Activating Prior Knowledge for CLIL

CLIL Matters
Materials 2020

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All teachers want their students to excel in their subject. How to achieve that? According to studies[1], there is a direct link between what a student already **KNOWS** about a given concept and their later performance. This **prior knowledge**, especially if **activated** at the beginning of the lesson, can boost your students' learning.

See what happens when you allow time for **Activating Prior Knowledge**:

> Students can link their **OLD** knowledge with the **NEW** information.

> New information **STICKS** better in the students' brains.

> Students can see a **BIG PICTURE** of the subject.

> **Students perform better at school.**

Activating Prior Knowledge also allows you to see your students' misconceptions about the topic of your lesson.

In **CLIL**, besides the **content**, you need to remember about activating students' prior **language**, including vocabulary. Look at the strategies below and choose those most appropriate in your teaching context.

1. Complete this vocabulary self-assessment table. Tick appropriate boxes.

Vocabulary term	I know how to...			
	define it	say it	use it	translate it
cell				
nucleus				
membrane				
cytoplasm				

1. In this activity, students assess their own language by ticking the appropriate boxes. Then, you can ask them to work in pairs or groups to teach each other the unknown terms. Finally, you need to explain only the terms no one in the class knows.

[1] Catrin Green, *How to Teach Secondary Science*, Independent Thinking Press, Bancyfelin, 2016

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2. Rate your knowledge of the vocabulary terms given below.

cell, nucleus, membrane, cytoplasm

1. I've never heard the term before.

2. I've heard the term, but I don't know what it means.

3. I'm not sure, but I think it has something to do with...

4. I know the word but can't explain it.

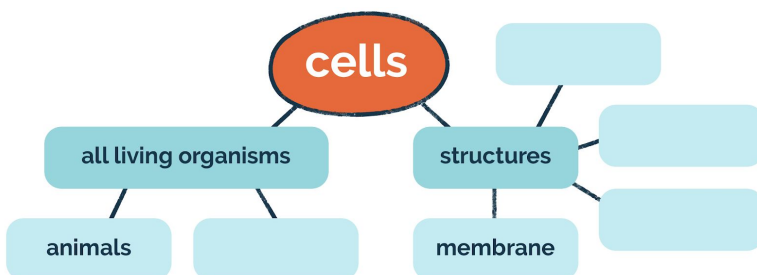5. I know the word well and can explain it to the class.

2. In this exercise, students rank the terms by allocating numbers 1 to 5. For example, they can write the numbers on the mini-whiteboards. You can quickly see who can explain the terms to the rest of the class if needed.

3. K-W-L Table. Complete the first two columns of the table.

Animal and plant cells		
What do you **KNOW**?	What do you **WANT** to know?	What have you **LEARNT**?

3. Completing the first column of the K-W-L table allows assessing students' prior knowledge, including misconceptions about a lesson theme. This can be done in groups or as a whole-class activity.

4. Draw a mind map or a concept map.

cells — all living organisms — animals

cells — structures — membrane

4. In this activity, students work in groups to draw a mind map or a concept map. You can guide the students by telling them what to write about, e.g. *cells - what, where, why*. It can be also done as a whole-class activity.

5. Brainstorming.

function growth small millions building vital

5. Brainstorming means the students give words they associate with the lesson theme (here: *Cells*). They can shout the words for you to write on the board. They can come up to the board in silence and write the words. Or you can give them one minute to make a list of the words, then extend this list by sharing the words in pairs or groups, and finally give some words to you to write on the board.

If you want to read more about **Activating Prior Knowledge**, go to the Edutopia website. For some more strategies of 'sticky teaching', read this Chalk Blog entry.

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