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## **Designing a pre-service CLIL teacher education program**

### **Summary**

This paper is a part of a larger instrumental case study exploring the process of creating a CLIL teacher education program for early primary level at the University of Warsaw. The paper identifies some challenges related to program design and describes areas of growth of student teachers specifically related to CLIL planning instruction. The data were collected over a period of five years and included interviews and focused groups with student teachers, teacher educators and mentor teachers as well as the analysis of CLIL units created by the student teachers.

**Key words:** CLIL, foreign language, pre-service teacher education, early education, CLIL lesson planning

### **Introduction**

As Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has become more popular in a variety of teaching contexts around the world, there is a strong need for teacher education for pre-service as well as in-service teachers. Research findings confirm that the success of CLIL lies to a great extent in the involvement of committed and well-prepared teachers (Fernandez & Halbach 2011; Czura & Papaja 2013; Pérez-Cañado 2016a). The absence of specific training for CLIL teachers may lead to misappropriations regarding the purposes and methodology of language and content integration (Sylvén 2013). As CLIL teaching becomes popular at all educational levels, including primary, secondary,

and higher education around the globe, there is a strong need to explore the process of preparing teachers who are able to provide instruction by integrating language and content at all levels. The aim of this paper is to present findings from a case study focusing on the process of development of a pre-service teacher education program focused on CLIL at early primary levels in Poland. The two guiding questions of this investigation are: What were the factors affecting the process of designing CLIL teacher education programs and what were the areas of development when student teachers attempted to plan CLIL teaching units at early primary education.

### **The study context**

This study was conducted from 2014 to 2019 at the Faculty of Education of the University of Warsaw. This was part of a larger project focusing on preparing well qualified language teachers for young learners. As part of this effort, Faculty of Education of the University of Warsaw opened the Graduate Programme of Teaching English to Young Learners (GPTE), a new teacher education masters' level course for language and CLIL teachers at early primary years. This was designed purposefully as an English Medium Instruction (EMI) course to provide students with a greater exposure to content taught in English, with the idea to offer a greater integration of language and content instruction. Theoretical grounding in CLIL teaching, with the introduction to integrated subject teaching in English, was addressed. It also offered research opportunities in the areas of CLIL education, language teaching, and subject content, and fostered practical training in CLIL teaching during extended student teaching placements.

Students who were admitted to the program had to show a good knowledge of English ranging from B2 plus to C1 using the CEFR levels. They represented various educational and cultural backgrounds. While the majority of students came from Poland (49), there were also sixteen students who came from other European, Asian, or African countries. The majority of students' previous educational background included language and primary education studies. In addition, there was a small group of students with social science, literature, or science education. This diversity required incorporating individualization in the process of teacher training, especially in the areas of language proficiency.

The rationale for creating the program was to design the teacher education program preparing teachers who can cope with a variety of language and CLIL teaching models at primary grades as well as with developing a good understanding of early language learning, the role of meaningful language use and richer language exposure (Kuppens 2010; Lefever 2010; Lindgren & Muñoz 2012).

### **CLIL in Poland**

Poland has a long tradition of bilingual education especially at secondary level, dating back to the 1970s. Research literature confirms a great diversification among the bilingual models, which seemed to be partly connected with the teacher abilities, both linguistic and methodological (Czura & Papaja 2013). Teachers with a stronger language proficiency and better teaching methodology were able to include more foreign language and provide a better integration of language and content. The teachers with weaker language proficiency and less expertise in bilingual teaching, greatly limited foreign language to teaching specific vocabulary lists and disconnected exercises. The majority of teachers in Poland do not have any formal education in the area of bilingual teaching and they develop bilingual teaching skills through their own practice, or with the help of short-term post-graduate courses offered irregularly (Czura & Papaja 2013; Brzosko-Barratt et al. 2018).

