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Scaffolding in Primary CLIL and EFL

Scaffolding is of key importance in primary English classes, including hard and soft CLIL and EFL classes. This paper presents the results of a questionnaire survey which examines scaffolding strategies used by Hungarian primary school teachers who teach 4th and 6th grade Environment and Nature classes through English. In order to triangulate the results, a second questionnaire survey was carried out in order to map the scaffolding strategies of English teachers who teach EFL in the 6th grade of primary schools. Their survey questions focused on two conditions: when teaching general English topics and when teaching subject content in the English class. Our results indicate a considerable overlap between the most and least frequently used scaffolding strategies in the four groups.

Keywords: primary CLIL, hard CLIL, soft CLIL, scaffolding in CLIL, CLIL in Hungary

1. Introduction

Scaffolding is a term traditionally used in the world of construction and renovation, but it can also be linked to the disciplines of psychology and education. Language teaching is not an exception either. Instructional scaffolding is also known as *Vygotsky scaffolding* (Verenikina, 2008). In Vygotsky's theory, scaffolding is part of the education concept of the *zone of proximal development*, or ZPD (Chaiklin, 2003: 2). Vygotsky himself defined ZPD as

the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978: 86).

ZPD thus signifies the set of skills or knowledge which a learner cannot do on his or her own, but he or she can do with the help or guidance of another, more knowledgeable or more skilled person. ZPD uses the skill level which is slightly above the level the student has achieved. In relation to Vygotsky's definition, Verenikina (2008: 162) also underlines the relatively vague, metaphorical nature of the term by calling scaffolding a typical example of umbrella terms, arguing

that it is too general when describing and explaining the specifics of the role of adults or more knowledgeable peers in guiding children's learning and development. It is also important to add that Vygotsky's idea of the zone of proximal or potential development was initially elaborated for psychological testing in schools (Verenikina, 2008: 165).

It was in 1976 that the concept of scaffolding was first used in an educational context (Wood et al., 1976). Since then the term has been applied to a number of educational and research areas. Clarke (2004) studied the characteristics of scaffolding in mathematics lessons, while Hammond (2001), as well as Karen and Jack Bradley (2004) analyzed the role of scaffolding in teaching English as a second language.

Scaffolding plays an increasingly important role in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). In the CLIL literature, a difference is made between hard and soft CLIL (Ball, 2009, Bentley, 2010). In hard CLIL, subject content in a subject class is taught through the CLIL language, usually by a native speaker of the L1. Ball et al. (2015) define hard CLIL as “a form of subject teaching in L2 which highlights academic achievement within the subject and treats language development as important, but as a bonus” (2015: 5). In soft CLIL, content from any subject class is used in a language class (Ball, 2009, Bentley, 2010), while other researchers stress that soft CLIL “may be offered for a short period, and it will only occupy a portion of the hours available to the subject” (Ball et al., 2015: 5). In their view, in soft CLIL, there is emphasis on the subject and on the language. Ball et al. add that soft CLIL is also used to describe the “broad linguistic aims that a language teacher brings to the classroom” (2015: 26). Strictly speaking, one can consider soft CLIL as a version of EFL, in other words, soft CLIL might be seen as EFL covering subject content.

Mehisto and his colleagues (2008) describe scaffolding in CLIL as accessing, improving and adding to current knowledge (2008:139): scaffolding is seen as a “temporary supporting structure that students learn to use and rely on, in order to achieve learning outcomes” (2008: 139). The authors provide the following general examples of scaffolding in CLIL: repackaging information in user-friendly ways, responding to different learning styles, fostering creative and critical thinking, and challenging students to take another step and not just coast in comfort (Mehisto et al., 2008: 29). Mehisto and his colleagues provide some more specific examples of scaffolding, such as shortening sentences, highlighting the most important text in a passage, using pictures and realia, having students sum up a text by writing headings for each paragraph, or brainstorming a topic to determine the existing level of knowledge of pupils (Mehisto et al., 2008: 140).

