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A CLIL MODEL FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The present paper gives an account on the results of a desk research carried out within the Erasmus + funded project C4C – CLIL for Children on successful CLIL models adopted in primary schools. As Romanian primary schools are concerned, our research revealed a few CLIL models, which depend on aim, context and desired outcomes. The CLIL methodology is/has been used either in short thematic units (modules) using the foreign language as a working language, involving rather little time within the curriculum, or, it may involve long or short-term exposure, as typical of some private primary schools which may offer a part of their curriculum in the target foreign language. The choice of the CLIL model in practice also depends on other aspects, such as children's age, level of education, school timetable, context of instruction, teachers' training and expertise on CLIL, language command, etc. In addition to the desk research, the Romanian partner carried out a survey asking teachers, educators and other participants involved in primary education on the models of CLIL they have implemented in their schools, in order to have a clear overview before developing a training course and lesson modules within the project.

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1. Introduction

In a research published in the Report of Central Workshop 6/2005: CLIL QUALITY MATRIX (Marsh et al., Project D3 – CLILMatrix), the participants demonstrated a variety of CLIL models across Europe. The researchers found that there are many CLIL models in education which depend on scope, context and desired results. "Variants may be found at all levels of education from pre-school to tertiary and can differ according to choice of subjects, exposure time, target languages, and overall objectives.



They may be modular or programme based. That is, CLIL may be used in short thematic units (modules) using the foreign language as a working language involving relatively little time within the curriculum. Alternatively it may involve very high exposure such as in International Baccalaureate schools, or high exposure time, as typical of schools which offer some 50% of the curriculum in the foreign language.” (Project D3, p. 7)

In a comprehensive CLIL model “both language and content are conceptualized on a continuum without an implied preference for either” (Coyle 2007: 543). This CLIL continuum will determine the specific CLIL model applied in a particular instructional context, depending on factors such as children’s age and level, schedule, context of instruction, teachers’ training and expertise on CLIL, language skills, etc. The particular CLIL model implemented will be determined by the current conditions, the educational needs and the intentional focus within the content-language continuum stated above. There is a series of CLIL varieties, under the broad definition of CLIL as an umbrella term, and these may range from content-oriented to language-oriented varieties.

According to Mehisto et al. (2008), there are six basic principles of teaching through CLIL:

- 1) use of new organizational and methodological approaches in teaching;
- 2) creative atmosphere;
- 3) authenticity of teaching;
- 4) active learning (students’ participation in content creation);
- 5) support in teaching (scaffolding);
- 6) cooperation.

The CLIL educational method is based on the methodology of teaching foreign languages and the methodology of other subjects, and it is implemented through critical thinking, project based learning, pedagogical constructivism, etc. When it comes to integrated teaching, the constructivist approach is mainly used as students do not have satisfactory language skills to be able to understand the entire contents of education. “New terms must coincide with previously acquired and adopted content, and it is equally important that such content is based on the already acquired language structures and skills.” (Mehisto et al., 2008)

CLIL requires teachers to engage in alternative ways of planning for effective learning (Coyle, 2005). The content teacher and the foreign language teacher jointly design the activities and this is one of the essential elements for a CLIL lesson to be successful. As Coyle states, when designing classroom activities and materials, teachers should make sure that the curricular subject is the main focus of classroom materials and should take into account the students’ prior linguistic knowledge and skills. Adapting the activity for students with specific needs is also a necessary step in CLIL planning and teaching (Coyle, 2005).

According to Coyle, the CLIL approach also requires teachers to introduce some changes, not just in planning, but also in the actual process of teaching: collaboration between the two teachers (content and foreign language teacher), making use of group work and cooperative strategies to help students develop attitudes for coping with different situations, changing the style of instruction in the classroom and using suitable techniques for error correction, among others. Teachers should, above all, develop and maintain high levels of self-confidence in the students (Coyle, 2005).