Recently, the number of primary schools claiming to provide CLIL instruction has also been rapidly growing in Poland, especially at primary levels. According to the data from the Polish Ministry of Education, the number of primary schools with bilingual classes has been on the rise. From 2017 to 2018, the number of registered primary schools which include bilingual classes increased from 150 to 280. One of the institutional reasons why primary schools started to include bilingual classes could be the educational changes of 2017 in Poland. These changes led to the closure of junior secondary schools, which over the last 25 years developed some expertise in providing bilingual instruction. Moving bilingual classes and CLIL teaching to primary schools in grades 7 and 8 brought both new challenges and opportunities to these schools. On one hand they had to build on the experiences of junior middle schools, create new courses adjusting to new curricula, and develop new cadres of teachers who are able to provide bilingual instruction in primary schools. On the other hand, introducing

bilingual education to primary schools potentially broadens the bilingual education to lower grades of primary schools as the schools become more experienced and comfortable with it. In addition to these organizational changes, there seems to be a growing interest in creating innovative language learning programs developed by individual teachers or collaborative groups of teachers to provide more extensive learning opportunities for students at lower grades. These programs appeared mainly at early primary grades 1–3 or in grades 4–6. These innovations include various forms and subject integration, which are aligned with the European trends of integrating language education with primary curriculum.

### **CLIL approach in primary education**

Since the 1990s, part of the long term language policy supported by the European Union has been to introduce CLIL programs into European schools. CLIL is based on the integration of language and content and it is characterized by its dual focus, which combines learning content with learning an additional language by focusing on both at the same time (Coyle 2007). It may be shaped through various teaching models. In primary CLIL it is usually introduced by the subject teacher, with a good language competence in the second language, who provides instruction with elements of the additional language. It could also include a model in which an English teacher collaborates with a team of primary teachers. As CLIL is a flexible approach, it is realized differently depending on the contextual variables in each school or each country. It is built upon the teachers' individual initiatives and restricted by the country's educational law (Czura & Papaja 2013).

The popularity of CLIL instruction is associated with its promise regarding language development. CLIL is highly regarded by parents and school administration, who strongly believe it to be an effective learning approach, especially in the area of language learning (Pladevall-Ballester 2015). This approach is also strongly supported by school administrators, who see it as an element of the school's promotion as well as the possibility of increasing the amount of language instruction without extending the amount of time reserved solely for language teaching. This direction of providing language and content at primary levels is supported by researchers who believe that CLIL instruction at early levels of language integration is possible due to the characteristics of

content itself. The content of primary education lends itself to bilingual instruction because it relates frequently to students' personal experiences. This allows teachers to rely on students' previous experiences, and with the appropriate methodology and techniques such as visuals, demonstration, and realia, overcome limited language proficiency (Halbach 2009). Some other arguments for early language and content integration at primary levels emphasize the importance of earlier exposure to language learning, ensuring contexts of rich meaning and communication of new ideas and concepts (Wildhage & Otten 2003). Research in early CLIL also warns against the potential negative effects mainly in the area of demotivation and affection (Otwińska & Foryś 2017), or not meeting the needs of all students across all skills, such as developing more reading and writing, rather than listening and speaking (Pizorn 2017).

The closer exploration of studies focusing on CLIL outcomes indicates that little is presented on the preparation of CLIL teachers whose teaching was being investigated. As research on young learners indicated the important role of the teachers in the process of language learning (Enever 2011), the same could be considered in relation to CLIL teachers working with young learners. Considering the complexity of language and content integration, and even more the needs of young language learners, investigating the process of CLIL teacher training with young learners needs further attention.

### **CLIL teacher education**

There has been a number of theoretical conceptualizations regarding the competencies required – for CLIL teaching with the development of the CLIL approach. Some of these were CLIL Competences Grid (Bertaux et al. 2010; Marsh et al. 2010). These indicate some areas that CLIL teachers should develop, including linguistic competence with intercultural aspects, pedagogical competence with the focus on student-centered methodologies, scientific knowledge or content knowledge, organizational competence, interpersonal and collaborative competence, and finally reflective and developmental competence.

