

”To offer extra support throughout all different senses to those, who move slower than others and have difficulties learning something and also to those, who move faster than the others.”

According to the teachers, differentiation includes noticing the individual skill level of each student and tailoring one’s teaching according to those levels, which can be done by focusing on the specific aspects of any given subject. The choosing of the subject being taught in English could be seen as the first step of this as a teacher needs to consider the aspects of the teaching of each subject and how these can be conducted in English. One of the teachers also stressed that this is not to be done only for tasks and exercises during class, but also tests and exams – this is a part of differentiation which can at times be easily forgotten. Unfortunately they did not give any further examples of this. However, three of the teachers mentioned the zone of proximal development and stressed that in an ideal situation learning should take place in this zone. Differentiation is an important tool in this as the different skill levels of students in turn create different zones of proximal development. With this, the teachers supported the idea of dividing differentiation into two categories: upwards and downwards differentiation. All of the teachers were unanimous in this, which is more likely courtesy of the unified teacher training programs in Finland than the unified programs of CLIL teaching.

All of the teachers agreed on differentiation being important in both of these cases, but admitted having encountered considerably more situations in CLIL which required differentiating downwards. As mentioned above, in Finland one needs to take an entrance exam to be accepted into a CLIL class, which makes this fact interesting as the skill levels of CLIL students ought to be quite good. Two of the teachers considered offering examples of this important since they felt that differentiating downwards sometimes leads to ways more extreme than when differentiating upwards. According to them, in an ideal situation the students would not notice differentiation taking place and thus would not categorize each other as “slower” or “faster” learners, but unfortunately in some cases this is impossible to avoid. Hence, for ways of differentiating downwards, the teachers mentioned giving a student a different set of tasks than the others, preferably clearer and simpler to understand. They also use other classrooms or other available space if a student, for example, needs a more quiet and peaceful environment to study in. In

addition to this, one of these two teachers supported the idea of having assistant teachers or some other extra help in their class to offer support for those who need it. In CLIL this could happen when a teacher hands out a writing task and a student struggles to produce a text. With communication and conversation tasks, however, the uses of an assistant teacher or a separate working space are not preferable ways of differentiation.

Besides skill levels, the teachers talked about the different needs of every student. All of the teachers started with the situations where the skills of a student are weaker or stronger than the average and stated that these situations are usually quite easy to detect. One of the teachers stressed that differentiation is especially important when something is obviously challenging and it takes a fairly long time for a student to “get the hang of it” and that these situations cannot go unnoticed. A teacher needs to be able to secure the basic goals set for teaching and to create a peaceful learning environment.

Five of the teachers then moved on to talk about learning difficulties or medical diagnoses, mentioning Asperger’s syndrome, dyslexia or the lack of eye sight or the ability to hear properly and the immediate need for differentiation in these cases. Three of them also said that in most cases, students with diagnosed difficulties like these need special equipment, but can otherwise work at the same pace and at the same level as the other students. Here, the line between special education or extra support and differentiation is to be considered – when does the need for differentiation change into the need for special education?

“I myself have encountered the need for differentiation when I had a student in my class who could not see properly. He saw a tiny bit, but had to use a computer at the back of the class to get through his studies. In this situation, as in others too, differentiation was mainly taking into account the different needs of my different students. He didn’t need any special education or special attention of any kind, as his learning skills were excellent: he just needed a bit of differentiation and extra equipment”

One of the teachers wanted to stress the fact that differentiation is not to be confused with special education or the need for special support and help. According to them, the latter are heavier actions, which are used when a student has actual difficulties with learning.

“--- Differentiation is definitely not the same as that: it can be executed in much smaller scales! In practice if you know your students well enough, you can differentiate almost all the time”

Two of the teachers talked about differentiation from the perspective of maintaining order in a classroom and maintaining interest, also.