Scaffolding is of even greater importance in primary CLIL, where the level of the CLIL language of pupils is between A2 and B1. Integration of content and language is a good idea in spite of the low language level of pupils (Halliwell, 1992). As new language is natural and normal for young learners, pupils see new

language as something they can use, and they can receive and produce real messages in a CLIL class through the CLIL language. In addition, learning other subjects through English helps pupils to learn English (Halliwell, 1992). Halliwell enumerates the tools that help making integration in lower primary school a realistic possibility. These include the use of visuals, which help to handle complex information more easily than a text. In addition, they show relationships more clearly than a text, and pupils see visuals and diagrams in all subjects. Repeated patterns, understanding through seeing and responding through doing also help pupils to cope with the challenges of integrating content and language in lower primary classes.

There has been an increase in empirical research into scaffolding in CLIL. Gerakopolou (2016) investigated and described scaffolding strategies applied in the secondary CLIL classroom. In general, the findings indicate that when using scaffolding strategies, CLIL teachers focused mostly on linguistic development, while the development of their students' cognitive skills remained a relatively neglected area (Gerakopolou, 2016: 9). Gondová (2015: 153) argues for the significance of using scaffolding strategies in materials writing for CLIL and, in addition to the development of language skills she also emphasizes the importance of the development of cognitive skills in CLIL teaching:

...it is essential that students are scaffolded in understanding the subject matter and the language used in the materials, as well as in verbalizing subject-specific issues using their own interpretation (Gondová, 2015: 153).

Further, Gondová studied several teacher-initiated scaffolding strategies in relation to the language component of CLIL (Gondová, 2014: 1013). Her research focused on grade 5 learners at lower-secondary CLIL schools in the Žilina region of Slovakia. Based on the analysis of worksheets prepared by CLIL teachers, she concluded that, in general, the teachers' use of scaffolding needs to be changed radically, because, for the majority of CLIL teachers, the idea of scaffolding meant only teacher-supervised or teacher-assisted learning. Other scaffolding strategies, including assisting a lower-level learner by a higher-level peer, or individual internalization of the teaching material were rare or incidental.

To our knowledge, no research has investigated scaffolding in primary CLIL in Hungary, even though the first primary CLIL programs in Hungary started in 1989, as a result of bottom up initiatives of parents (Szabó, 2012). In these programs, which are called bilingual primary schools, pupils start with learning Arts, Music, P.E. or Environment through a CLIL language (mostly English) from grade one. In upper primary (grades 5 through 8), schools can choose from teaching Music, Arts, P.E., Nature, IT, History or Civilization through the CLIL language, and from grade 7, schools can add Biology, Geography, Physics,

Chemistry, Civilization, Mathematics, IT or History to the list of subjects taught through the CLIL language (Ministry of Human Resources decree 4/2013.[I./11.]: 610). The expected language level to be reached by at least 60% of the pupils in the CLIL language is A2 in grade 6 of primary school (Ministry of Human Resources decree 4/2013.[I./11.]: 611).

Thus, it is clearly a challenge for the primary Science (Environment or Nature) teacher to teach pupils through the CLIL language, where pupils' competence in the CLIL language is at or below A2. This requires the use of scaffolding strategies. The situation is made even more difficult by the absence of CLIL teaching materials for English CLIL programs (Bakti and Szabó, 2016).

2. Research questions and assumptions

In this paper, we worked with the following research questions:

1. What scaffolding strategies are used most frequently in Hungarian primary hard CLIL Environment and Nature lessons taught through English in grade 4 and grade 6, respectively?
2. What (if any) differences are there between the two sets of strategies?
3. In what ways are these scaffolding strategies different from scaffolding strategies used in primary soft CLIL and EFL classes?