Much of the early research in CLIL teachers training needs was focused on CLIL teachers' linguistic competence. The studies of in-service teachers indicated that the low language proficiency affected the way in CLIL was

implemented in schools. In the Spanish study (Lorenzo et al. 2009), CLIL teachers felt insecure about their fluency and their general level of English. This was also observed elsewhere (Fernandez & Halbach 2011) among primary school teachers in Madrid. Recent research however, indicated that there is a diversity of needs when it comes to developing linguistic skills, depending on teachers' education or study abroad experience (Pérez-Cañado 2018). The European survey study indicated that the preschool and early primary teachers seem to experience problems in the area of the linguistic competences, especially language for communication, but also in pronunciation and fluency (Ruiz-Gomez 2015; Pérez-Cañado 2018). Also, the Polish survey data showed significant differences in self-perceived training needs depending on the teachers' specialization or previous teaching experience. Subject teachers pointed out a strong need for professional development in bilingual teaching methodologies and language learning, while language teachers focused on content knowledge and less frequently on bilingual teaching methodologies (Brzosko-Barratt et al. 2019).

In addition to the linguistic needs, the recent research showed that developing other abilities such as methodological, collaborative, and student-centered teaching were equally important for CLIL teachers. The results of the large European studies give some indication regarding the training needs of teachers at early primary levels. The survey study exploring the CLIL training needs showed that the teachers of preschool and early education had a limited knowledge of CLIL education, especially in the area of CLIL methodology (Pérez-Cañado 2016a; Pérez-Cañado 2018). However, little is known about the specific skills within CLIL methodology, which become significant when providing CLIL instruction for early primary grades. One area which was explored in research is related to literacy development. Primary CLIL teachers in Spain, indicated strongly the lack of skills in the area of literacy development, specifically when learners begin their bilingual education before they develop skills in the foreign language (Halbach 2009; Halbach & Fernandez 2011).

The studies on pre-service CLIL teacher education programs are scarce. They confirm that it is plagued by many of the same challenges that are typical for other teacher education programs. These challenges include the gap between theory and practice and the transmissive models of teacher education. Designing a CLIL program has to not only facilitate CLIL-specific training, but also attempt to construct opportunities for connecting theory and practice, or to create alternatives to the transmissive models by introducing various levels of reflection and teacher inquiry. An analysis of pre-service program

indicated the following four areas of expertise of CLIL teaching needed to be addressed: subject-specific pedagogical competence, pedagogical-communicative competence to manage interaction in CLIL classrooms, inter-area collaboration skills, and finally professional skills that will ensure the continuation of the process of self-development and innovation after the initial teacher education (Escobar-Urmeneta 2010).

Rapidly growing numbers of CLIL schools and the complexity of the approach put new responsibilities on teacher training institutions to provide CLIL training, though it continues to be very limited for both pre-service and in-service levels (Czura & Papaja 2013; Pérez-Cañado 2018). These programs should as much as possible include a whole array of theory and practice of bilingual education at both undergraduate and graduate levels, addressing not only the CLIL methodology and language, but also should be strengthened by extending the study of content subjects in English.

### **Research methodology**

This study is part of a larger project focusing on exploring the bilingual teaching community in Poland and was designed as an instrumental case to provide a better understanding of the process of preparing bilingual teachers at pre-service level. The instrumental case methodology was chosen as it provided insight and facilitate better understanding of the issue (Stake 1995; Stake 2000). The data was collected over 5 years and included many sources such as semi-structured interviews with student teachers, focus groups with student teachers, and semi-structured interviews with teacher educators and mentor teachers. In addition, the study utilized the analysis of CLIL units created by the students during their studies in the program.

