

Utilities of CLIL methodology in the classroom

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Resumen: El trabajo que a continuación presentamos pretende ser una guía a la hora de explicar y analizar en qué consiste la metodología CLIL (por sus siglas en inglés) en la enseñanza actual en España, y muy especialmente centrándonos en el ámbito de la enseñanza secundaria. Simplemente ojeando el artículo, se puede hacer el lector una idea aproximada de que es exactamente la metodología CLIL, qué significa, y sobre todo sus ulteriores implicaciones en las situaciones diarias de clase.

Por tanto albergaremos a lo largo de la presentación la definición de la metodología CLIL, a qué tipo de situaciones educativas se refiere y va destinada, y sobre todo, a su posterior uso en la clase así como las razones para su implementación y desarrollo, sobre todo en España.

Palabras clave: metodología CLIL, secundaria, enfoque dual, aprendizaje simultáneo, organización escolar.

Title: utilities of CLIL methodology in the classroom

Abstract: The essay we now are to present focuses on the implications and uses of CLIL methodology in present-day teaching in Spain, especially within the scope of secondary education. By merely skimming out this paper we will manage to get an accurate idea of what exactly CLIL is, what it means, and besides, its further implications in everyday teaching situations.

We will hereby bring the proper definition of CLIL methodology, what sort of educative situations it refers to, and above all, the keys to its further use in classroom and the reasons for its implementation and development, especially in Spain.

Keywords: CLIL methodology, secondary, dual focus, simultaneous learning, classroom setting.

1. Introduction

In the last decade, CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) has undergone a rapid development in the Spanish scenario. This is the result of a commitment with the European policies aimed at fostering plurilingualism and a growing awareness of the need to learn foreign languages.

In the Spanish scenario, CLIL programmes are being implemented in mainstream schools quite frequently with direct support from educational

authorities. The different models vary significantly from one region to another, but can be divided into two main contexts:

- Monolingual communities where Spanish is the official language.
- Bilingual communities where Spanish is the official language together with another co-official regional language, both of which are compulsory at non-university levels.

Therefore, increasing priority has been given to CLIL as the best way to foster multilingualism, one of the aims of European educative policies. This is one of the reasons why support for CLIL has witnessed such increase in the last years in Spain. CLIL is consolidating as a trend in the education systems, which is attempting to confirm to the new demands of our globalised society.

2. CLIL Methodology

CLIL stands for Content and Language Integrated Learning. It refers to teaching subjects such as science, history and geography to students through a foreign language. This can be by the FL teacher using cross-curricular content or the subject teacher using English as the language of instruction. Both methods result in the simultaneous learning of content and English. The term CLIL was coined by David Marsh, University of Jyväskylä, Finland: "*CLIL refers to situations where subjects, or parts of subjects, are taught through a foreign language with dual-focused aims, namely, the learning of content and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language*" (Marsh, 1994).

However, CLIL methodological approach, which could be said to be an European version of the American CBI, has been practised for many years, from the Babylonian era to the early sixties when bi-lingual education was introduced in many schools around the world. There are many ways of describing the characteristics attributed to CLIL.

CLIL offers opportunities to allow teenagers to use another language naturally, in such a way that they soon forget about the language of instruction and only focus on the learning topic. This is usually done through putting aside some time in the school week for learning subjects or special modules through another language. This means that in the class there are two main aims, one related to the subject, topic or theme, and one linked to the language.

Good results have been found with very different CLIL types, and it is clear that a small amount of CLIL can go a long way towards improving a teenager's hunger, willingness, and capability to learn both other languages, and other subject matter.

Language and communication are one of the most complicated aspects of human behaviour. Our desire to measure success in terms of exam results, which is a basic part of school culture, sometimes blinds us to other learning qualities which can be highly advantageous for any person.

Rather we should use the language as a tool for communication and learning as early a point as possible. Experience of CLIL can make this possible. It can nurture a youngster's feel good attitude as they see that successes can be achieved, and that the road towards improvement and development is open to them.