Our assumption was that there would be differences in the most and least frequently used scaffolding strategies

1. between 4th and 6th hard CLIL classes, because of the differences in the age and language level of pupils,
2. between 6th grade hard and soft CLIL classes, because of differences in the language level of the pupils,
3. between 6th grade soft CLIL and EFL classes, because of the differences in methodology and topics discussed.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

Our investigation was carried out with the participation of 45 primary school teachers. They or their schools were contacted by email and asked to fill in the scaffolding questionnaire. The participants can be divided into three groups. The first group is 9 practicing CLIL teachers who teach Environment (Környezetismeret) lessons through English in 4th grade, while the second group is made up of five practicing CLIL teachers who teach Nature (Természetismeret) lessons through English in 6th grade. The third group is made up of 31 primary school English teachers, who filled out a modified version of the questionnaire (see Appendix 2). These teachers all teach English, including some topics that can be related to subject content, in grade 6 of non-CLIL primary schools. The teaching experience of the participants is detailed in table 1.

Table 1. Participants' teaching (hard CLIL) and teaching (English teaching) experience in years

	Average	Minimum	Maximum
Grade 4 Environment (out of which hard CLIL)	16 (5.6)	0 (0)	28 (12)
Grade 6 Nature (out of which hard CLIL)	16 (8.6)	10 (2)	31 (17)
Grade 6 teaching (out of which EFL and soft CLIL)	21.2 (15.5)	3 (1)	40 31)

3.2. Data collection

A questionnaire was compiled on scaffolding strategies in primary Environment and Nature classes based on the literature on scaffolding in CLIL (Halliwell 1992, Mehisto et al. 2008), interviews with and coursework from students attending the postgraduate CLIL training program of the Faculty of Education, University of Szeged, and interviews with practicing CLIL teachers from an earlier study on CLIL teaching materials (Bakti and Szabó 2016). Scaffolding strategies can be placed on a continuum at one end of which are strategies targeted at lower language level learners, for example reading and translation based on the English textbook, using realia objects, using diagrams, while at the other extreme are strategies for more advanced learners, such as rephrasing content through English, explaining complex English grammar in English, or using interactive, interdisciplinary project work (See Appendix 1 for the list of strategies in the hard CLIL questionnaire).

Participants were asked to indicate the frequency of using these strategies in their 4th and 6th grade CLIL Environment and Nature classes. They could mark how frequently they use the listed scaffolding strategies on a 3-point scale, with the following options: frequently, occasionally, or never. The hard CLIL questionnaires were sent out to Hungarian bilingual primary schools via email as a word file attachment. The filled questionnaires were anonymized. The link for the modified questionnaire in a Google form format for EFL teachers was sent out by email to primary schools in the southeast of Hungary. The second questionnaire was filled out anonymously by the EFL teachers.

A pilot test preceded the data collection, preliminary results of the pilot test, including results related to schools teaching through minority languages were presented in Szabó and Bakti 2017.

3.3. Data analysis

The data from the questionnaires were tabulated and analyzed in four groups: 4th grade hard CLIL, 6th grade hard CLIL, soft CLIL and EFL. The, average frequencies for the use of each scaffolding strategy were calculated, with the following values: frequently: 3, occasionally: 2, never: 1. Thus, the higher the average, the more frequently the scaffolding strategy is used. Then, standard deviation was calculated for each scaffolding strategy. Finally, scaffolding strategies were ranked according to their frequency of use and the results of the four groups were compared.

4. Results

4.1. Hard CLIL classes

The frequency of use of different scaffolding methods in grade 4 is shown in Table 2. In the fourth grade, the scaffolding strategy of building on pupils' existing language knowledge ranked first, in other words, teachers try to adapt to the language level of fourth graders when preparing and teaching their CLIL Environment classes. This strategy is followed by building on pupils' existing content knowledge, using everyday objects and preparing a vocabulary list for the pupils.

The least frequent strategies in fourth grade hard CLIL included the scaffolding strategies of explaining complex English grammar through English, using the English and the Hungarian textbooks together and using the Hungarian textbook only.

In the tables summarizing results, the left column reports the scaffolding strategies, the column Average indicates average frequency of use, and the right column shows standard deviation.

