



Intercultural Education in CLIL

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Abstract

The rapid and significant spread of CLIL is not supported by a comparable level of research [1]. There is much more still to investigate in order to empirically prove whether this methodological approach works efficiently. The basic premise is not being met since there is clear evidence that one of their four main axes is underdeveloped: the cultural one. Despite intercultural competence being one of the greatest potentials of CLIL, it is not automatically inherent in it and needs explicit attention [2]. Language, content and culture should be taught together as they are all part of everyday reality of the student. Then, it is highly necessary to strengthen the cultural axis as it pursues the awareness toward learning community.

Moreover, the development of intercultural education is one of the main goals of the 21st century education and it is within the most consistent educational policies all over the world. Looking at various topics from different cultural angles, realizing that other cultures tend to see things differently, have different values and beliefs, is one of the most valuable experiences that CLIL may offer. Students need to learn about other countries because there is evidence that people's willingness to cooperate significantly increases the better they know each other. If we want to prepare our student to succeed in a globalized world and enable them to work in teams across national and cultural borders, intercultural communicative competence needs to be the ultimate educational goal and it must be placed at the heart of our teaching [3]. Students need to become aware of the hidden cultural codes as well as of the appropriate linguistic and non-linguistic means and strategies to address them; that is, students need to be taught how to keep the flow of communication. This way, I am designing an intercultural education model for CLIL, whose main guidelines will be presented here.

1. Introduction

The growing interest in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is evident as it is implemented in some schools of all the European countries except Denmark, Greece, Iceland and Turkey [4]. The main reason of this spread is that students develop school subject content and the target language (English in the majority of the contexts because of its instrumentality) at the same time, interdependently and with no detrimental cost to their mother tongue. Due to its extensive and massive expansion and after more than twenty years of experience in some places, we are supposed to be at a determining moment in which CLIL practitioners at different education levels – Primary, Secondary and Higher Education- are asking for further guidelines and analysis in order to check whether they are doing it properly or not and how they can reinforce their methodological training to achieve one of the main goals: to get better qualified and globally competent students.

Despite the flexibility of CLIL – more than one model can be found – the majority of the empirical research studies that have been carried out up to the moment mainly focuses on isolated axes. Within its four blocks (4C's: Content, Communication, Cognition and Culture), the performance of content and communicative axes has caught the attention of most of the scholars and it has been verified that they work efficiently, so it now can be stated that CLIL students improve their skills when compared to non-CLIL students.

Consequently, here we have one of the debateable issues of CLIL: the role of the cultural axis. "In the coverage of content, we cannot ignore knowledge of culture either" [5, 591]. It should be clear that language, content and culture must be taught together as each of them are present on everyday reality of the student. Moreover, culture influences both language learning and content learning. On the one hand, foreign language teachers are more aware of the necessity and the importance of developing this axis in order to accomplish one of the main purposes of the supranational, national and local educational institutions, which has to do with Interculturalism and social cohesion. They have more experience on teaching culture because it is frequently included in their curriculum. On the other hand, non-linguistic subject teachers rarely take into account the role of communication in their lessons hence they do not necessarily include current affairs or cultural features within their lesson planning. Consequently, CLIL teachers need guidance in empowering their learners to make the transition from cultural awareness to intercultural understanding.

As with bilingual and multilingual education, there has been increasing European educational policies in connection to the field of Intercultural Education (IE) and cooperation in order to face the difficult challenge to provide quality education for all regardless of cultures, beliefs, customs and religions. Actually, since 2002 when the Council of Europe launched the project called “The New Challenge of Intercultural Education” they started to aim at promoting the awareness of the need of introducing as an element of IE the interfaith dialogue focusing on religion as a cultural phenomenon [6]. One of the main goals was to put forward the introduction of common European principles for managing diversity at school considering the greater social plurality of their countries [7].

2. Intercultural Education

Firstly, and before designing the IE model for CLIL, it must be cleared up what we understand by IE. It aims to know and respect other cultures, to develop a tolerant attitude towards ethnic minorities, to recognize and accept 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. Its fundamental pedagogical principles are: improving and strengthening of the school and the human and equality values of the society; recognition of the personal right of every student to receive the best personalized education, taking care of their personal identity formation; positive appreciation of different cultures, languages, and their presence in school; diversity awareness and respect for differences without underestimate none of them; to fight against racism and discrimination; to attempt to overcome prejudices and stereotypes; improving school success and promotion of the ethnic minority students; active communication and interaction among all the students, they will take part of the teaching-learning process democratically; active participation of the families in the school and promote the relationships between the various ethnic group by inserting the school in the local community [8].