### **Participants**

The study participants were thirty student teachers. Ten of them were the graduates of language studies, ten were the graduates of primary education and ten were the graduates of other faculties. The majority of students participating in the study were Polish (22), but there were also eight students

from other countries. Twelve teacher educators participated in the study, both school-based and university-based. They all came from Poland and were the experts in the field of language teaching, early education, subject teaching, or applied linguistics. They had extensive experience in teacher education, with the average of 21 years. They specialized in various areas of education, and some of them had extensive experience with content and language integration, while the others had limited experience. Most of the teachers who had limited experience participated in professional development by means of study visits and workshops. Teacher educators based in schools were also experienced, with an average of 12 years of experience. Their role in the program included being mentors and course instructors. They worked in both private and public schools. All mentor teachers participated in the workshops focused on various aspects of CLIL teaching, mentoring and professional development.

### **Data collection and analysis**

Data collection consisted of two focus groups with student teachers and ten semi-structured interviews with teacher educators, mentor teachers and student teachers.

The analysis of documents including teacher education syllabi, standards of teacher education, and multiple class assignments such as CLIL curriculum units and portfolio assignments.

The data analysis included iterative cycles of analysis, which were conducted within-case. The data was coming from multiple sources. During the process of data analysis, each data type was analyzed independently and subsequently divided into thematic categories after the collection by making continuous comparisons. The analysis of contextualized and triangulated data sources helped numerous details for in-depth descriptions to emerge in interpretation (Wolcott 2001).

### **Study focus and research questions**

This report focused on two research questions addressed in the instrumental case study. The first question concerned the process of CLIL program design and the factors affecting it. The second question explored

the areas of development when students start planning CLIL teaching at early primary education.

Research question 1: What were the factors affecting the process of designing the CLIL teacher education program?

Research question 2: What were the areas of development when student teachers started planning CLIL teaching units, at early primary education?

## **Findings**

### **Factors affecting program design**

The data revealed four main groups of factors affecting the process of designing the GPTE program. They included: the insufficiency of CLIL teaching regulations, the lack of standards of bilingual teacher education, traditional separation of language and content in early primary teacher education both at the university and in schools, limited student teaching placements in CLIL, and a diversity of student teachers' needs.

### **Factors related to limited regulations**

The first group of problems was related to the lack of bilingual teacher education standards in Poland. The analysis of documents indicated that according to the Polish educational law, any teacher with the qualifications for teaching content subjects with a certified language proficiency at B2 level could teach the content areas bilingually. With the lack of sufficient regulations, there were many limitations regarding the formal qualifications. As there are not any additional standards for bilingual teachers, upon the GPTE program completion the students could not receive any additional formal qualifications certifying their broad competences in CLIL teaching. After the newly introduced changes of the standards of teacher education in 2019, the only formal qualifications that the teachers could receive after the 2-year program were limited to obtaining language teaching qualifications in grades 1–3. These were not sufficient for students who did not previously study primary education and wanted to obtain full teaching qualifications to teach primary CLIL. Student teachers who entered the GPTE program only with the language teaching qualifications received no additional formal qualifications, unless they

specialized in early education through additional courses. As CLIL teaching requires a broad scope of competences comprising linguistic, content related, methodological, pedagogical and collaborative skills, it requires a very different approach to teacher education and requires finding some alternative solutions for obtaining formal qualifications. The CLIL teacher education has to include solutions for cross-curricular cooperation from various content areas including language and subject content in English, which seems to be very difficult to put in practice. The lack of specific standards and regulations seemed to constrain opportunities for this cooperation among various faculties. Study participants pointed to many potential reasons why this cooperation is rather scarce. Subject content departments have limited expertise in teaching CLIL methodology or providing additional content language instruction in a foreign language, while language teaching departments cannot fully address the specific content areas and content areas' methodology. The research participants indicated that in order to meet the demands of CLIL teaching, the GPTE program included many additional courses. These courses addressed many of the competencies included in CLIL Teachers Competences Grid (Bertaux et al. 2010), and the demands of teaching young learners. In their interviews, teacher educators complained that these courses were difficult to justify to the administrators and student teachers, and the perception of their importance was weakened.