Table 2. Scaffolding strategies, 4th grade hard CLIL

Scaffolding strategy	Average frequency	St. dev.
Building on pupils' existing language knowledge	2.8	0.197
Building on pupils' existing content knowledge	2.7	0.345
Using everyday objects to teach content	2.7	0.345
Preparing a vocabulary list for the pupils	2.7	0.345
Taking into consideration individual when planning an Environment / Nature lesson	2.6	0.44
Using materials from the internet to teach content	2.6	0.44
Rephrasing content in English	2.5	0.493
Helping pupils face new challenges	2.4	0.493
Using visuals	2.4	0.493
Adding a Hungarian explanation to the English explanation	2.4	0.493
Preparing a simplified English text for the pupils	2.4	0.617
Reading and translation based on the English textbook	2.4	0.493
Using interactive, interdisciplinary project work	2.3	0.44
Using materials from other classes in the Environment / Nature lesson	2.3	0.44
Explaining content in Hungarian	2.3	0.44
Using language-independent activities in Environment / Nature lessons	2.1	0.197
Explaining complex English grammar in English	2.1	0.592
Explaining complex English grammar in Hungarian	2	0.444
Using the Hungarian and the English textbooks together	1.2	0.345
Using the Hungarian textbook only	1	0

The frequency of use of different scaffolding strategies in 6th grade CLIL Nature classes is shown in Table 3. There were five strategies which were all ranked as frequently used by CLIL Science teachers: preparing a simplified English text for the pupils, rephrasing content in English, using the internet, and building on pupils' existing content and language knowledge. Using visuals and everyday objects, together with interactive project work were also ranked at the top.

The least frequently used strategies in the sixth grade included the scaffolding strategies of explaining complex English grammar through English or through Hungarian, using the English and the Hungarian textbooks together and using the Hungarian textbook only.

Table 3. Scaffolding strategies, 6th grade hard CLIL

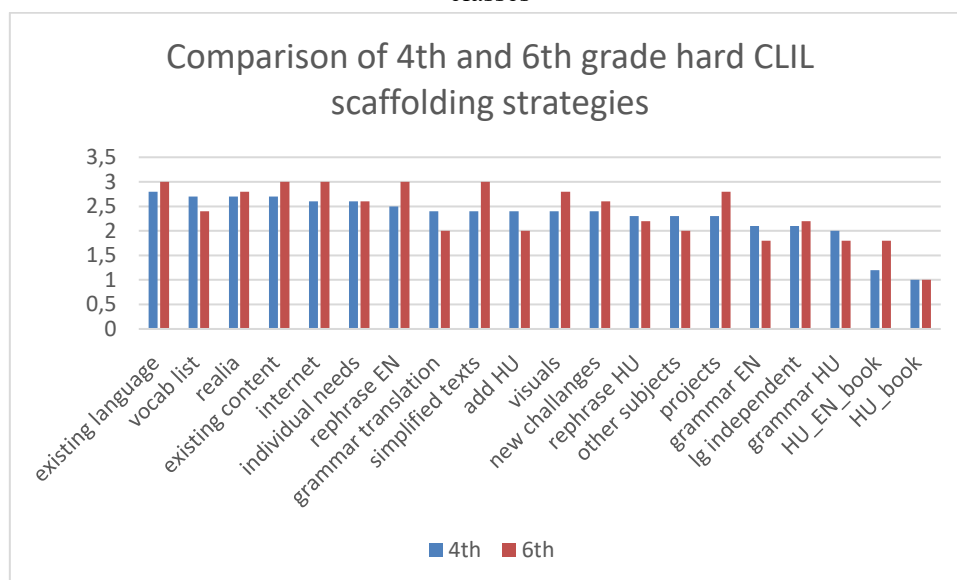
Scaffolding strategy	Average frequency	St. dev.
Building on pupils' existing language knowledge	3	0
Building on pupils' existing content knowledge	3	0
Using materials from the internet to teach content	3	0
Preparing a simplified English text for the pupils	3	0
Rephrasing content in English	3	0
Using visuals	2.8	0.32
Using everyday objects to teach content	2.8	0.32
Using interactive, interdisciplinary project work	2.8	0.32
Taking into consideration individual needs when planning Environment / Nature classes	2.6	0.48
Helping pupils face new challenges	2.6	0.48
Preparing a vocabulary list for the pupils	2.4	0.72
Explaining content in Hungarian	2.2	0.32
Using language-independent activities in Environment/ Nature lessons	2.2	0.32
Reading and translation based on the English textbook	2	0.4
Adding a Hungarian explanation to the English explanation	2	0.4
Using materials from other classes in Environment / Nature lessons	2	0.4
Explaining complex English grammar in English	1.8	0.64
Explaining complex English grammar in Hungarian	1.8	0.96
Using the Hungarian and the English textbooks together	1.8	0.32
Using the Hungarian textbook only	1	0

