

Studying New Zealand's Educational System Through Content and  
Language Integrated Learning : A Review of the Overseas Education  
Training Program of Mie University & The University of Auckland

John Tomecsek, III

三重大学共通教育センター  
大学教育研究—三重大学授業研究交流誌—  
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# Studying New Zealand's Educational System Through Content and Language Integrated Learning: A Review of the Overseas Education Training Program of Mie University & The University of Auckland

John Tomecsek, III

Department of English, Faculty of Education

## **Abstract**

In the past decade Japan's Ministry of Education has been actively promoting the interdisciplinary use of English and has encouraged universities to offer more subjects taught in English. The CLIL approach has been identified by some educators in Japan as a potential catalyst for improving communicative English and promoting cross-curricular teaching. In 2011, The University of Auckland, at the request of Mie University's Faculty of Education, designed an educational training program to take place in New Zealand.

The program is taught entirely in English and includes university classes, school observations, cultural activities and a home stay. The program is unique in that it blends CLIL classroom instruction in English with content facilitation and daily debriefings in Japanese. The purpose of this paper is to review The University of Auckland's overseas educational training program and understand its design as it relates to CLIL.

## **The University of Auckland's Teacher Program**

In 2011, The University of Auckland created a unique program taught in English to introduce Mie University students to New Zealand's educational system. It is open to all majors in the Faculty of Education and accepts students of all English

abilities. The program consists of four key components; university classes, school observations, cultural activities and a home stay. Students begin the program with an introduction to New Zealand's educational system and Maori culture. Classes at the university cover various aspects of the school system including its history, philosophy, curriculum and teaching practices. In addition to the customized classes for the program, Mie students also observe and participate in classes with the general student population. The program includes visits to a pre-school, elementary school and junior high school where Mie students have the opportunity to observe classes, interact with students, and interview teachers and staff. All school visits include a tour, an introduction to the schools philosophy and a question and answer session with teachers and the headmaster.

Throughout the program students learn and experience traditional Maori culture and are introduced to the concepts of multiculturalism and diversity. New Zealand incorporates multiculturalism into its curriculum and promotes tolerance, cultural understanding and empowerment. Home stays allow the students to immerse themselves in New Zealand's culture, practice their English communicative skills, and develop interpersonal relationships.

### **Understanding CLIL & The Teacher's Program**

The objective of the program is for students to study about New Zealand's educational system, culture and society using English as the primary language to learn and communicate. By definition the program fits within the CLIL model of learning. CLIL (content and language integrated learning) is an "educational approach where curricular content is taught through the medium of a foreign language" (Dalton-Puffer, 2011, p.183). A successful CLIL program combines the four guiding principles of content, communication, cognition and culture. There is dual focus on learning the subject (content) and acquiring the competency in the language (communication) (Georgiou, 2012). It is important to note that both language and circular content are learned simultaneously with neither taking precedent (Cekrezi, 2011).

In many circumstances either a language teacher is trying to teach content or a content teacher is trying to teach in a foreign language. At The University of Auckland native English speaking faculty teach Mie students only in English. Although many of the professors have experience teaching second language learners Mie's mixed ability class makes teaching the content challenging at times. As Ting (2013) points out its important for CLIL teachers to be aware of the learners 'limited linguistic resources' and be mindful of students ability to comprehend.

While CLIL instruction in Auckland is carried out in the second language (English), Georgiou (2012) suggests that the native language of the students (Japanese) could play a supporting role in promoting both language acquisition and comprehension (Naves, 2009). Classroom

interaction between The University of Auckland's professors and Mie University students is always in English; however, occasionally students will use Japanese when working in groups or answering each other's questions. The commitment of the students to only use English varied heavily on their English ability level and the difficulty of the topic being discussed. The degree to which English only is enforced in the classroom is dependent upon the lecturing professor. "For CLIL to be effective it must challenge learners to think and review and engage in higher order thinking. (Cognition) CLIL is not about the transfer of knowledge from expert to novice. CLIL is about allowing individuals to construct their own understanding and be challenged – whatever their age or ability" (Coyle, 2005). The Auckland program gives the students freedom and flexibility when using Japanese to organize, internalize and understand the content.

### **Adapting CLIL**

A key component that makes The University of Auckland's teacher program stand out from other study abroad programs is the active involvement of Mie University's faculty and staff. On every trip 3 to 4 members accompany the students and fully participate in the program and all its activities. Over the course of the program's history and at the encouragement from the programs staff and teachers, Mie University's faculty have taken an active role in the CLIL framework. The program is unique in that it blends CLIL classroom instruction in English with content facilitation and daily debriefings in Japanese. Allowing the students to reflect on the day's experiences and review the content in their native language has shown to strengthen students

understanding and reinforce the content for the following day.

Compared to the entire day the debriefings are very short and last only 30 to 40 minutes. Sometimes the debriefings take place during lunch or on the bus to or from a school excursion. As expected, students rely more on Japanese in the beginning of the program until they can get their bearings in the classroom and become accustomed to their New Zealand instructors. However, as the program progresses and students gain confidence, the use of Japanese decreases. Sometimes the debriefings are even done in English with minimal Japanese support. The use of a native language within a CLIL program is neither encouraged nor discouraged but is at the discretion of instructors. CLIL is flexible and adaptable and can be customized to suit a variety of contextual factors (Coyle, 2005).

### **The Program's Future**

As The University of Auckland's teacher program enters its fourth year it continues to grow and provide students with a unique opportunity to study abroad, improve their communicative English skills and deepen their knowledge about global education. Many short-term study abroad programs for Japanese focus strictly on language however the program in Auckland exposes student teachers to new techniques, ideas and perspectives in education that they will be able to use in their future classrooms.

The inclusion of Mie's faculty in the program has gradually increased since the program began and appears to be helping students of various English abilities negotiate the curricular content. In the

future it would be beneficial to formally study the impact that the debriefings in Japanese have on the students and to see how Mie's faculty can better compliment The University of Auckland's faculty in carrying out the teacher training program. As of now the number of participants has been small and CLIL has worked effectively despite the range in English ability levels. However as the program becomes more popular and attracts a wider range of ability levels it will be interesting to observe CLIL's effectiveness vis-à-vis comparable to group size.

A reason for CLIL's growing popularity worldwide is that student's motivation for studying languages increases when language is used for practical, real world challenges (Cekrezi, 2011). Student surveys have shown that studying at The University of Auckland and experiencing New Zealand's schools has increased their motivation to continue in the field of education and has raised their enthusiasm about becoming teachers. As the program grows and the relationship between Mie University and The University of Auckland strengthens this will be a great opportunity to nurture a new generation of global teachers that will prepare Japan's students for the future.

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