"*Cafés Philosophiques*" in the CLIL Project

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Abstract

We intend to enhance our CLIL [Integrated Content and Language Learning] methodological project, designed to teach philosophy through English - in particular, in Italian senior secondary schools- with the experiences matured at the "T. Lucrezio Caro" classical-linguistic lyceum of Rome and based on research being carried out at the moment by the PhD school of the Faculty of Education Sciences of Rome's RomaTre State, University. These experiences focused on the **Cafés Philosophiques** *workshops, a privileged observatory from which to monitor ways of tutoring and integrating programmes/syllabi intended for multi-ethnic educational environments. The* **Cafés Philosophiques,** *as an expression of the CLIL methodology, are considered as extra-curricular activities, although students may be permitted to include them in their CV's/portfolios, provided participation is officially documented. Our goal is that of foregrounding new, multilingual lexicographical parameters with reference to the study of Philosophy, emerging from an exegesis of variations in terminology, from the hermeneutics of ideas, and teaching/learning practices applied to the subject. To this end, a number of other objectives have been added, like: an increase in the students' ability to communicate, an improvement in their conversational skills and they way in which they express their ideas in a foreign language (FL/L2). The CLIL /* **Cafés Philosophiques** *project provides students from multi-ethnic backgrounds with an opportunity to come together in a multilingual context where they are encouraged to discuss some of the central themes of the Western and Eastern philosophical traditions, at a level they find comfortable. The issues may range from those we consider "general" like death, violence as an innate human attribute or an aspect of animals and nature, time, whether we make decisions, or decisions make us, whether we have the right to deny evidence, how to recognize doubt, and, again, the meaning of life, conscience, freedom, the possibility of creating something from nothing, selfishness. Other topics may be decidedly more "everyday" like marriage, learning, taking risks, the contorted meaning of words, technological awareness, the spirit of the times, creativity, sleepwalking, what true friendship is, miracles, laughter in a world of sorrow etc. In brief, this experimental research aims at developing students' capacity for knowledge and their understanding of the history of philosophy, while enhancing their conversational skills in different languages (codes) in a cross-cultural reality (functional multilingualism) related to their senior-secondary-school reality.*

Introduction

Our research project regarding philosophy as a school subject, was first applied in 2000-2004 to the "*School in Hospital*" programme designed for Rome's Umberto I° University Hospital, and later to a four-year (2011-2015) experiment designed for Rome's "*T. Lucrezio Caro*" classical-linguistic lyceum, and still being developed, technically, by the PhD school of the Education Sciences Faculty of Rome's *RomeTre* State University. This project seeks to confirm the extent to which today's school may be considered the privileged "cross-over educational" setting for the practice of CLIL (integrated Content and Language Learning). We have discovered that a similar practice[2] is capable of achieving not only curricular but also extra-curricular results, as in the case of the ***Cafés Philosophiques*** project. As to the relationship between the CLIL language and its curricular contents, both aspects should go hand in hand and be considered on an equal footing during the syllabus-design phase. When outlining the general operative modalities, the following aspects should be kept in mind: valorisation of the students' previous knowledge, integration of pre-existing hard and soft-copy materials, the use of an IWB (images, drawings, mind maps, video tuition), inclusion of meta-reflections with language exercises during curricular and extra-curricular time, as well as flexible, innovative didactic approaches and methods. The language-teaching/learning goals foreseen are: improvement of FL/L2 competence and performance, optimisation of lecture-type lessons, development of extra-curricular learning and an increase in learning itself. Our project has however, confirmed that by shifting the focus from the form

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[2] CLIL: " CLIL is an approach to education having two goals: to teach/ learn both language and content" "EuroCLIL 1994).

to the content of the language and by increasing the learner's self-esteem, the educational process is enriched at two levels in particular: the psychological and the socio-psychological and that neither of them may be subjected to the other or neglected without producing negative results. The CLIL teacher is well aware that teaching does not necessarily or automatically generate learning[3]. Furthermore, it is necessary to study the learner's so-called "built-in syllabus", that is, the language-acquisition phases followed while mastering an L1 or FL/l2. A thorough knowledge of the phases to follow while learning an L1 or an FL/L2, enables teachers to facilitate learning by improving the pedagogical and teaching strategies they avail of. While studying the complex processes involved in language learning, the researchers who examined this "educational cross-over" setting, always kept the following two sets of factors in mind: the set of generally uniform factors (the learning acquisition and interlingua phases) and the set of variable factors (learning strategies, individual differences, situational factors, learning environment).To operate efficaciously, teachers should be aware of and familiar with both sets of factors.[4]

1

The project reproduces the Socratic activities that characterized the **Cafés Philosophiques**, and the numerous extracurricular experimentation environments created over the years, as privileged observatories from which to monitor integrated tutoring and programming, especially as far as multi-ethnic educational realities are concerned.