Based on Tables 2 and 3, we can see that there is some overlap between the most frequently used strategies in 4th and 6th grade hard CLIL classes; building on pupils' existing language and content knowledge ranked top in both groups, together with using the internet. Some age- and language-level related differences can also be detected in the data: teachers teaching in 4th grade use realia and prepare vocab lists for the pupils, and take into consideration individual needs, whereas teachers in 6th grade prepare simplified texts for the pupils and rephrase

content in English, in other words, they use strategies that are suited to the higher level of English knowledge of 6th grade CLIL pupils. The four least frequently used strategies are the same in both groups.

The frequency of use of scaffolding strategies is compared in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Comparison of the frequency of use of scaffolding strategies in 4th and 6th grade hard CLIL classes



4.2. Soft CLIL and EFL classes

In this section, the results of the questionnaire to the EFL teachers is presented.

First, participants were asked to rank the frequency of use of different scaffolding strategies in their regular English classes. Table 4 shows the results.

Table 4. Scaffolding strategies in EFL classes

Scaffolding strategy	Average frequency	St. dev.
Taking into consideration individual needs when planning a lesson	2.87	0.22
Using materials from the internet	2.83	0.27
Building on pupils' existing language knowledge	2.81	0.31
Explaining complex English grammar in Hungarian	2.81	0.31
Reading and translation based on the English coursebook	2.68	0.46
Helping pupils face new challenges	2.64	0.46
Building on pupils' existing content knowledge	2.61	0.47
Adding a Hungarian explanation to the English explanation	2.61	0.5
Preparing a vocabulary list for the pupils	2.45	0.64
Rephrasing content in English	2.29	0.73
Using interactive, interdisciplinary project work	2.29	0.60
Using materials from other classes in English lessons	2.26	0.48
Using language-independent activities in English lessons	2.16	0.43
Using everyday objects	2.13	0.38
Using visuals	2.1	0.35

Using the English coursebook only	2.1	0.64
Preparing a simplified English text for the pupils	1.97	0.62
Explaining complex English grammar in English	1.87	0.62
Explaining content only in Hungarian	1.77	0.65

As can be seen from the table, the most frequently used scaffolding strategies in 6th grade EFL classes are planning according to pupils' needs, using materials from the internet, building on pupils' language knowledge and explaining English grammar in Hungarian. The least frequent scaffolding strategies include using visuals, using the coursebook only, preparing a simplified text for the pupils, explaining content only through Hungarian, and explaining English grammar in English.

Then, EFL teachers were asked to rank the frequency of the same scaffolding strategies for those English classes where they teach some subject content, when teaching about, for example, animals, protecting the environment, the Middle Ages, monuments or famous people in an English class. Table 5 summarizes the frequency of use of scaffolding strategies in soft CLIL.

There is a considerable overlap between frequently used scaffolding strategies in soft CLIL and EFL. Building on pupils' language knowledge, using the internet and planning based on pupils' individual needs ranked top in both groups, and, in soft CLIL, building on pupils' existing content knowledge was added. The least frequently used strategies include explaining content only in Hungarian, using the English coursebook only, explaining English grammar in English, and using visuals. It is somewhat surprising that the use of visuals was ranked rather low, as in soft CLIL, in groups with A1 language level, visuals could help to get the message through effectively.