We often undermine our child's ability to learn languages. The brain offers enormous capacity for languages. If a child learns different languages, this will develop the thinking processes within the brain itself.

What we need to realise is that the ability to use different languages, even to a modest extent, can have a positive impact on the youngster's thinking process. CLIL does not only promote linguistic competence. Because of the different thinking horizons which result from working in another language, CLIL can also have an impact on conceptualization, literally how we think.

Being able to think about something in different languages can enrich our understanding of concepts, and help broaden our conceptual mapping resources. This allows better association of different concepts and helps the learner to move towards a more sophisticated level of learning in general.

In CLIL methodology, we provide a situation in which the attention of the child is on some form of learning activity which is not the language itself. What we are doing is providing the opportunity to learn to think in a language, not just learn about the language itself as the major learning focus.

Although bilingual immersion programmes have been used for centuries, CLIL methodology is related to CBI, which started in Canada and USA in mid XX century. But what it is relevant at this point is that the dual focus on language and content on the one hand, and the concern in communication, cognition and culture on the other are original of European CLIL methodology.

However, these educational opportunities have very often been restricted to small groups of youngsters who had been privileged to join the socio-economic and political elites of a society. This would have reflected a view that only certain people are capable of benefiting from additional language learning.

CLIL offers us all an opportunity to dismantle such legacies of the past. It provides all adolescents, regardless of social and economic positioning, the opportunity to acquire and learn additional languages in a meaningful way.

Another important aspect is that CLIL classrooms always have children with mixed abilities in terms of not only the additional language, but also other forms of knowledge and skills. One key part of CLIL methodology requires that children use the language actively with each other during the lessons so that they learn from each other. All children can benefit from CLIL, not just those that we think of as being good at languages.

And, in the case with education in general, parents need to be involved with the CLIL process, offering whatever support is possible and relevant. The key responsibility can be summed up as take an active interest, not just at the beginning of CLIL or at the end, but through the process.

3. The utilities of CLIL in the classroom

CLIL methodology has certain utilities for its use in the classroom. Among others, we can cite the three principal ones following David Marsh (2002): it increases the use of a second language without increasing the amount of time spent in the classroom; CLIL has a dual focus and this affects the methodology used in the classroom; CLIL motivates students in a way an ordinary language class might not.

Most CLIL classes involve the use of two languages, the majority language and the CLIL language. This is one reason why this CLIL approach is called integrated because of the integration of the focuses on language and subject matter as well as the promotion of integrated curricula. Often the main issues are given in the first language and then learning activities are carried out in the additional language.

It has also been found that some of the most suitable CLIL teachers are those who speak the majority language as their first language, and the CLIL language as a second language. This is particularly important when dealing with young children because these teachers are often sensitive to the ways children learn in the first language, and are familiar with the points of transference which can come about from using the CLIL language.

CLIL is carried out in one language, but combine with the use of the language of the larger environment. A major outcome of CLIL is to establish not only competence in these two languages, but also nurture a good attitude towards language learning in general.

So very often the CLIL language will only be a platform by which the teenager may take an interest in other languages and cultures as well. If the child has a home language which is not the language of the wider environment, then CLIL can lead to an even greater appreciation of that home language.

1. It increases the use of a second language without increasing the amount of time spent in the classroom.

The European Commission has defined CLIL as: "Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), in which pupils learn a subject through the medium of a foreign language." "It [CLIL] provides exposure to the language without requiring extra time in the curriculum."

This promotes an approach with a twin set of objectives. One of these objectives is clearly educational (to learn subject content and a foreign language) and the other is administrative- no extra time is needed. This is important because in the European Council Resolution in 1995 it was stated that,

"...all EU citizens, by the time they leave compulsory schooling, should be able to speak two languages other than the mother tongue".

This is done through the use in CLIL. Instead of studying Geography in the majority language, do it in a foreign language. As long as it works, the pupils learn the same subject concepts and skills, but increase contact time with the foreign language – crucial consideration in the improvement of attainment levels.