”I use differentiation as a tool for calming down students, so if they just cannot settle down I instantly know that I need to differentiate. Differentiation enters the picture when a student just cannot keep up with the others or is really bored because they already know the stuff we are going through. In both cases differentiation helps to prevent frustration”

The first of these two teachers noted that differentiation is necessary especially in math and in physics or chemistry, where one can have many talented and fast students who excel in calculating, ones who understand the basics and “the big picture” faster than the others. The teacher stressed that there is no point in wasting time repeating the basics to these students, as they know them already: it makes more sense to give them tasks in which they can use their cognitive skills more efficiently. This is the core idea of differentiation. All of this helps the teacher to make sure these students will not get frustrated or lose interest in studying. The other of the two teachers also talked about frustration and how that definitely leads to difficulties in preserving order in their classroom. In their mind, the visible need for challenges needs to be noticed early on.

“They get bored and start disturbing others very quickly! Differentiation is definitely needed with these kids who are already quite skilled and just need to be updating their skills”

4.2 The role of differentiation and planning it

In this section, the role of differentiation and the amount of planning it requires will be discussed. All of the teachers agreed that it is and should be a part of everyday teaching: according to them, differentiation should be automatic.

”Differentiation definitely cannot be an additional part, it has to be an everyday part of teaching – it’s continuous, based on a teachers evaluation of their students and also the students’ self-evaluations. Although, I don’t know if this is possible at all times...”

Two of the teachers introduced two different sides to this, as one of them has only recently started out as a CLIL teacher and the other one has had 10 years of experience. The former said

they encounter situations requiring differentiation every day, such as a student needing special equipment, but find it upsetting how they sometimes cannot seem to be able to take notice of these situations as they have to focus on the “normal” tasks of a teacher. In their mind, they need more experience and years of teaching behind them before they can take notice of the different needs of their different students. Here, the question of whether teachers need more tools or more experience definitely becomes relevant. The latter teacher, on the contrary, said differentiation should be a routine from the start, but added that one only learns to differentiate in practice when one gets to know their students well enough. They also note that even though they have numerous students in their class who have special needs when it comes to learning and studying, not everyone needs differentiation. This emphasizes the teachers’ thoughts of downwards and upwards differentiation, but is also in contrast with the thought of every student being an individual in need of tailored teaching according to their interests and skills.

One of the teachers noted that differentiation is not solely about handing out easier or harder tasks, but about learning how to ask the right questions in the right way when in a teaching situation. They continued and said it is relatively easy to differentiate when one knows their students and knows who needs easier questions or gestures to help them answer and also who can be asked to help their peers. This indicates that the teachers are well aware of what differentiation really is and do not see it as just giving extra tasks to the faster/’brighter’ students.

When it comes to planning differentiation, the teachers had quite differing opinions. One of them said they do not need to plan it at all, while another one said they think about the contents, methods, task types and the time available keeping different learners in mind every time they plan a lesson. One teacher agreed on this and said they think about differentiation every day and also direct their students into this direction. Another one stated that they cannot plan differentiation as each situation is different and one cannot be prepared for them. These differing opinions reveal that there are no guidelines for differentiation, nor the planning of it, and that each teacher has their own way of dealing with situations requiring differentiation. However, two of the teachers talked rather similarly about the different parts of differentiation and how those affect their plans. According to the first of these two, time management and methods can be planned, while planning contents and task types demands too much time.

”I always try to keep the basic contents and tasks the same for everyone as I don’t have time to come up with several, but I do think about methods beforehand and also as we go. We will do what we can within the time limit we have”

The other teacher said that for them, contents and methods tend to stay in the background as, when teaching a large group of students, it is easier to create general guidelines and rely on them. They noted that they focus on creating extra tasks for the “more talented” students and on thinking how they could present something so that everyone will understand it. They found that while numerous ideas are functional on paper, in practice they tend to only hand out different tasks to different students. This is one indication of teachers not having enough ways to differentiate in CLIL.

4.3 Ways of differentiating

For this section I am going to go through a few of the teachers’ answers on their own, as all of the participants had varying answers for this particular part and a few mentioned only one or two methods which are included in the more vast answers of the other teachers.