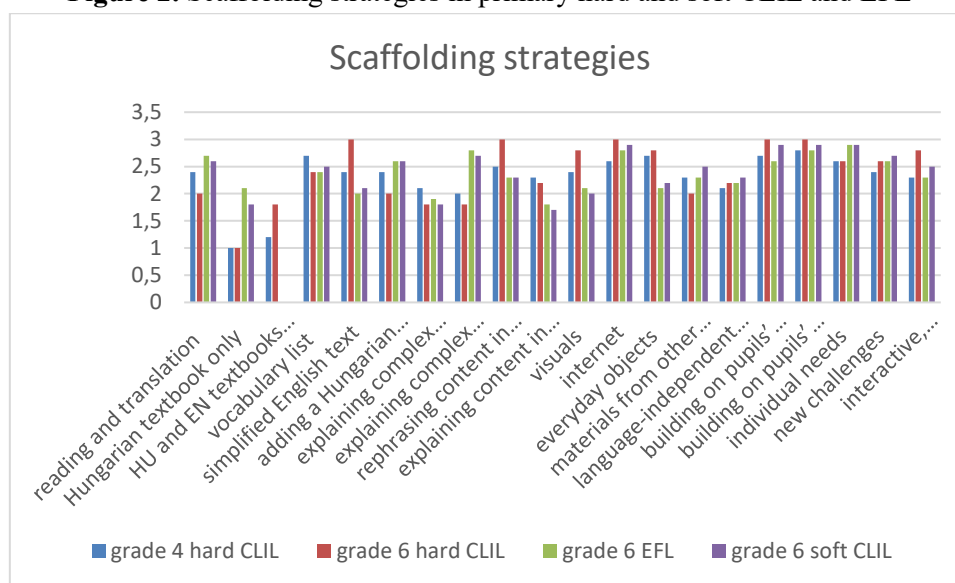
Table 5. Scaffolding strategies in soft CLIL classes

Scaffolding strategy	Average frequency	St. dev.
Building on pupils' existing language knowledge	2.9	0.17
Building on pupils' existing content knowledge	2.87	0.22
Using materials from the internet	2.87	0.22
Taking into consideration individual needs when planning a lesson	2.87	0.22
Explaining complex English grammar in Hungarian	2.74	0.38
Helping pupils face new challenges	2.71	0.41
Adding a Hungarian explanation to the English explanation	2.62	0.47
Reading and translation based on the English coursebook	2.62	0.50
Preparing a vocabulary list for the pupils	2.52	0.50
Using interactive, interdisciplinary project work	2.52	0.50
Using materials from other classes in English lessons	2.48	0.57
Rephrasing content in English	2.29	0.60
Using language-independent activities in English lessons	2.26	0.53
Using everyday objects	2.22	0.45
Preparing a simplified English text for the pupils	2.13	0.50

Using visuals	2	0.32
Explaining complex English grammar in English	1.83	0.54
Using the English coursebook only	1.81	0.57
Explaining content only in Hungarian	1.71	0.64

In summary, it can be stated that there is a considerable overlap between the most and least frequently used scaffolding strategies in primary hard and soft CLIL and EFL classes. However, some age- language-level- and methodology-related differences can also be observed (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Scaffolding strategies in primary hard and soft CLIL and EFL



5. Discussion

This paper looked at scaffolding strategies used in 4th and 6th grade primary hard CLIL, soft CLIL and EFL classes. Our assumption was that there would be differences related to the age and language level of the pupils in hard CLIL classes. Our results seem to indicate that there is a considerable overlap between the most and least frequently used scaffolding strategies in primary hard CLIL, soft CLIL and EFL classes. Both 4th and 6th grade primary CLIL Science teachers build on the existing language knowledge of the pupils, however, the differences in the language level of the pupils, is mirrored in the other frequently chosen strategies, namely using realia objects and preparing vocabulary lists for 4th grade pupils, and strategies requiring more advanced language knowledge for 6th grades, namely preparing a simplified English text for the pupils and rephrasing content in English. Somewhat unexpected is that the use of visuals is ranked higher by 6th grade Science teachers than by the 4th grade teachers, as this strategy is suitable for CLIL in primary for pupils with lower language skills. This is not in line with Halliwell's (1992) suggestions for the tools that make integration in lower primary school a realistic possibility.