### **Factors related to division of language and content**

Another set of problems related to program design was related to the traditional division of language and content at teacher education. The analysis of other early teacher education programs and course syllabi indicated that typically teacher education at primary levels included psychological or pedagogical content as well as integrated subject content areas taught in Polish. The content focusing on English language teaching methodology courses were taught in English. This situation resulted in the lack of experienced teacher educators, who were able to provide instruction in content subject areas, such as science, math, or literacy education, at least partially in English. In addition, content teacher educators had to be knowledgeable and sensitive to the needs of children and second language learners. In the interviews, teacher educators mentioned that they had to adjust their courses to include teaching strategies with more focus on language, contextualization, experimentation, learning strategies or materials development.

The lack of university-based teacher educators was initially accompanied by a small number of mentor teachers who were able to support student teachers in developing CLIL practical skills and those who had some experience with mentoring students. The specificity of CLIL lies in its diversity, therefore it was essential to expose student teachers to various contexts and approaches to language and content integration. Mentor teachers came from both private and public schools, which offered a variety of models of CLIL teaching. The initial interviews with mentor teachers indicated that they were frequently insecure about their CLIL teaching practices and were looking forward to obtaining more CLIL teacher training. Having student teachers was helpful in reflecting on their own practice. With the limited number of practicum placements and the diversity of CLIL approaches, it was necessary to organize, in addition to regular long-term student teaching, regular short-term study visits, where the students worked with bilingual teachers and students being exposed to various models of teaching.

Related to the division between language and content traditions present in education was the challenge of designing teacher education tasks, assignments, and assessments which would attend to the student teachers' development in an integrated way. The tasks had to be designed in a cross-curricular way and address the needs of the language teaching component and the subject teaching component. In addition, the teacher education tasks had to be integrated with the student teaching practice. The outcome of this compromise was the idea of a CLIL unit, which was supposed to be a platform to combine language and content as well as theory and practice. The idea behind it was that CLIL units should be designed and assessed by teacher educators from various subject areas and their university courses and in conjunction with student practice. The first unit was designed to be prepared during their second semester of studies and the second unit during the fourth semester of studies. Each unit is prepared for a different school as student teachers participate in two different practicum placements during the first and the second year. Many teacher educators however, mentioned the difficulties in the process of unit assessment as all the teacher educators both school and university had limited opportunities to collaborate and discuss student teachers' work during the semesters.

### **Factors related to the diversity of student teachers' needs**

Another strong theme which appeared in the data was related to the diversity of student teachers' needs in regard to CLIL training. The differences

were connected to issues such as teaching experience, the contexts of language teaching experience, English language proficiency, or previous educational background. A small group of students had participated in any forms of bilingual education. Those who had some exposure to bilingual education mentioned that they felt it was what to some extent helped them understand and envision the concept of CLIL education. There were also some students who came from plurilingual contexts and studied previously in a foreign language. These students experienced the process of learning in a foreign language, but their learning in a foreign language did not include any language support, which is frequently expected in CLIL education. A great majority of students had a limited knowledge of CLIL teaching, and their first months of CLIL training were spent on grasping the concept. In the focused groups, student teachers pointed out their difficulties in conceptualizing CLIL teaching. "It took me a long time to imagine how CLIL teaching could be realized in practice" (Focus group 2).

Another challenging factor affecting the program design was providing diversified approaches to developing student teachers' English language proficiency. Although student teachers were admitted with a good language proficiency ranging from B2–C1, there were some differences in students' academic language and content subject-specific proficiency. These challenges were also linked to motivating student teachers to continuously and autonomously develop language skills. The program included multiple ways to develop language skills: all courses were taught in English and students had to complete their assignments in English, work in linguistically diverse groups, participate in specific language-focused coursework aimed at improving student teachers' language awareness (pronunciation and grammar courses), participate in academic language courses and research seminars. Despite this coursework, it was difficult to develop a more individualized approach to student teachers' needs. Some students required additional writing and pronunciation courses.

