Online Collaboration in CLIL

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Tools

Online Collaboration in CLIL

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In our latest post on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), our experts Liz Dale and Rosie Tanner, authors of CLIL Activities, offer their insights and advice for online collaboration in CLIL.

One of the most important aspects of CLIL is, of course, communication: students need to communicate in speaking and in writing. Part of communication is collaboration, where students work together in the CLIL classroom to communicate.

New digital tools are making it so much easier to collaborate synchronously online in the classroom. We are growing fans of online noticeboards and use them a lot in our CLIL training. One example of this is Padlet, a simple online tool that students can use without a login.

What are online noticeboards?

Online noticeboards are essentially digital online walls where everyone in a class can simultaneously share their ideas. The beauty is that everyone (if they are online on a computer or mobile device) can contribute at the same time – or, in the jargon, synchronously. Once you have created your noticeboard, students add notes: they double click anywhere on the wall and can add their sticky note – their name (or an alias), plus text, video or images.

How do I use an online noticeboard?

Here are two introductory tutorials. Though written for Padlet, they should also give you a sense of how these online noticeboards work generally. The first is a document, the second a Youtube tutorial.

Key Features

With online noticeboards, you can do several things with your wall:

- Give your wall a title and description (e.g. biology – classification; history – the Greeks)
- Create a fun background (wallpaper)
Choose a layout for your post: freeform (posts anywhere), stream (posts below each other) or grid (posts in a neat grid)

Customize your wall: it can be private, password protected, totally public, or have a hidden link which you can share with people you want to have access.

Moderate posts, if you like, before they are posted. We don’t use this feature since we want to see all our students’ answers at the same time.

The what and why of online noticeboards for CLIL

The key word for us is collaboration. It’s not one of the 4Cs of CLIL, but it’s an important element of the C of communication. And on these online noticeboards, students collaborate. Furthermore, as a teacher of language as well as content, you can give immediate feedback on language and content to your students as they write. For example, we ask questions such as these. If someone has spelled a word wrong, we ask, ‘Jona, how do you spell responsibility?’ Or if you can’t understand what a student has written, you can prompt, ‘Jessie, I don’t understand what you mean. Can you add an example or try again?’

Here are some ideas about how to use online blackboards, and why these ideas are good for CLIL:

- Post an open-ended question to activate your students about content, for example: Work in pairs. Discuss what you think is the difference between weather and climate. Write your joint answers on the noticeboard. In this way, you find out how much all of your students know already, not just the few who respond in a plenary discussion.

- Post an open-ended question to activate your students about language, for example: Write down as many words describing the weather as you can. This helps students see new words and ask questions about them. We always ask students and teachers to ask each other questions about what they have written on the board: this gives them more responsibility for their learning process.

- Get students brainstorming at the start of a CLIL topic, for example: Write down a question you would like answered about nutrition. Write one question per sticky note. This fires up the students’ background knowledge and vocabulary on a topic, making it easier for them to focus and understand in a second language. It helps teachers find out what students are interested in so they can tailor the lesson to the group and gives students a focus in the lesson. The class can use noticeboards like this to review at the end of a lesson and check if all the questions have been answered.
At the end of a lesson, get students to write an “exit card”, giving you some feedback on the lesson or checking understanding, for example: Write down the most important thing you learned in this lesson/workshop. Reviewing is extra important in CLIL to check students’ understanding of new concepts and to consolidate any new words or grammatical structures.

Using an online noticeboard can save us all from long plenary discussions; it encourages discussion, and engages everyone at the same time – in short bursts of writing (max 150 words) or discussions about what is on the noticeboard. Everyone can instantly see everyone’s contribution and teachers can give direct, personal feedback.

Cambridge CLIL padlet.

We have posted this question for you about online noticeboards so that readers of this CLIL blog can add their own thoughts. Try it out! Leave a sticky note for us!

Examples of online noticeboards used in CLIL training

Here are some examples of online noticeboards which Rosie has used in her training.

1. Hangman. We did hangman as an activator, then I asked all the teachers to add a word to _this padlet which they could use for hangman_. In this way, I checked their understanding of the game.

2. A couple of weeks ago, Rosie gave the first of her CLIL coach sessions for teachers learning to be CLIL coaches and we (Rosie plus sixteen potential coaches) talked about the tasks of a CLIL coach. _This padlet_ raised a lot of discussion about where the tasks of a CLIL coach start and end.

3. In a workshop on encouraging students to speak in CLIL, _this padlet_ gave us an overview of the main challenges that teachers at a particular secondary school face in their CLIL lessons.

Don’t forget to contribute on _our padlet_!

Rosie and Liz will be back with more advice on teaching with CLIL soon. You can read their previous posts _here_.