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Techniques for Introducing CLIL in Primary Schools

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Abstract

CLIL is an innovative educational approach which allows students to learn how to do things rather than knowing things, focusing both on content and language. 'This approach involves learning subjects such as history, geography or others, through an additional language. It can be very successful in enhancing the learning of languages and other subjects, and developing in the youngsters a positive 'can do' attitude towards themselves as language learners.' (Mehisto et al., 2008). CLIL entails a new educational approach based on the integrated learning of foreign language and content. The foreign language is acquired through subject-related contents provided in such a way to encourage learning. Special attention is paid to the learning skills, as they are pivotal for an efficient linguistic and communicative learning. For this reason, as Mehisto et al. (2008) stated, the CLIL approach is strictly linked to good practice in education: 'CLIL cannot be separated from standard good practice in education. CLIL is a valued-added, as opposed to subtractive, approach that seeks to enrich the learning environment.'
The present paper will look at ways of effectively introducing CLIL in primary schools, presenting the language teaching techniques that were successful for the early learning of a foreign language that can also be used in CLIL activities. Similarly, the good practice in education and the techniques that were effectively used in teaching school subjects can be applied to CLIL and will be presented throughout the paper.

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1. Introduction

The present paper is part of the research undergone within the Erasmus+ European project C4C-CLIL for Children (2015-2018). The C4C – CLIL for Children (www.clil4children.eu) project was funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus + programme, Key Action 2 – Strategic Partnerships for a period of 3 years, from 2015 to 2018. The Consortium, represented by organizations

active in research and/or training of teachers and primary schools from Italy, Portugal, Romania and Poland will develop methodologies and materials to improve the use of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in primary schools by using Open Educational Resources.

Over the past two decades an increasing body of research has demonstrated that CLIL can enhance multilingualism and provide opportunities for deepening learners' knowledge and skills, however effective use of CLIL requires a specific methodology and specific training of teachers. In a preliminary needs analysis carried out before submitting this project, partners recognized primary school teachers in partner countries have been so far little involved in training for CLIL that has been instead targeted mainly to teachers of secondary schools. The aim of this project is to support primary school teachers in filling this gap by providing them with a comprehensive training program.

A Survey has been carried out within the project on the state of the art about the use of CLIL in primary schools including good practices and difficulties, as well as a census of OER materials to be used for CLIL in primary schools. Based on these two preliminary reports, the consortium will develop further: Guidelines on the development and use of CLIL in primary schools; a set of CLIL materials and lesson plans for teaching Science, Mathematics and Geography in English in primary schools; a Guide addressed to teachers on how to use the CLIL methodology in primary schools; an E-course (online course) addressed to teachers on how to use CLIL methodology in primary schools.

The C4C – CLIL for Children project is addressed to primary school teachers that want to improve their expertise in CLIL methodology and the quality of their educational offer. It is also addressed to organizations training teachers and other parties interested in primary schools and L2 learning/teaching: students and parents, publishers and developers of educational materials, decision makers, researchers.

2. Descriptions of CLIL Methods with Related Supporting Theory

In Europe, the implementation of CLIL goes back in the 90's when specialists and the European Commission started a Europe-wide discussion on how to bring excellence in language learning, found in some types of schools (mainly bilingual), into public government-funded schools and colleges, driven by both educational and political motives: 'The political driver was based on a vision that mobility across the European Union required higher levels of language competence in designated languages than was found to be the case at that point in time. The educational driver, influenced by major bilingual initiatives such as in Canada, was to design and otherwise adapt existing language teaching approaches so as to provide a wide range of students with higher levels of competence' Marsh (2012). Nowadays, the CLIL methodology is spread all around Europe, in different forms.

According to Ioannaou Georgiou and Pavlos Pavlou (2011), CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) 'is the most common term used in the European setting to describe the approach to teaching a curriculum subject through a foreign language, with the dual focus of acquiring more subject knowledge and improving one's skills and competences in the foreign language.' CLIL is 'the platform for an innovative methodological approach of far broader scope than language teaching. Accordingly, its advocates stress how it seeks to develop proficiency in both the non-language subject and the language in which this is taught, attaching the same importance to each. Furthermore, achieving this twofold aim calls for the development of a special approach to teaching in that the non-language subject is not taught *in* a foreign language but *with* and *through* a foreign language. This implies a more integrated approach to

both teaching and learning, requiring that teachers should devote special thought not just to how languages should be taught, but to the educational process in general' Eurydice (2006). Students learn the language necessary for studying while learning the subject and therefore, they are not expected to be proficient in the language of instruction before they embark on studying under the CLIL approach.