These various language learning and language teaching biographies made it very difficult to design a course which supports the needs of all learners. The individualization of the course was based on several levels such as providing appropriate language learning, providing appropriate student teaching placements, and introducing the online portfolio. This made the problem of designing teacher education program more difficult as it had to accommodate the differences among students.

## Areas of development in CLIL unit planning

The analysis of CLIL units, as well as interviews with student teachers and teacher educators, revealed some areas of development, which were identified by participants as significant in the process of learning about CLIL instruction and CLIL planning. These areas indicated student teachers' change of attitudes towards CLIL teaching and their perception of aims of early CLIL, the development of new skills in the areas of materials' development, integrated planning, literacy development, as well as linking content and language.

Many student teachers mentioned that prior to their first experiences with preparing CLIL instruction, they did not expect integration of early primary content with language instruction to be especially difficult, as the topics were not very advanced and frequently based on everyday life. With time, they started to notice that CLIL teaching required much more integration and better planning than they had anticipated. The level of difficulty was also emphasized by teacher educators. Some of them mentioned that preparing CLIL teachers for early teaching contexts seemed to be more demanding as the future teachers needed to possess a wide range of competencies and better creativity in order to compensate for the low language proficiency of their pupils. In addition, pupils' low language proficiency frequently forced student teachers to move away from the traditional early education coursebooks and materials that they utilized when planning instruction in Polish, nor could they use authentic materials in English. The need to put so much emphasis on materials' development and their adaptation for the needs of young language learners was frequently expressed by student teachers as a major drawback to CLIL teaching.

Many students mentioned that prior to their studies they thought about CLIL teaching mainly in terms of delivering content instruction in a foreign language. "I thought about CLIL teaching as teaching the same as if I taught in Polish" (Focus group 1). Many student teachers expressed that the need to connect language and content turned out more difficult than they had anticipated, as in their previous learning and teaching experiences these two elements were separated. During their undergraduate student teaching experiences, they were mainly exposed to language teaching delivered by a separate teacher using English language coursebooks, while early education content was delivered in Polish with the aid of different materials.

The review of the CLIL units indicated that especially at the beginning of the studies CLIL units were constructed as a series of multidisciplinary lessons, randomly linked with facts and activities. “In my first unit, I was trying to pick up subjects from different sources, but I realized I did not get the whole point. I was getting a little bit from here and a little bit from there. When I looked later, I was not sure about what the aim of my unit [was]” (focus group 1). With time, student teachers started to develop more integrated interdisciplinary units, much broader in their integration. “In the second semester, after some additional content courses, I realized that I could provide different types of math activities, which are better connected with the content I was teaching and the language needs of my students”. Student teachers noticed that more integrated units seemed to bring better results in helping learners understand the new content. One of the student teachers mentioned that in her initial lesson plans pupils were asked to read a randomly chosen book about animals, to sing a song about animals, count animals, and draw pictures about animals. In more advanced units, pupils were also learning about animals, but they were asked to collect some basic information about endangered animals by creating graphs of endangered species and drew some posters about the ways humans can take the responsibility to protect the animals. According to her, the more advanced unit was planned not as series of separate lessons in different subjects, but as a more cohesive entity.

CLIL unit planning proved to be difficult for student teachers also because they had to develop skills in building pupils’ background knowledge. This required from students an in-depth understanding of pupils’ knowledge and skills, which for the pre-service teacher was a challenge. This was strongly addressed by mentor teachers, who pointed out that student teachers had problems of adjusting the CLIL tasks to the pupils’ needs. “Student teachers had very intricate ideas for introducing content activities, but my students were not ready for them [...], my students were not ready for the tasks that were given” (Mentor teacher, interview 4).