Introducing CLIL in primary school involves changes in the curriculum. The CLIL approach includes a variety of teaching methods and curriculum models and can be adapted to the age, ability, needs and interests of the learners and can be developed at different levels of complexity for different sectors. It can be integrated as a new approach for teaching integrated curriculum or as different subjects taught in a foreign language.

Mehisto, Marsh, and Frigols (2008) claim that CLIL has many faces and that it can also be used for short-term exposure. It means that CLIL experiences in primary schools do not necessarily mean teaching a whole subject in a foreign language but selecting, within that subject, some significant areas to be exploited and developed in a foreign language.

Curricular documents in Europe suggest from 10 to 60 minute foreign language instruction within different subjects across the primary education. For example, in Mathematics children can learn the numerals, in Physical Education basic commands etc. Mehisto, Marsh and Frigols (2008, p.13) say that “language showers are primarily intended for students aged between four and ten years old, who receive between 30 minutes and one hour of exposure per day. This includes the use of games, songs, many visuals, realia, handling of objects and movement. Teachers usually speak almost entirely in the CLIL language. Routines are developed and considerable repetition is used so students know what to expect. This creates sense of security, lowers anxiety and boosts learning.”

CLIL focuses on specific subject areas or themes, as opposed to other traditional foreign language courses. “There are at least three good reasons to integrate language work and other subjects of the curriculum. First, it is a way to show the children that the new language they are learning is something normal and natural. Secondly, learning other things in a foreign language and receiving and producing real messages will help children to learn that language. Thirdly, familiar ways of working will help both children and teachers when dealing with new teaching material.” (Halliwell, 1992, p. 130)

CLIL can easily fit into the structure established by the national or regional curriculum. Teachers can decide what themes will be studied and how much time will be devoted to that particular area, such as: Mathematics, Science, Physical Education, Music, Arts and Crafts, etc.

Pavesi et al. (2001) state that this CLIL Model is the most appropriate for primary education: “In primary school the proportion of instruction in L2 can vary depending on the school, teacher and language context. L2 instruction can be limited to “language showers” of 10 minutes a day or extend to cover up to 50% of all lessons. A curriculum that includes daily CLIL instruction of 10-20 minutes a day develops an interest in the L2 while the learner acquires basic words and phrases and develops listening and speaking skills. In a curriculum that devotes more time to CLIL, learners will also acquire proficiency in listening and, to a lesser degree, proficiency in speaking. As a general rule, in primary school priority is given to the oral code.”

2. A CLIL Model for Primary Schools in Romania

The Erasmus+ funded project C4C - CLIL for Children (2015-1-IT02-KA201-015017) (www.clil4children.eu) is currently being implemented in Romania by the University of Pitesti and Primary/Secondary School *Alexandru Davila* - Pitesti, under the KA2 action, in partnership with other research institutions and primary/secondary schools in Europe, from Italy, Portugal and Poland who also

implement the products of the project in local institutions. The project involves experienced primary school teachers as well as English teachers for primary school children.

The methodology developed during the project lifespan is grounded on the results of the State of the Art analysis which was realised jointly by all partners. The first two Intellectual Outputs produced were the following:

- The **State of the Art Report about the use of CLIL methodology in primary schools** which compiled four national reports from Italy, Portugal, Romania and Poland. It contains: two desk researches on CLIL, the results of the survey carried out with questionnaires in partner countries and other European countries, as well as examples of good practice on implementing CLIL in primary schools. The results of the Survey carried out in partner and non-partner countries, as well as the two desk researches undergone at the beginning, revealed that there is great need for CLIL training and CLIL designed materials to help primary schools teachers. The *State of the art Report* offers a wide selection of examples of good practice regarding current models of experimenting with the implementation of CLIL in the partner countries: Italy, Portugal, Romania and Poland. These can be analysed for most advantageous application, taking into account the teachers' experience and the contexts.
- The **Guide to OERs for CLIL in Primary Schools** which resulted from the joint effort of four C4C partners to collect and census 90 Open Educational Resources (OERs) to teach English through CLIL in primary schools (ages 5 to 12) in a series of designated European countries, namely: Italy, Germany, the Czech Republic, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Spain. It includes Guidelines for developing and using CLIL and constitutes a set of materials and planning of lessons to teach Science, Mathematics and Geography in English and to highlight CLIL methodologies in practice. The guide also includes a section (**section 3**) with clear instructions on how to access the selected OERs and use the guide.
- The **Guide Addressed to Teachers on how to use CLIL Methodology in Primary Schools** which is conceived as a very practical guide for teachers **list examples of good practice and worksheets and provide practical worksheets** in order to: help teachers plan CLIL learning activities with students; observe students' behaviour and learning; and monitor the results of CLIL learning sequences. It focuses on a *curriculum model for CLIL based on modules which comprise sequences of 3 lessons each in a particular subject area: Science, Geography or Mathematics for primary education (grades 1 to 6)*. Examples given and worksheets, grids, and other materials take this model as the reference for advice on: CLIL learning aims, CLIL integrated content & language learning, CLIL methodologies, as well as on CLIL lesson planning, resources & materials, and monitoring and evaluating the CLIL experience.
- An **E-course addressed to teachers on how to use the CLIL methodology in primary schools** (to be developed) which will be self-administered, and the content will be structured in units. Every unit will be structured with informative materials, check lists, observation grids, grids for developing and monitoring improvement plans, links to useful sources and additional informative materials. At the end a question based assessment tool will allow to measure how much of the planned learning outcomes has been reached. The e-course will adopt several types

of learning objects: Lectures based on PDF documents and/or text resources; Asynchronous audio and/or video webinars based on micro-lessons or interviews of experts on CLIL, pedagogy in general, or didactic issues (both internal to the Consortium or of stakeholders/experts external to the consortium, including video recordings of teachers' lessons – if possible, considering all the privacy issues – used as case studie); Multimedia resources produced by all the partners; Quiz (multiple choice, drag 'n drop, fill-in-the blank, etc...); 2D and/or animated info graphics; Micro-lessons based on Power Points processed using e-learning tools like i-Spring; Tasks based on stimuli, resources, suggestions proposed to the teachers that have to produce written documents, or presentation, or other materials that will be evaluated with a peer-to-peer approach.

- **Mobility for teachers in one of the partner countries.** During the C1 Mobilities within the project, 25 teachers from partner primary schools were trained by the C4C researchers on how to develop CLIL didactic materials and design lesson plans (90 minutes each) for Science (Animals; Plants); Mathematics (Numbers; Shapes) and Geography. The Mobility training consisted in 40 hours of intensive training activities including seminars, group workshops and CLIL lesson observation. The key elements of the training programme comprised: Reflective teaching: exploring the classroom practice; Various learning activities and multimodality in CLIL; Games in CLIL; Children's literature, storytelling and CLIL; Student assessment in CLIL; Phonetics and Phonology for CLIL teachers. Teachers also took part in 15-hours face-to-face training organised in each partner country by the researchers. They will be piloting all these CLIL lesson plans in their schools, in 2017, and then decide on further implementation of regular CLIL courses under the form of Modules. In Romania, School Alexandru Davila in Pitesti will be piloting the three Modules (15 lesson plans) as an after-school programme, without making any changes in the curriculum. Based on the outcomes of the pilot, the students' and parents' further interest in CLIL programmes, they will then make a decision on implementing the CLIL programme o a regular basis, within the *Curriculum at the choice of the school*, during the following school year 2017/2018.

3. Conclusion

Recent studies on CLIL have revealed that the vast majority of European countries offer CLIL programs in mainstream education, both primary and secondary, although often not all students attending CLIL schools receive CLIL teaching. The most common situation is that schools provide parallel paths of regular education and CLIL education. About a third of these countries also have pilot programs to implement this type of education. Nevertheless, the CLIL methodological approach is still new and its degree of implementation varies widely among European Union countries. In most European countries, the choice of subjects taught in CLIL varies among schools and regions. The most common situation is that schools are able to choose one or more subjects in the curriculum based on the institutional needs and on available resources (eg. qualification of teachers).

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