There has been no central educational policy for CLIL in a foreign language in primary schools in Romania so far. CLIL in a foreign language is not implemented at a national level in state schools at primary education. It is, however, applied in various private schools in some cities (Bucharest, Cluj, Arad). Some schools (usually private schools) provide CLIL lessons in foreign languages for a definite period of time, for example during the cycle of a European project implemented in different schools, even at primary level. Some state schools, however, organize intensive programmes of teaching a foreign language upon parents/pupils request. In particular, the subjects covered are Geography, History, Culture and civilization of the country where the foreign language is spoken (Great Britain for English, Germany for German, France for French, etc.).

2.1. Early foreign Language Teaching Principles/Techniques Applied to CLIL

In Romania, as well as in all European countries, the communicative approach to language teaching has become quite common. It is based on the concept of communication skills and organization of the linguistic syllabus in terms of communication functions. Current curricula provided by the Ministry of Education for language teaching also make reference to the communicative approach, which is also used in the English textbooks in primary schools.

Throughout the present paper, we will have a look at some of the most recent and common methods that have been used to cater for the needs of the foreign language early teaching and other pedagogical requirements, such as the different learning styles or development of learner's autonomy of the students. In addition, we will examine a few methods and techniques that were successfully used in teaching school subjects through CLIL.

2.1.1. T.P.R. - Total Physical Response

This method draws on the basic principles of how young children learn their first language and lays its foundations on humanistic education principles and theories related to the acquisition of the language. Developed by the American psychologist James Asher (1982), this teaching method involves a wide range of physical activities, mostly commands, and a lot of listening and comprehension, as well as an emphasis on learning as fun and stimulating.

The originator of TPR worked from the premise of the similarities between the acquisition process of the native and of the second language, and emphasized that the language addressed to children is most of all made of commands. Children respond with whole-body actions, before being able to orally articulate words. A similar process is triggered when learning a second language, as comprehension comes first than speaking. In responding to commands students get a lot of comprehensible input, and in performing physical actions they seem to echo the claims of neuro-linguistic programming that certain people benefit greatly from kinaesthetic activity.

This method is developed to reduce stress students feel while studying foreign languages. Learners are allowed to speak when they are ready. Here is a set of techniques used in TPR:

- Using commands to direct behaviour

- Role reversal

- Action sequence following a specific procedure: 1. the teacher shows the actions and tells the students the commands, while they watch; 2. students listen to the commands and repeat the actions with the teacher; 3. students listen to the commands and repeat the actions by themselves.

The most commonly used tense to convey the sequence of actions is the imperative. T.P.R. can be used for different sequences of actions: daily actions, actions related to imaginary or simulated contexts, actions related to specific contents, following a set of principles:

- The students' understanding of the target language should be developed before speaking.

- Students can initially learn one part of the language rapidly by moving their bodies.

- Feelings of success and low anxiety facilitate learning.

- Language learning is more effective when it is fun.

Using TPR in CLIL lessons can give students great opportunities for content learning in a foreign language, such as science-related topics (plants, animals, water cycle, etc.): both linguistic and subject contents are comprehensible and are learnt through the actions in a positive learning environment, where children are actively involved. T.P.R. techniques to learn vocabulary can be successfully used to learn new terminology related to specific subjects. For example, the teacher can place a set of flashcards related to each lexical item in different parts of the classroom and encourage students to listen and perform the actions: point to the thunder, point to the raindrops, go near the mountain, etc.

The Total Physical Response method has limitations, however, especially when teaching abstract language and tasks, but it is widely considered to be effective for beginners and is still the standard approach for young learners.

2.1.2. VAK - The Multisensory Approach

The multisensory approach is drawn upon the application of *Neuro Linguistic Programming* (NLP) principles to the language teaching. According to this study area, the experience that people gain about the world is acquired through the senses, which allow them to gather information, filter it (also according to expectations, beliefs, interests), and re-arrange it in internal representations. The visual, auditory and kinaesthetic (VAK) model was developed by early years specialists and psychologists such as Keller, Orton, Gillingham, Stillman and Montessori way back in the 1920s. There are three main systems of representation, or sensory modalities: visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, which include both physical and tactile sensations, both internal and external ones. The sensory systems are differently used by each individual, because each one has a privileged modality of representation of their own experience, which can be mainly visual, auditory, or kinaesthetic.