Building a background knowledge also required from student teachers an in-depth understanding of content and content terminology. They frequently expressed limited content knowledge and declared a lack of strategies of content teaching in English. They had to spend much time in order to develop their own content knowledge to make final decisions on how to approach the content. “It took me a long time to realize what teaching young learners is all about. I realized that CLIL teaching is not about the methods. I was first

convinced that the teacher just comes to the classroom and teaches vocabulary and I couldn't see the difference. I realized that there is more about teaching. It is about building the background. The lesson is about the context. It is about discussing different things" (Student teacher, interview 6).

Adjusting to the needs of their learners with limited language proficiency seemed to be very difficult, especially when student teachers had to introduce new knowledge and teach new concepts. One of the interviewed student teachers said that she had to rethink her previous student teaching in Polish. She noticed that she had moved away from any presentations, to substitute these presentations with hands on activities, such as games or experiments. During her CLIL teaching she realized that her long presentation in English would have been too difficult for her students to understand, even with the help of visuals. In one of her lessons, she decided to show the experiment before the presentation, to help students develop some initial understanding. The presentation that she finally prepared was shortened and focused on the most important points.

Related to the ability to plan was their perception of their role as course developers. They realized that in order to be better integrators they had to take more active role as course developers. At the beginning, student teachers perceived their role as passive followers of "what experts designed as learning objectives for a group of students" (Classroom assignment, Group E). With time many of them seemed more ready to adapt course syllabi to include the needs of learners.

Another difficult area for student teachers to develop while attempting to plan CLIL units was related to the concept of literacy development. In the majority of the analyzed units, there was very little connection between first language literacy and the foreign language literacy. The problems which seemed to appear in student teachers' units were related to the types of texts they chose and the types of activities they planned around these texts. The analysis of the units indicated that the chosen texts were mainly connected to the rest of the unit content through the topic, not as much through the text type or text structure. Most often the chosen texts played a role of a thematic hook to get students interested in the topic or the sources of content information, less frequently were they used to develop a strategy or to use as a model for a writing assignment either in Polish or English. The most challenging for student teachers was to encourage students' experimentation with texts, both oral and written. One of the teacher educators mentioned, "It is very difficult to persuade

students that literacy is not only about working with a text through selecting the unknown words, filling out a boring worksheet or conducting a short conversation about the content [...]” (Teacher educator interview 3). Teacher educators pointed out that student teachers in early CLIL teaching should be able to broaden the concept of literacy to include more connections between teaching literacy in the first and second language (Email exchange 3). The analysis of the units showed many missed opportunities to build the connections to develop literacy strategies.

In the interviews and in the focus groups, student teachers mentioned the process of broadening their perception of the role and the place of language teaching in CLIL. This change has been at the heart of the CLIL approach and yet it continued to be very difficult to influence during the studies. Some of the reasons could be connected with the limited exposure that student teachers were offered in this area both prior to and during their masters’ studies. While some students did learn about the CLIL teaching prior to starting their studies, their practical experience with this approach was limited. Some of the student teachers referred to it as a certain transition which they had to go through as they had to change from separating language focus from content focus to a more integrated content and language teaching. This difficulty showed itself in the initial lesson plans that they designed. Many of the first plans included language teaching objectives which were not really connected or related to the content of the lessons. Language objectives were almost artificially added to the lesson plans, not supporting content learning. The analysis of lesson plans showed that the easiest way for students to identify the language component was through vocabulary learning. Frequently, the only language components of their lesson plans were limited to providing vocabulary lists. Other language objectives, for example those linked to language functions, were difficult for students to identify. A common example could be not building any language support when asking students to describe something. One of the students expressed their difficulty in including necessary language objectives to provide content learning, e.g. when third grade students were asked to describe the planets of the Solar System, without any built-in support to help them develop skills in description. The opportunities to support student teachers to integrate language and content were also difficult because of the lack of good models. Moreover, the connections between language and content were difficult for student teachers to observe during student teaching placements, as many mentors indicated this to be a challenge in their own teaching. “The integration

of language and content is something that is still difficult for me” (Mentor teacher interview 5).