The first teacher prefers handing out helpful lists of words, which include essential vocabulary needed during the class or a specific topic. These make it easier for students to follow and also help and encourage them to talk about the topic and the new vocabulary with their peers. However, the teacher is not sure what they prefer when their students are given a text to read: on one hand, a helpful list of words makes it easier for the students to understand the text, but on the other CLIL teaching is about making one’s students talk as much as possible and thus the teacher would like to see their students work together and discuss the new vocabulary. This can be difficult and is one of the main challenges of differentiation in CLIL. In addition they mention that when differentiating upwards one can offer more challenges by handing out more difficult writing or reading tasks. In their mind, writing tasks in general are the ones most easy to differentiate with - one can quite easily have different topics, different lengths and a different level of requirements. This is closer to the teaching of EFL and thus easier to differentiate in than communication tasks, which are the essential part of CLIL.

The second teacher also said they use helpful lists of words which include vocabulary that helps students to talk in class without having to constantly switch to their native language. This is also one of the main ideas of CLIL teaching. They also see time as a key factor: some students need more time for a conversation than others and thus the teacher wants to be prepared to extend a conversation by offering more topics to discuss. Here, material packages of certain topics would certainly help teachers to differentiate. One can also differentiate using time by allowing some students to work longer on a project or a test. The teacher also mentioned the use of special equipment, such as a computer, a hearing device, a calculator, a tablet or other technical support one might need. In their mind, the easiest way is still to give the faster students a set of extra tasks – this, yet again, can be an indication of the lack of ways to differentiate, or of the lack of time, as the teacher seemed to be well aware of the different ways they can use for differentiation in CLIL.

The third teacher said they usually allow their students to choose the level in which they execute a given task – they can make it easier or harder themselves, in a way. For example, if the students are asked to talk about a specific topic, they can either go through the questions given to them or expand the subject and talk about anything they know about it. This works well with the communicative idea of CLIL. The fourth teacher also talked about discussions and said they focus on giving more oral guidance, prepping their students and giving feedback in English to those who are talented and trying not to repeat things as much so those students will not get frustrated during class. They also mention using more varying and challenging vocabulary and longer sentences with these students. Thus, a teacher can differentiate by altering their own language output with different students. This can, of course, be rather challenging due to limited time and large group sizes.

The fifth teacher stressed the possibility of altering one's questions according to the different skill levels of one's students: from those who are more advanced, they ask extra questions such as *why*, *explain*, *give reasons*, *compare* and from those who are on a basic level, they ask simple yes/no questions or questions one can answer with fewer words. They also make sure they have exercises designed for different skill levels: for basic level they have simple tasks which require basic knowledge and are quite mechanical and for an advanced level they have tasks which

require a higher level of cogitative action, such as combining or comparing information, creating a material package or solving problems. These can all be used with both reading and conversation tasks. Although, if a teacher always provides an easier and a more difficult version of a task, one might have to be concerned that students will choose the easier option despite of their skill level being higher.

The sixth teacher said they use technical equipment such as a reading-TV, earplugs or a computer and also prefer using helpful lists of words when processing advanced and challenging texts or, on the other end, handing out even more advanced texts. Some of their students need an assistant teacher and some can be that for others – some need extra support while others need something to expand their knowledge with. The teacher also mentioned that some of their students need simpler materials while others can search for their own materials and create material packages. All of these represent the two categories of differentiation the teachers brought up before. This in turn raises the question of differentiation being just for the two high ends, not for average students.

To summarize, the list of ways of differentiating the teachers presented ranged from simple tools, such as word lists, to more complex ones, such as time management. Still, the most important tool for differentiation seems to be the teacher itself. Altering one's own output according to the different skill levels of one's students is one of the main ways for increasing or decreasing the level of difficulty of a given communication task. The need for helpful technical devices and material packages designed for CLIL teaching in Finland seems to be apparent as well.

4.4 Challenges and ways of improving

In this section I will discuss the challenges of differentiation. One main challenge was mentioned by all the teachers and talked about the most – the lack of time. The teachers mentioned that just when they have used differentiation and got one set of students clear on what to do, another set of students is still asking what page are they supposed to be on and thus, there simply is no time to concentrate on everyone as individual learners. One of the teachers confirmed the lack of time is definitely the main problem.