In school, students have different approaches and act differently when asked to perform a task or to learn content. By applying this model, *visual learners* will learn by seeing and observing things, feeling more confident with information given in charts, mind-maps, diagrams, demonstrations, pictures, and handouts. Frequently these types of learners don't like reading out loud and are more likely to use higher reading strategies such as skimming and scanning. *Auditory learners* learn through hearing as they prefer discussion, and learn through music, jokes and rhymes. They can easily remember contents if they listen, repeat and discuss them with classmates. They often talk out loud to themselves and have trouble

with reading and writing tasks. *Kinaesthetic learners* learn by touching and doing things, and they prefer activities which involve physical experiences –feeling, holding and 'hands on' techniques. They get easily involved if they can use manipulative materials, play games, act or participate in activities that entail actions and emotions.

The multisensory approach was introduced in the language teaching area in order to offer students the possibility to learn a foreign language according to their systems of representation, and to strengthen the other senses. When teaching various subjects in a foreign language, through the CLIL methodology, it is of utmost importance to make sure all contents are adequate to all learning styles, as students are requested a tremendous cognitive and linguistic effort.

2.1.3. TBL – The Task-Based Approach

Teachers started using tasks many years ago. The main feature of applying all these tasks is that rather than concentrating on a particular language structure, vocabulary group or function, they make use of a wider range of language, connected to specific content. On many occasions, students may also be using a range of diverse communicative language skills.

Teachers have traditionally used tasks as a follow-up to a series of structure/function or vocabulary based lessons. Tasks have been used as 'extension' activities, being part of a graded and structured course. The tasks are central to the learning activity, in task-based learning lessons. Initially developed by N. Prabhu (1987) in Bangladore, southern India, TBL is based on the belief that students may learn more effectively when their minds are focused on the task, rather than on the language they are using.

In the model of task-based learning described by Jane Willis (1996) the traditional PPP (presentation, practice, production) lesson is reversed. The starting point is the task that students have to accomplish throughout the lesson. After completing the task, the teacher draws students' attention to the language used, making corrections and adjustments to the their performance. In "*A Framework for Task-Based Learning*", Jane Willis defines a three stage process:

- Pre-task - Introduction to the topic and task.
- Task cycle - Task planning and report
- Language focus - Analysis and practice

The task-based methodology was often implemented in the teaching of a foreign language, also thanks to the recommendations of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*. The Framework suggests planning task-based curricula, so that students can use both their linguistic and cognitive abilities. Further studies showed the importance of introducing the task-centred methodology in CLIL activities, as its characteristics are perfectly adequate to promote the strengthening of the linguistic skills. Willis articulated different types of tasks: *problem-solving; listing; ordering, sorting, classifying; comparing; sharing opinions, personal experiences; creative tasks or projects (Willis, 1998, pg.3)*, which can also be used during the integrated learning of language and content.

2.2. Scaffolding Strategies

One of the most common strategies, which is essential to the CLIL approach, that teachers use to facilitate comprehension and learning is scaffolding. It is a tutoring activity in which students are given specific support by a teacher or a peer to help them perform the task or solve a problem that they cannot

perform alone (Bruner, 1986). Scaffolding refers to the temporary interactional support that is given to students while their language system is 'under construction' and thus helping them to build competences.

How to make sure students have sufficient language resources to match the complexity of the concepts they're learning is one of the biggest challenges of learning a content area through a foreign language and that is why careful scaffolding proves to be especially useful when teaching through CLIL. There is a wide range of scaffolding strategies that a teacher may use in the CLIL classroom, depending on the materials, students' needs, knowledge and understanding. Walqui (2006) proposes two frameworks of general scaffolding techniques used by CLIL teachers:

•   Modelling: offering examples that students can imitate or clearly demonstrate what they have to do.

•   Bridging: connecting new input with students' previous knowledge, for example activating knowledge they already have from personal experience.

•   Contextualizing: enhancing learning to make input more comprehensible through visuals aids such as pictures, graphs or verbally, through metaphors or analogies.

•   Schema building: helping students organize their thinking or knowledge by creating schemas that are mutually connected.

•   Re-presenting text: changing a text into another written or visual form, for instance: a story can be turned into a dialogue.

•   Developing meta-cognition: students learn how to evaluate themselves and are taught strategies of thinking.