The methodology centres on cooperative work: in class the teacher of Philosophy carries out metacognitive reflections which, at the end of each two lessons of one hour each, permits the students to carry out activities with the native speaker. This work is done using the FL/ L2 only, and involves giving instructions about how to carry out the tasks assigned, in pairs, in small groups or more numerous teams, and how to correct the work done. Almost all the activities are conducted following the cooperative-learning approach. The first part of the programme is based almost exclusively on glossary activities and on carrying out very short, easily understandable comprehension texts in FL/L2. In the case of a fourth-year class, there is also a mixed-type entrance test consisting of three questions: one open, one closed, one multiple choice. The second half of the 20-hour module foresees, again for a fourth-year class, that the students read longer texts by individual philosophers; some pages regarding Descartes' "Method" , for example, aimed at enabling them, even if guided, to exploit a number of strategies with the help of the IWB (images, drawings, mind maps, video tuition) while mastering specific contents. Meta-cognitive and traditional checks, administered at the end of each phase of about 4/5 hours, constitute means by which to verify the progress made by the learners.

2

Our research project sought to foreground the new, multilingual lexicographical parameters referring to the study of **Philosophy**, emerging from an exegesis of variations in terminology , from the hermeneutics of ideas, and, from practices applied to the teaching/learning of Philosophy as a subject. To this end, we included other objectives in the **Cafés Philosophiques** project**,** like: an increase in the students' ability to communicate, an improvement in their conversational skills and in the way in which they express their ideas in a foreign language (FL/L2). Here we shall indicate, in brief, the general methodological bases and cross-cultural skills FL/L2 of any CLIL project: the development of forms of dialogic learning; the renovation of traditional lesson forms, cooperative-learning and a re-definition of the role of the teacher, who, in this instance, is usually aided by a native speaker. As to learning skills, we have given top priority to: finding and examining sources, organizing documents, interpreting and appraising materials, seeking links and textual insights, identifying keywords, integrating the roles of teacher / native speakers / learners, explaining during lecture-type lessons, reformulating questions / open answers, problem solving and preparing drafts and summaries as a compendium to educational courses. When treating activities complementary to the CLIL meta-linguistic and meta-cognitive process -as in the case of philosophy- it is important to comply with the following: research,

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[3] The CLIL teacher does not teach BICS – Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills- but must ask him/herself a series of questions : the type of communication the students will be involved in; the kind of language the students may need in order to communicate ; the necessary key words; the kind of scaffolding to be provided.

[4] This kind of language was defined, appropriately, as CALP- Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (J.Cummins 1979).

connecting, comparing, associating, sequencing, classifying, hypothesising, analysing, interpreting, producing, imagining, assessing and evaluating.

3

Here, I brief are some of the topics with which the CLIL/**Cafés Philosophiques** project provided the students from multi-ethnic backgrounds for discussion when they came to come together in a multilingual context where they are encouraged to converse on some of the central themes of the Western and Eastern philosophical traditions, at a level they find comfortable. They issues ranged from those we consider of a "general" nature like death, violence as an innate human attribute, or an aspect of animals and nature, time, whether we make decisions, or decisions make us, whether we have the right to deny evidence, how to recognize doubt, and, again, the meaning of life, conscience, freedom, the possibility of creating something from nothing, selfishness. Other topics were decidedly more "everyday" like marriage, learning, taking risks, the contorted meaning of words, technological awareness, the spirit of the times, creativity, sleepwalking, what true friendship is, miracles, laughter in a world of sorrow.

Conclusion

Summing up, this experimental research project seeks to promote students' ability to grow acquainted with and understand **The History of Philosophy**, while acquiring the ability to converse in a number of languages (codes) in a multi-lingual, intercultural context related to the senior-secondary school cycle. Reflecting on education is one of philosophy's acts *par excellence*. It may be considered as a representation of a meta-reflection on human development, capable of explaining the important "gap" between "what we are" and "what we shall be potentially", as we pass through the various stages of our development. This, with a view not only to understanding ourselves, but also, the historical-cultural ambit within which we learn both an L1 and a FL/L2, in order to draw from it, particular and probable behavioural-linguistic indications favourable also towards New Technologies within Scholastic 2.0 environments, Iin the belief that philosophical dialectics is truly capable of building up a discourse valuable not only for the individual, but for all. The problem of the meaning of knowledge (why I learn or why I have to learn) emerges as a fundamental philosophical issue, at the moment when religious responses are weakening[5]. The rise of an increasingly comprehensive and dynamic representation of a technical picture of the world has surpassed the limits upon which earlier models of knowing were founded and built. The twenty-year-old CLIL project has demonstrated that communication is a dynamic act, not a fact governed by fixed, standard forms. The curricular and extra-curricular communication contemplated by the **Cafés Philosophiques** include the CLIL task of reaffirm understanding, an aspect already implicit in the dynamics of contrastive linguistics, as a meta-communications and philosophical dialogic educational model. We hasten to repeat that dialogue is the paradigm of all communicative relationships, so much so that, dialogue is the best means by which to achieve communication.In order that there dialogue may occur, all the interlocutors need to know that their individual positions are never absolute, unchangeable. One needs the ability to open up to what the other has to say; if this openness is lacking there can be no true dialogue. To engage in dialogue we need to be willing to listen. And so, the dialogic model becomes the paradigm of effective communication whether in an L1, of in an FL/L2

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