



## Multicultural Education for Language Teacher Education and CLIL

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### Abstract

*Multicultural education is getting vital importance nowadays as it could be one of the keys in order to get a better understanding of one another in future generations. At the same time, a new trend is born in some schools across Europe: multicultural schools. They are becoming highly important due to the existing need of reorienting the principles that control human relationships. There should be, at least, two principles, which prevail: equality and reciprocity; and these schools bet for them. In the teaching-learning process the equality principle should be remarkable in order to achieve the important goal of learning how to coexist in multicultural contexts. Reciprocity is another extremely important value in order to get a real coexistence in schools.*

*The teacher's job is becoming more and more complex because demands placed upon them are increasing, especially for language teachers whose competences have been amplified in the last decades. They should be trained to deal with cultural differences where the principal problems and conflicts appears due to the fact that those cultures are ignored or overrated, and not because of their lack of understanding. Foreign/second language teachers should be prepared to promote and implement the concept of plurilinguism and the operational approach in class. It could be the linguistic skills what places those teachers in a more challenging situation because they are often the first contact for immigrant students. Thus multicultural education in foreign/second language teachers is essential.*

*Nowadays, one of the most innovative approaches in second language teaching is CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning). It integrates four dimensions (Culture, Content, Communication and Cognition) whose interaction makes effective and efficient the learning of the foreign language and the content. Within these four axes, it is culture the one that needs specific attention, as it is not sufficiently developed.*

*Our paper will get deeper in the analysis of all these factors, and as a final conclusion, it will state the need to develop the 'cultural axis' of CLIL.*

### 1. Introduction

There is no doubt that one of the causes of the greater social plurality is the increasing immigration. These migratory effects bring about a negative and stereotyped view of immigrants as well as the cultural racism. Then, multicultural education can, and should achieve the social and school integration of pupils from immigrant families and the normalization of their presence in everyday life, too.

It is really important to understand personal cultural background and experiences as well as those of the others when you coexist in a pluralistic society. It is within these contexts where multicultural education takes on usefulness. The arrival of learners from different cultural backgrounds to schools gives rise to various challenges for the students: different culture, race, language, learning and teaching approaches; and for teachers because they have to update their cultural knowledge and their professional skills in order to be able to implement curricula in a multicultural classroom.

However, the educator is directly and constantly in contact with the social reality and, therefore, with its educational branch. Teacher training is the basis on which either success or failure depends. Teachers are the key to success in the near future, as well as the starting point to change our society to make them aware of multiculturalism and interculturality.

"The teacher profession is becoming more and more complex because demands placed upon teachers are increasing, so we are facing a huge challenge, especially for language teachers whose competences have been amplified in the last decades. They should be trained to deal with cultural differences where the principal problems and conflicts appears due to the fact that those cultures are ignored or overrated, and not because of their lack of understanding. That is what is highly important: to educate future teachers not only in their cognitive capacities, but also in affective and ethic dimensions, by integrating in their professional and personal competences attitudes of tolerance, opening and even empathy to others" [1: 76-77].



Culture should be one of the key aspects, mainly, for language teachers. Although this is gaining importance both in initial teacher training and in the latest methodological approaches, it still needs to be properly developed.

Being CLIL a reference approach along Europe, and taking into account that culture is one of their four axes, there are some researches that evidence that this is one of the less matured concepts [2].

## 2. Multicultural Education

Multicultural education describes those educational programs that integrate different ethnic, linguistic and cultural aspects in curricula and instructional practices [3]. It bets for the mutual enrichment, it offers the opportunity to show real cultural differences, to compare and exchange them, in a word, to interact: action in the activity; a compulsory principle in every educational relationship. It provides the diverse learners with skills and abilities to manage activities with common norms and regulations [4].

Multicultural education pretends to know and respect other cultures, to recognise and accept the cultural pluralism as a social reality, to contribute to the establishment of a society where equal rights and equity prevail over discrimination and to help all students to develop their personal identity [5]. Its main pedagogical principles are strengthening of the school, recognition of every student to receive the best personalized education, positive appreciation of different cultures, languages, and their presence in the school, improving school success and promotion of the ethnic minority students and promote an active communication and interaction among all the students and an active participation of the families in the school.

Among the remarkable reasons why this new trend is born in the schools we can find the need of reorienting the principles that control human relationships. There should be two principles, which prevail over the rest: equality and reciprocity.

In the teaching–learning process the equality principle should be remarkable in order to achieve the goal of learning how to coexist in multicultural contexts. The desirable multi/intercultural coexistence will be settled down when every student, without distinction, has the ability to perceive that their values are recognized in everyday school life, in the countless daily incidents in their relationships with classmates and teachers. It should be built working every day on the value of equity. In this new task, is the teacher who must change their mind firstly and give priority to the educational component rather, than to tuition.