Giving student teachers more opportunities to integrate language and content seemed not only to change their perception of the language component in CLIL, but also allowed students to broaden their understanding of how they can better contextualize language teaching in other contexts of early language teaching. In their interviews, student teachers frequently commented on this. “Learning CLIL helped to approach language teaching in a different way. When I am teaching language now, and when I am not doing CLIL teaching, I am still adding philosophy of CLIL teaching. My lesson is better contextualized, and I really try to show students how the language could be used for learning something that they are interested in” (Focus group 2).

## Conclusions

As CLIL becomes more popular at all educational levels, strengthening teacher education in the area of content and language integration becomes an important issue. The complex skills need to be introduced at all levels of teacher education, including pre-service, and need to be continued throughout their professional life. Research literature emphasizes the need to create CLIL training already at pre-service level in order for student teachers to be able to provide language and content integrated education to their pupils (Pérez-Cañado 2016; Pérez-Cañado 2018). The present study indicated that the opportunities for student teachers to be exposed to various forms of language and content integration are limited. The separation of content and language teacher education courses does not help student teachers develop skills in CLIL teaching. Student teachers usually obtain skills in early education content in Polish only, with limited language teaching methodology which might not be sufficient for CLIL. The experiences of the GPTE indicate that CLIL instruction at early education requires obtaining many new teaching skills. Some of them include integrated planning, linking language and content, building background knowledge or developing new approaches to literacy teaching to mention just a few.

Integrated education has been at the heart of early education in Poland since 1999. It was introduced with the idea that it allows children to develop in a harmonious way, which is best suited for their needs. Early education

teachers can concentrate around some topics that the child is taught every day and topics that respond to his/her interests, needs, and abilities (Duraj-Nowakowa 1998). However, research indicates there is a very limited integration between language and early primary content in the majority of Polish schools. The majority of foreign language teaching is done by language teachers, not by the early education teachers, who are greatly limited in their opportunities for language integration. The collaboration between early education teachers and language teachers is limited to supporting the special needs of students or classroom management issues, frequently excluding classroom activities, materials or learning strategies (Sradomska 2009; Kamińska 2017). CLIL has been positively received as a good approach which allows more integration between language and content, and with the multiple models of CLIL teaching, it offers opportunities for the variety of contexts. It could bring more systematicity and concrete solutions into the process of educating young learners in an integrated way (Nicholls 2009).

The newly introduced early education curriculum of 2017 also seems to emphasize the connections between language and content teaching in grades 1–3. In addition, the newly suggested standards of teacher education integrate foreign language education into the process of preparing early education teachers. This means that every program of early teacher education will have to include the language teaching component.

However, taking into account the experiences of the GPTE students, which provided intense and focused two-year approach to developing in CLIL teaching skills addressing CLIL teaching competences, it seems rather unrealistic to assume that language and content integration can be introduced to Polish early education classes by teachers who obtained only the minimal requirements of language teacher education dictated by the newly introduced standards. We can conclude that a very basic introduction of early education teachers to language teaching consisting of 180 hours of coursework and 60 hours of student practice might not be sufficient even to prepare to some basic levels of language and content integration included in the New National Curriculum of 2017 for grades 1–3.

There should be some additional opportunities offered for student teachers already at pre-service level to ensure language and content integration through more systematic ways such as offering some early education content in English, creating common assignments and assessments, student teaching placements in CLIL oriented schools.

Many teacher education departments, including early education, are fragmented through content area specializations with limited cadres of teacher educators who can support integrated instruction. Research into CLIL indicated that integration requires a complex web of connections between different elements such as subjects, topics, languages, tasks, resources and projects, therefore it has implications into all levels of educational practice including teacher education (San-Isidro 2018: 190). Insufficient regulations regarding bilingual teacher preparation at all levels fail to encourage more cross-curricular approaches and co-operation among various departments. As teacher education institutions are frequently limited to fulfilling the requirements included in the standards of teacher education, additional training in the areas of bilingual education could be aided by introducing bilingual teacher standards or certifications, which would address the broad competences of bilingual teaching.

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