CLIL has a dual focus and this affects the methodology used in the classroom.

"CLIL refers to situations where subjects, or parts of subjects, are taught through a foreign language with dual-focused aims, namely the learning of content, and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language" (Marsh, 2002).

Through CLIL-type practice, one learns [subject] content while at the same time learning a foreign language. David Graddol wrote that CLIL is:

"...an approach to bilingual education in which both curriculum content (such as science or geography) and English are taught together. It differs from simple English-medium education

in that the learner is not necessarily expected to have the English proficiency required to cope with the subject before beginning study" (Graddol, 2006).

Graddol suggests that a powerful element of CLIL is its role in the improvement of language skills, and that pupils do not necessarily need a particularly high level of foreign language attainment to participate on a CLIL programme. How is this possible?

- Because the teachers will have to adjust their methodology to ensure that the students were understanding the content.
- Teachers would not be able to simply 'transmit' the content, assuming that their audience understood. They would have to think of other means (group work, tasks, etc) which would result in an increase of the skill-based focus of the learning.
- The educational materials and resources would also have to reflect this approach.
- The pupils would be learning language that was more clearly focused on, and related to, the subject matter that they needed to learn.
- CLIL is not confined to higher-achieving students. It is not an approach for the elite. It fits in perfectly with a mixed-ability philosophy.

These points are all desirable, in educational terms. Ensuring that students understand the content, reducing teacher talk, increasing the focus on skills, influencing publishers to do likewise and getting students to learn language items that are always contextualized, always functionally necessary in the classroom – sound good at any level of curricular discourse.

3. CLIL motivates students in a way an ordinary language class might not.

CLIL views language as a 'vehicle' not simply as an entity in itself. This is a central component of the CLIL package. David Graddol said something similar in his book "English Next", when he talked about the world now viewing English not so much as a language but as a core skill.

This is a crucial observation, and it lies at the heart of the educational and social change that has taken place since the development of the Internet and the parallel growth of globalization. As English becomes an essential add-on to any curricular programme around the world, it is moving into a position where it becomes a subject that pupils learn in order to do something else.

CLIL, with its 'dual-focused' aims, encapsulates perfectly this post-modern, utilitarian view of the English language. CLIL also seems to contribute to a key concept of our times – namely 'motivation'. How does CLIL motivate more than other conventional approaches? Some possibilities:

- it provides reasons for learning and improving the foreign language level, because the understanding of the subject content is compulsory
- it focuses on and assesses the subject content, so the learner is not being assessed on his/her mastery of the Past Simple (for example) but rather his/her ability to use it in the appropriate places
- it gives students a feeling of real achievement. They are coping with, and talking and writing about, complex material in the foreign language.

4. Conclusions

We are entering a new era on the development of content and language integrated learning. Over the last two decades there has been an explosion of interest in CLIL in Europe and especially in Spain as many teachers, learners, parents, researchers, and policy-makers have realised the potential of CLIL.

CLIL also brings with it complex challenges which focus on the growth of effective pedagogies and the professional development of teachers who understand how to question their teaching, experiment with new approaches and put these into practice in their classrooms.

Moreover, for CLIL to be justifiable within a regular curriculum there is a need for rigorous on-going planning, monitoring and evaluation with clear goals and expectations. Implementing CLIL provides an opportunity for teacher and learners to collaborate with other stakeholders in order to understand better the complexities and implications of using languages as effective learning tools.

Spain is rapidly becoming one of the European leaders in CLIL practice and research. The richness of its cultural and linguistic diversity has led to a wide variety of CLIL policies and practices which provide us with many examples of CLIL in different stages of development that are applicable to contexts both within and beyond Spain.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the case of the autonomous community of Andalusia where the CLIL methodology is not only offered in English (as the common language used worldwide) but also in French and in German, which is quite innovative and uncommon to find outside at least in Spain. More detailed information can also be found at the following site:

<http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/educacion/webportal/web/aicle/>

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