



eCLIL4You a European Comenius Project to Promote Language Learning through Web 2.0 Tools from Pre-school to Lower Secondary Education

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Abstract

A group of 11 European schools have joined together in a Comenius project with the aim to create learning environments able to develop the lifelong learning key competences addressed by the Council of Europe. Active and cooperative learning, constructivism, authenticity, sheltered instruction, learner autonomy, ICT and media education are a frame of reference for the development of CLIL learning materials aimed to discover local and European environments through English and national languages. The partnership has designed discovery activities and implemented effective teaching and learning strategies able to facilitate the learning of both content and language with learners of different ages and in different European school contexts. The quality of the learning process, the active inclusion of all the learners, the use of ICT to promote learner autonomy and cooperation with the partner schools have played a central role in all the actions of the project. ICT tasks have been designed to get the students think creatively, create materials cooperatively with the European partners through web 2.0 tools and the European platform "eTwinning". The outcomes of the first year activities have showed an increased motivation in language learning; the implementation of creativity, cooperation and learner autonomy through the use of web 2.0 tools and social networking as learning tools; a risen awareness of the value of the diversity of European environments; the need to collect the teaching and learning CLIL materials suitable and graduated for learners of different ages in a final e-book. In addition, the use of the European eTwinning platform and web 2.0 tools has become an important part of the language and plurilingual methodology in our Institute to such an extent that other two European eTwinning projects have been developed this year, one related to Multilingual songs with 4 European schools and one to "A rainbow of feelings" with five countries. Examples of how ICT has supported the language and content learning process, especially through the use of web 2.0 (calameo, picture trail, photopeach, google forms and drive, glogsters, videogames, chat, skype, animal cartoon...), will be provided in the oral presentation, with samples taken from the different active projects in our Institute.

1. Introduction

Content and Language Integrated Learning has become a priority concern in the last decade in the European education debate as clearly showed by many European official documents. The Comenius partner Institutions involved in the project believe that CLIL should be an opportunity given to all learners to activate and improve their language and learning skills through experiences appropriate to their age, cognitive and language competences. As agreed during a preparatory visit in Italy in January 2012, the partnership has started an action-research process aimed to develop a set of practical materials related to the theme "Environment" for learners of different ages (5 to 13), based on appropriate learning strategies and the use of ICT and media education as tools for cooperative learning, networking and understanding of the value of European cultures and languages. Researches in L2 have shown that students are motivated when they use it as a tool for communication, and when they see the purpose for mastering a language [1]. As our CLIL project is intended for young children, the following educational and pedagogical cornerstones represent the framework for all the learning experiences activated throughout the project:

- language learning is viewed as holistic, which means that the target language is seen both as a medium of instruction (used to discover, elaborate and expand the content) and of learners' communication (while being concentrated on the content, students are more motivated and improve their fluency);



- 'thinking' and 'on going reflecting' on the content and on the learning process in the target language play a central part in the project as they develop learner's mental processes and conceptualization [2];
- students are seen as active constructors that build new knowledge on previous experiences thorough discovery learning (they take initiatives, make choices, collect data, repackage information);
- activities are contextualized and built on students' interests and experiences; they are included in the curriculum and respond to different learning styles and intelligences [3];
- the learning experience is based on linguistically and accessible 'tasks' that are cognitively demanding;
- teachers act as 'facilitators' and 'mediators': they encourage cooperation, activate prior knowledge and 'learning to learn strategies', provide comprehensible input and scaffolding (appropriate strategies/materials that facilitate autonomous learning through the target language);
- the 'quality' of the learning process is more important than the final product;
- collaborative and peer learning, on-going and self-assessment are central in promoting social skills and metacognitive awareness of the learning process.

The partner Institutions have chosen the theme "Environment" for its cross-curricular nature, flexibility and inclusion in the curriculum of the partner schools and also because it allows the involvement of teachers of different subjects (Geography, Science, Art, Music, English, History), learners of different ages and the outside world. Throughout the project activities the Institutions are also exploiting creative ways to develop the attitude of young learners towards the learning of other languages and the discovery of the variety of European environments. The cross-curricular activities are run in English and the partner languages are gradually introduced through multilingual glossaries.

2. CLIL, ICT and task approach

Good teaching is about "starting" from the children and helping them to think for themselves through challenging and motivating activities. There is no doubt that ICT has an enormous impact in education in general and in language learning in particular. Research shows that there are several ways in which ICT can lead to improved information-processing skills by enabling multiple and complex representations of information. The partnership has observed that the use of collaborative platforms and web 2.0 as learning tools in CLIL activities can lead to:

- increased students' active participation;
- authentic use of the target language in meaningful contexts;
- increased input and output in the 4 skills (listening, reading writing and speaking);
- improved cross curricular work;
- development of language and intercultural awareness.