The other important value in order to get a real coexistence in schools is the reciprocity. Sometimes in schools, everybody is used to fix their look in the “other”, those who do not belong to our culture. They must improve their linguistic skills, their academic progress, they should change their difficult behaviour and the adaptation is their main task. It is the immigrant who, despite of its shortcomings, feels the need of modifying partially or fully their cultural identity.

### 2.1 Teachers' Role

Most teachers consider the culture and language of their student from minority race as an obstacle in their school integration. There are too many teachers that are not adequately prepared to teach linguistically and culturally diverse students so they feel insecure. The origin of this problem generally lies in the training of the teacher. In order to exceed this feeling, teachers must take into account a number of conditions to overcome difficulties, such as organising lectures including practical activities, they should mainly go for a cooperative learning where the control of the activities is not only focused on the teacher but also on the whole group. It is difficult because the teacher feels that they lose the control of the class, but results will be much more positive about coexistence, maturity and effective learning. They must also develop coherent attitudes with the objectives of intercultural education, providing them with the necessary resources.

Subjects on this topic are hardly found in the curriculum of teacher education. Reality changes as everything in life, so their curriculum should be suited to this “new” demand. It does not require modifying the teaching-learning style completely; there is a large range of ways to work in multicultural education because the training of the teacher is a lifelong task. It is a social science which means that they always have to be up to date.

To equip the teaching body with skills and competences for its new roles, it is necessary to improve both high-quality initial teacher education, and to establish a coherent process of continuous professional development to keep teachers up to date with the demands of the society, otherwise we will not solve the situation in which the majority of the teachers are nowadays. We understand their frustration because of the lack of confidence; they feel they need to work efficiently in this challenging setting, they need programs, courses and projects in multicultural education. Some of these ways are the programs promoted by the teachers associations but almost all of them are neither adjusted to the needs of the educational and socio-communitarian reality, nor to the demands of teachers themselves.



This could be the reason why many of these programs are regarded as a failure, due to their uselessness.

Consequently, practical proposals of multicultural education should be brought closer to everyday reality in schools. Despite the fact that teachers' need to be ready for "educating on diversity" is already assimilated, now it is time to define how it should be adapted to what is pedagogically correct. One of the problems arises here: the pragmatic and academic minds of the majority of teachers who teach in either primary or secondary education (compulsory education) have a deficit view of the "others" regarding several aspects: lack of linguistic and academic proficiency, cultural patterns experienced in their families, which slow down or which are incompatible with the usual school dynamics, increasing conflicts in multicultural school settings, non-standard or difficult relationship with immigrant families, etc.

Frequently, it is the language teacher the one who faces this new challenge. Indeed, it is true that foreign language classes are an ideal place for this type of education and that is what has been done almost in every country. "The cultural dimension of foreign language education has grown in the last two decades. However, research exploring the relationship between language learning and insights and attitudes toward culture is limited and studies have not been able to show if there is a causal relationships between the two" [6].

When language teachers understand that the diversity in their learners construct knowledge, they will use their backgrounds and their experiences as the essence of the learning-teaching process. Language teachers must affirm students' identities by using their background as a resource to teach and learn. They should move towards acceptance in order to help students to incorporate their linguistic, cultural and background resources into all aspects of schooling, as well as, setting clear and high expectations for students [7].

### 3. CLIL: Its Cultural Axis

The traditional approaches to foreign language teaching did not consider culture teaching as a priority. They used to focus their attention on improving students' linguistic competence. Nowadays, research on multicultural and intercultural education helps teachers know which are the main contents, aims and pedagogical principles they should control.

Content and Language Integrated Learning is the cutting edge for second language teaching method in Europe. CLIL integrates four dimensions (the four C's in which CLIL is based: Culture, Content, Communication and Cognition) whose interaction makes effective and efficient learning the second language (L2) [8]. However, despite the large spread of CLIL in Europe, the basic premise is not being met. Among these four "Cs", the cultural axis needs specific attention and it is not developed yet[9]. Moreover, Coyle [10] pointed out that the study of these individual four dimensions is just the starting point in order to draw conclusive results and for the development of this approach itself.

Different researches have verified that the two more developed axes (communication and content) work properly so students have significantly improved their skills when compared to non-CLIL students [11]. Furthermore, research papers focus on isolated axes like the improvement of communicative skills in primary and secondary education students [12] or the acquisition of content and vocabulary in L2 in CLIL and non-CLIL groups [13]. Then, it is highly necessary to strengthen the cultural axis as it pursues the awareness toward learning community. The development of international/cultural understanding must be included as the premise of this approach will not be reached otherwise.

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