Our assumption concerning hard and soft CLIL and EFL classes was that there would be language-level and methodology-related differences. Again, our results seem to indicate that there is an overlap between the most and least frequently used scaffolding strategies. One difference is that the somewhat outdated strategy of reading and translation is used more frequently in soft CLIL and EFL classes than in hard CLIL. This might be explained by the fact that the grammar and translation method is still implemented in many language teaching contexts in the world (Assalahi, 2013, Karakas, 2019).

In comparison to other studies on scaffolding, our findings are in line with those of Gerakopoulou (2016), who found that students' age and subject discipline were variables affecting the choice of scaffolding strategies. Her results show that teachers considered the age, and thus the level of linguistic competence of their students, when selecting scaffolding strategies.

6. Conclusions

This paper investigated scaffolding strategies used in 4th and 6th grade primary hard CLIL, soft CLIL and EFL classes. Our results indicate that there are some age- and subject-specific differences in the scaffolding strategies used in each type of teaching, however, at the same time, there are considerable overlaps between the strategies used.

The results have some implications for EFL and CLIL teacher training. Most lower primary CLIL teachers have a Lower Primary Teacher BA with English specialization. We think that in the CLIL modules of the English specializations of Lower Primary Teacher training programs, it is advisable to focus on teaching students to tailor science texts to the language level of pupils, and help students learn and practice how to explain processes and terms through English. In addition, future lower primary CLIL teachers should gain practice in rephrasing content through English, and learn how to identify key words. In addition, it would be advisable to familiarize future EFL teachers with the fundamentals of CLIL methodology.

Limitations of the current study include the relatively small sample size of the hard CLIL group, and the lack of other means of gathering data on scaffolding, such as classroom observation or interviews with teachers.

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Appendix 1.

List of scaffolding strategies (hard CLIL)

1. Reading and translation based on the English textbook
2. Using the Hungarian textbook only
3. Using the Hungarian and the English textbooks together
4. Preparing a vocabulary list for the pupils
5. Preparing a simplified English text for the pupils
6. Adding a Hungarian explanation to the English explanation
7. Explaining complex English grammar in English
8. Explaining complex English grammar in Hungarian
9. Rephrasing content in English
10. Explaining content in Hungarian
11. Using visuals
12. Using materials from the internet to teach content
13. Using everyday objects to teach content
14. Using materials from other classes in Environment/Nature lessons
15. Using language-independent activities in Environment/Nature lessons
16. Building on pupils' existing content knowledge
17. Building on pupils' existing language knowledge
18. Taking into consideration individual needs when planning Environment/Nature lessons
19. Helping pupils face new challenges
20. Using interactive, interdisciplinary project work

Appendix 2.

List of scaffolding strategies (EFL and soft CLIL)

1. Reading and translation based on the English coursebook
2. Using the English coursebook only
3. Preparing a vocabulary list for the pupils
4. Preparing a simplified English text for the pupils
5. Adding a Hungarian explanation to the English explanation
6. Explaining complex English grammar in English
7. Explaining complex English grammar in Hungarian
8. Rephrasing content in English
9. Explaining content only in Hungarian
10. Using visuals
11. Using materials from the internet
12. Using everyday objects
13. Using materials from other classes in English lessons
14. Using language-independent activities in English lessons
15. Building on pupils' existing language knowledge
16. Building on pupils' existing content knowledge
17. Taking into consideration individual needs when planning a lesson
18. Helping pupils face new challenges
19. Using interactive, interdisciplinary project work