The challenge for the teacher is to find ways to use ICT to encourage thinking and cooperation between children through the use of the target language. As language-learning is facilitated when students are cooperatively involved in working on a task, the whole project has been based on authentic "tasks" so as to involve learners in activities in which their attention is focused on meaning rather than linguistic structures and in which they are required to negotiate meaning and make choices in what, when and how to learn [4]. Through collaboration on the project activities students can learn to help themselves learn, ask for help from each other and from the teacher, learn language by using it in real settings, explain what they are learning and how they are learning [5]. The integration of ICT, task based activities, face-to-face and online work in CLIL requires an accurate planning of the learning paths in order to facilitate decoding of the digital texts, development of thinking and communicative skills. Networking through the European eTwinning platform, video-conferencing and web 2.0 tools have engaged children in collaborative learning and knowledge sharing with other students not physically present.

3. Clil, skills and web 2.0

The planning has been organized around four steps illustrated in this paragraph through tables that show how strategies and ICT tools have been integrated in the project in order to develop thinking, cognitive and communicative skills and the final product of the various tasks.

3.1 First stage: tuning in

This first stage of the planning implies setting activities that activate students' previous knowledge, introduce the task to be completed and new linguistic items related to the specific language of the subject. Students are actively involved in the planning process by discussing the expected learning outcomes, the steps of the task and the collaboration procedures (in class and online). Some tuning in activities have been done cooperatively online with the partner schools while others have been developed in class by using strategies from cooperative learning. The table below shows how the activation of learning strategies and the use of web 2.0 tools have promoted the development of skills and contributed to the implementation of the project activities.

Strategies	ICT – web 2.0	Skills	Activities-Products
Brainstorming Discussions Surveys K-W-L True - False - I don't know Round table Placemat Making predictions etc.	https://drive.google.com http://padlet.com http://popplet.com www.onlinecharttool.com blog and picture galleries in the etwinning platform	Questioning Predicting Identifying Organizing Sharing ideas Listening Planning etc.	Panel discussions to exchange ideas, surveys and brainstorming activities related to: - environment - project mascots - climate and weather - animals in the local habitat - water (rivers) - Christmas decorations in the local environments

(Table 1. Tuning in)

3.2 Second stage: finding out.

Teachers prepare accessible materials and provide the appropriate scaffolding to promote "autonomous learning". Students search and select information, work cooperatively in class and online to create common digital materials in the form of interactive games or activities with the European partners. The target language is the vehicle of communication and its use allows students to consolidate and expand the linguistic and content knowledge they have acquired in their everyday experience.

Strategies	ICT – web 2.0	Skills	Products
Think-pair-share Scanning, skimming Reading guides Information gap Listening with key words Running dictation Half sentences Graphic organisers Concept maps Experiments etc.	www.google.it www.youtube.com www.glogster.com www.voki.com www.picuretrail.com https://drive.google.com www.jigsawplanet.com www.sliderocket.com http://photopeach.com Windows Movie Maker Adobe After Effects CS 6 eTwinning platform	Finding resources Researching Discovering Reading Rewriting Selecting Collecting Summarizing etc.	Presentation of the schools in their environment; monthly observations of a tree in the school playground and recording of temperature and weather; Christmas photo hunting for decorations to create online jigsaws; creation of games to give info about local animals; creation of an animated animal cartoon; creation of identity cards about local rivers; creation of water poems; water experiments.

(Table 2. Finding out).

3.3 Third stage: sorting out

At this stage students compare information from the partner countries and summarize results in a final product.

Strategies	ICT – web 2.0	Skills	Products
Giving choices Differentiate activities according to learning styles Cooperative work Drama, songs Games etc.	eTwinning platform http://it.calameo.com/ http://bookbuilder.cast.org https://quizslides.com www.onlinecharttool.com Microsoft Excel http://ftp.ihmc.us www.wordle.net www.skype.com	Interpreting Illustrating Solving Listening Making choices Comparing Contrasting Performing Relating etc.	Collecting, comparing and organizing data from the partner materials into a final product (poster, concept map, online quiz, electronic book, songs, graphs, multilingual tables); videoconferences.

(Table 3. Sorting out).

3.4. Fourth stage: evaluation

Students and teachers evaluate the tasks, reflect upon the process of learning, notice specific difficulties they met and discuss ways of improvement. They make proposals for improvements.

Strategies	ICT – web 2.0	Skills	Products
Self and peer evaluation Teacher evaluation and assessment Project website	Google forms www.weebly.com	Discussing Generalising Examining Responding Reflecting etc.	Personal and class portfolios Questionnaires Can do statements

(Table 4. Evaluation).

4. Conclusion

The inclusion of web 2.0 tools as learning and thinking tools together with the use of the European eTwinning platform for networking and cooperating with ten European schools have certainly helped children to acquire new competences. Not only they had opportunities to improve the target language (English), but also to access a wide variety of new skills unrelated to the actual language-learning. These include the practical skills needed for the completion of the tasks (e.g., videotaping, making posters, conducting an interview, using online presentations, editing photos and videos, panning a game, etc.) as well as cognitive and employability skills (critical reflection, self-evaluation, cooperative work and leadership). These skills have been practiced throughout the project activities within a "CLIL experiential learning environment" and can be of great benefit to the general education of the whole individual.

References

- [1] Vlachos, 2005 and 2006
- [2] Marsh, 2008
- [3] Gardner, 1983
- [4] Sonja Knutson, Experiential learning in second language classrooms, 2003
- [5] Wilhelm, 1999