“The biggest challenge is the lack of time. I have to plan my content in a foreign language and also consider differentiation, which equals a LOT of time spent thinking about my teaching and preparing for my classes. Of course I can use my ideas later on every year, so that’s good, but it still takes so much time I feel overwhelmed sometimes. Some nights I find myself thinking *I really don’t have time for this!*”

Two of the teachers noted that motivation is a challenge for both students and teachers. They said that motivating their students to find their own learning styles and to use English with confidence in class is always a challenge. This is clearly one of the main challenges of CLIL in general. The other one said that, working in a school where they have a large number of teacher trainees, the biggest problem is getting them excited about CLIL: getting their self-confidence to a level where they could try out teaching a theoretical subject in English, too. According to this teacher, most of the teacher trainees in their school are hesitant about CLIL in general. CLIL is a new method in Finland and the knowledge of it has not spread everywhere – the spreading of information and perhaps additional CLIL teacher training programs are hopefully to be discussed in the future.

One of the teachers thought the lack of ways to differentiate was the main challenge. They mentioned that differentiation was discussed numerous times in the Department of Teacher Education, but that they were not exactly given a package of useful ways of differentiation to use in their own teaching. Whether these things should be taught in a teacher training program or offered through materials and experience later on is an important question to be asked. They have thought about using the Internet as a source for ways of differentiating, but feel like there is no time for that as they need to focus on planning their lessons.

”The lack of materials is really saddening, I have to make so many materials myself and it takes time – which I don’t have!”

They stressed that especially with older CLIL-students they need time to search for materials for their classes and thus they do not have time to focus on differentiation.

“I would never say it is easy when it comes to CLIL teaching. It takes a whole lot of time to prepare one’s materials for CLIL lessons. This in turn has a negative effect on differentiation. When you

finally have one material ready, you don't have the energy to alter it for different learners. Time is your worst enemy! If only the perfect materials would just magically appear..."

According to them, it is easy to create or find different tasks and use them for differentiation, but altering contents or methods is rather challenging. This in turn is not ideal differentiation as it is far too one-sided. They feel that the use of different methods is important as it keeps teaching and learning interesting and might also offer extra support for their different learners, but that they do not have enough tools for that in general. They do not seem to be sure where they want to get help from, only that they definitely need it. One of the teachers combined all the challenges into differentiation being a challenge in itself.

"The lack of everything is a problem when we're talking about differentiation: the lack of time, the lack of methods, the lack of proper working space and the impossibility of dividing yourself into smaller pieces. How could I find time to focus and support each and every one of my students?"

All of the teachers agreed on differentiation being a part of CLIL, but not an easy part. Three of them stressed that they need more extra space for group work or due to some individual needs of students. Another one said that teaching the same group is an advantage since one can create routines for the group which help in differentiation – smaller groups within a group, assigned pairs for pair work and special routines for extra tasks and materials. One of the teachers stated that differentiation is definitely not easy and that it demands hard work and dedication. They feel that if schools had more money, material packages could really help as the lack of materials is their biggest challenge. They stress that there are not nearly enough textbooks available in English and suitable for teaching CLIL in Finland. One of the teachers wanted to stay positive and said it is always challenging, but that especially in CLIL, one needs to know their students and their needs and can only then differentiate both in the foreign language and also in the theoretical subject being taught – but it is rewarding in the end.

5 Discussion and conclusion

The present study aimed towards mapping the varying methods of differentiation being currently used in CLIL teaching in Finland and the main problems teachers have come across when differentiating. The exact research questions were the following:

1. What kind of methods of differentiating are currently being used by CLIL teachers in Finland?
2. What are the main challenges of differentiation in a CLIL classroom?

Due to the qualitative nature and a questionnaire containing open-ended questions, the validity of the present study was reliant on the depth and accuracy of the answers received from the participating teachers. The questionnaire used for the purposes of the present study was answered by eight CLIL teachers, who offered broad insights to the methods they themselves use and talked about the difficulties they face when implementing these. Thus, the present study was able to answer the questions it intended to answer rather well.