The “Guidelines on Intercultural Education” by the UNESCO was launched with the mission of directing educational policy worldwide and guaranteeing universal primary education for all by this year. In addition, this document provides three key principles for IE: “i. IE respects the cultural identity of the learner through the provision of culturally appropriate and responsive quality education for all; ii. IE provides every learner with the cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to achieve active and full participation in society; iii. IE provides all learners with cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills that enable them to contribute to respect, understanding and solidarity among individuals, ethnic, social, cultural and religious groups and nations.” [9, 32].

CLIL not only pursues to increase linguistic competence, but it also aims at acquiring a deepening intercultural awareness through the positioning of self and the “otherness”. Consequently, classrooms (in general, not only the foreign language ones) should be “culturally sensitive places to learn” [10, 47]. Learning through a foreign language should serve as the first stepping-stones to open students’ minds to a different perspective, a foreign one. “Relativizing cultural perspectives and the ability to shift between them can be seen as a key element in intercultural learning and development of intercultural competence” [11, 32].

As mentioned before, there are not many studies connected to the cultural axis of CLIL [12][13] but those ones state some of the advantages of using CLIL as a pedagogical approach to enhance learners’ intercultural communicative competence (ICC) [14]. Some of these benefits are related to the real materials in the target language that teachers can use in the classroom, its authenticity helps students to get some insights on different foreign perspectives. Actually, information and communication technology offers measureless opportunities to access to this kind of teaching materials to be used in content subjects. González-Rodríguez and Borham-Puyal carried out a study in which they used multicultural literary texts in order to promote ICC in CLIL contexts. It brought about great results and they mentioned that “by reading multicultural fictions that portray varied attitudes, feelings and assumptions on a given topic, students will acquire a richer and broader perspective on a theme... this would allow students to become interculturally competent as they explore a topic from foreign viewpoints” [15, 110].

3. Intercultural Education Model for CLIL

Despite there have been an endless number of scholars who have approached IE, Michael Byram is the main and most outstanding reference. According to his model of ICC, there are some skills, attitudes, knowledge and critical cultural awareness that need to be developed thus we will take them into account in our model. Some examples of these are [14]: knowledge about social and individual interaction, about other people and cultures; being able to understand, interpret and make connections between events, customs and even documents from another country; mediation between different

interlocutors of one's own and foreign cultural practices and beliefs from a critical and constructive point of view.

Due to the considerable potential of CLIL for adding value to the curriculum in terms of intercultural understanding, we are working on an IE model within this pedagogical approach. It will be organised according to different competences previously defined and it will be teachable, learnable and assessable. The first step towards the design of this is not only considering Byram's model of ICC, but also found many other models of IE that have been promoted around the world such as Banks' Holistic Model, Bildung Theories [16] and educational policies.

There are various ways in which the term competence is used. It is neither a synonym of ability, nor simply a matter of skills. It is a combination of knowledge, attitudes and skills to successfully cope with tasks, challenges or difficulties, individually or together with other people. Intercultural competence therefore involves a set of knowledge, attitudes and skills to effectively and appropriately communicate and interact in different cultural contexts with foreigners, and to understand the existing differences between them.

It consists of an intercultural competence training model that will be developed through a pedagogical methodology that combines content and foreign language. In order to achieve our main purpose (to raise our students' intercultural awareness), the general sketch of this model is divided into two big and main areas: the intrapersonal competence area (cognitive) and the interpersonal competence area (social). In each of them, we will define the type of knowledge, skills and attitudes that must be enhanced as a continuum so as to enrich students' progress and final results: a better performance in the communicative, content and cultural axes of CLIL. Our model will offer interesting ways for the coordinated work between the content and the language teachers of the CLIL team by stating the work of the content teacher as the responsible for the curriculum organization, and the language teacher as the designer of the methodological construct of the integrated curriculum that this approach established as one of its mainstays.

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