Among the scaffolding strategies used, the technique of brainstorming is considered a way of `negotiating field knowledge` and it is very significant in language pedagogy as it contributes to the co-construction of knowledge. Teachers should consider the peer to peer learning as a target in CLIL approach to provide students a deeper awareness of their learning process and increase their confidence. In fact, one of the principles of scaffolding consists in adapting the activity to the learners so that each one can progress and accomplish the task no matter what their initial level is.

The help provided through scaffolding is only temporary. It is removed gradually as the students gain the necessary knowledge and experience to be autonomous, just as scaffolding is removed once the building is complete. Students are given support for learning of both content and language as new learning is built on what is already known. Even though scaffolding is often provided by a teacher, it can also be provided by a more proficient peer, or group of peers. Once the students are confident of how to say what they want in a situation, they will be able to use their linguistic knowledge in other situations, without scaffolding. Once the knowledge, skill or understanding needed will have been internalised, they can be used further, without external support.

Scaffolding is a dynamic component in the process of teaching and learning and it takes many forms. For instance, when scaffolding the skill of listening, teachers might help students grasp meaning by focussing their attention on the form of a particular tense used. Also, during a reading activity, the questions the teacher asks about a particular text can guide the reader to a clear understanding. Writing skills can be developed through template texts, or the use of graphic organisers to help sort out ideas. Tools such as tables and grids, mind maps and flow charts enable data processing, and develop thinking

skills such as comparing and contrasting, sequencing, recognising relationships and classifying. In time, with scaffolding, students internalize what they are learning, and help is decreased.

2.3. Methodology Based on Constructivism and Cooperative Learning

The methodology based on constructivism underlines the active role of the student in the learning process. It also stresses the importance of the classmates, who are seen as a group allowing learning to take place with the others and from the others, through the negotiation of knowledge. Therefore, the group serves a dual purpose: it allows the development of social skills through cooperation with others; it supports cognitive development, and encourages and reinforces learning. The role of the teacher is not passing on knowledge, but creating a learning environment where students get oriented rather than directed.

Learning environments offer the opportunity to gain experience, to think critically, use materials and resources to complete a task. Active teaching (it is an umbrella term which can include *problem-solving* activities, discovery learning, case-studies, *role play, peer tutoring*) can be used in building learning environments.

Regarding the mechanism of learning, studies and research focused on the individual differences and the different modalities people use when learning. The theory of multiple intelligences, the Neuro-linguistic Programming and the studies on the cognitive styles has strongly hit the pedagogical and teaching studies. It is essential to bear this in mind when building learning environments. The constructivist learning environments are based on cooperative learning. The class is considered as a context made up of small work teams, that have to perform a task while acting responsibly and developing social practices.

Cooperative learning has been often used in CLIL experimentations, due to its education-related potential. Cooperative learning is an educational approach aimed at unlocking the socio-emotional and cognitive potential of the classroom, seen as a group, and of each student.

Teachers play a vital role as they have to provide tasks that require collaboration and inter-dependence among the members of each group. Interdependence of roles is a key concept. As Polito emphasized (2008), it is essential to distinguish among different roles before assigning them to students: organizational roles (who organizes material, who takes care of deadlines, who takes care of the delivery, etc.); cognitive roles (who asks questions, who deals with summaries, who links the content with previous tasks); emotional roles (who encourages new ideas, who encourages others to engage in the conversation).

With regard to CLIL activities, particularly in primary schools, the organizational roles were the most used, while the cognitive ones were the least used. Although they entail a more difficult re-arrangement, cognitive roles can be provided to children as well. If a group has to create a poster, some members of the group can deal with the drawings, others with the captions, with highlighting key words, or with spell checking by using a dictionary. When assigning roles, it may also be useful to distribute different texts and materials, so that each member of the group has information that others have not (two-way task). As a result, only when all the information is gathered will it be possible to accomplish the task.

Constructivist and cooperative learning environments, rather than fostering a knowledge based on instruction, encourage shared knowledge as it requires cognitive skills, openness towards the others, their

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ideas, their world, and their culture. Thus, the purposes of such learning environments can contribute to complete the CLIL key elements: *Content, Communication, Cognition, Culture/Community*.

3. Conclusion

Even if CLIL involves a new approach and a certain degree of change, it can easily fit into the parameters established by the national or regional curriculum. Furthermore, CLIL cannot be separated from standard good practice in education (Mehisto, Marsh and Frigols, 2008, p. 27). The advantage of any CLIL course is that a teacher can decide what themes will be studied and how much time will be devoted to this area. The CLIL methodological approach is still new and its degree of implementation varies broadly 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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