While there are clearly various ways of differentiating being implemented in CLIL teaching in Finland, the teachers find differentiation to be challenging and find themselves out of methods and out of time. The present study exemplified a large spectrum of methods, which extend from simple word lists to one or more assistant teachers in the classroom, but also found that there are not nearly enough customized methods for differentiating specifically in CLIL. The discussion on assistant teachers and special equipment also revealed a question of where is the line between differentiation and special education. The teachers were asked to define differentiation and they wanted to draw a line between the simple methods being used for that and the actual need for special education. They feel like differentiation should be a fluent part of everyday teaching and wished for more useful ways of differentiating, so not that much time would have to go into designing materials and planning differentiation beforehand.

The results of the present study take CLIL teaching one step closer to being a more comprehensive method of language teaching in Finland. The study was qualitative and consisted of the answers of merely eight teachers from different schools and thus cannot provide results impacting all of Finland, but nevertheless offers results which can be of use when developing

materials for teaching CLIL and ways of differentiating. It demonstrated what kind of methods are being currently used and thus exposed a gap, which can be filled by additional studies which would result in material packages or a united network where methods, materials and ideas could be shared by CLIL teachers all over Finland. These would without doubt help CLIL teachers to differentiate in their classes and to take differentiation under consideration when planning their classes. Roiha (2012) found similarly in his study that teachers were in need of concrete ways of differentiating and as the present study showed that the lack of time was one of the biggest challenges teachers are facing, the need for these material packages is clearly justified. Many of the materials designed abroad are not suitable for Finnish education and thus there is a need for materials designed specifically for teaching CLIL in Finland. One of the long term aims of the CLIL Network of Finland, conveniently, is to create a united network for CLIL teaching materials, which would allow sharing information of available materials between schools. This would also create unity between the CLIL teaching programs of different schools and allow co-operation in acquiring new materials.

In conclusion, the present study was able to answer the presented research questions quite extensively and was able to notice a more specified gap to be filled by later research in the area of CLIL teaching in Finland. A research of this kind should be conducted from the perspective of teachers and aim towards providing practical and useful materials for CLIL teaching.

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Appendix

Eriyttäminen CLIL-luokkahuoneessa/differentiation in a CLIL classroom

1. Kuinka kauan olet toiminut CLIL-opettajana?

- 0-5 vuotta
- 6-10 vuotta
- 11-15 vuotta
- 15 vuotta tai enemmän

2. Mitä ainetta/aineita opetat CLIL-tunneillasi vieraan kielen lisäksi?

3. Mitä sinun mielestäsi on eriyttäminen?

Mainitse avainsanoja tai asioita, jotka tulevat mieleesi eriyttämistä ajatellessa.

4. Koetko eriyttämisen olevan osa arkipäiväistä opetusta vai enemmänkin lisäosa, jota käytetään erikoistilanteissa?

Kuvaile eriyttämisen roolia opetuksessasi.

5. Minkälaisissa tilanteissa eriyttäminen on tarpeellista?

Voit mainita myös esimerkkejä siitä, milloin olet kohdannut eriyttämisen tarvetta omassa luokkahuoneessasi.

6. Millä tavoin itse eriytät CLIL-opetuksessa?

Mainitse muutamia esimerkkejä keinoista, joita käytät eriyttämiseen.

7. Otatko eriyttämistä huomioon opetusta suunnitellessasi?

Pohditko esimerkiksi sisältöjä, menetelmiä, tehtävyytyyppejä tai käytettävissä olevaa aikaa erilaisten oppijoiden kannalta?

8. Mitkä ovat eriyttämisen haasteita: mikä tekee eriyttämisestä hankalaa CLIL-opetuksessa?

Vaikuttavatko esimerkiksi suuret luokkakoot, ajanpuute tai keinojen vähyys?

9. Koetko eriyttämisen olevan helppo ja sujuva osa CLIL-opetusta?

Jos et, kerro miten tilannetta voitaisiin mielestäsi parantaa.