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## **CLIL 'ARENA'—EPISODE 1**

### **Reflection on CLIL implementation in an EFL Primary School classroom**

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Hearing about CLIL and also witnessing a lesson at a school in Belgium made me very enthusiastic about trying out what I considered to be an innovative approach which could open up new horizons for the EFL world in Greece. Fortunately, as I had recently been appointed to the 3rd Experimental Primary School of Evosmos in Thessaloniki, which is under the supervision of the School of English at the Aristotle University, I was in a position to try out new methodologies and approaches.

I taught the subject of geography using the CLIL approach for five years. During the first year tentative steps were made as we were unsure as to how this new approach would be received by the pupils but also by the parents. This is the reason why at first CLIL was only implemented in one of the Year 6 geography classes. Geography through CLIL was planned according to the 4 Cs framework (Coyle, 1999) which combined the elements of content, communication, cognition and culture.

It was obvious from the beginning that the pupils were unsure, and I could also say a little afraid, of what the geography through CLIL lesson would entail, especially the pupils who felt that their level of English was not so good. Therefore, to help the pupils feel safer in this environment they were given the opportunity to voice their concerns and also to make suggestions about how they would like the lesson to be conducted. Suggestions they made included the use of computers, games and, in general, ideas which didn't include the traditional use of the course book.

Throughout the school year the pupils were had the opportunity to give feedback on the lessons. Feedback is an essential ingredient of learning and an on-going two-way process in which teachers and learners are both sources and receivers of feedback (Skenderis & Laskaridou, 2009). There was a 'feedback' box in the classroom where they could write any comments they wished and a common decision was made between teacher and learners that the comments would be read out and discussed in class every two weeks.

The syllabus was based on the National Curriculum but the pupils were not given the course book for a number of reasons. As the medium of instruction was English, we didn't want pupils looking at the materials in the Greek language before the actual lesson. Moreover, it was agreed with some of the other teachers of the class to adopt a cross-curricular approach regarding the subjects of physics, art and music. In general, the geography lesson was conducted using task-based, learner-centered and holistic approaches. Learners were given the chance to discover knowledge for themselves and draw their own conclusions.

An example of how teachers collaborated can be seen with the unit on the solar system. Learners weren't presented with all the information about the planets but rather, through watching videos, they were able to record information regarding the size, colour and other characteristics of the planets. They were then given worksheets where they had to colour the planets, order them according to their position in the solar system and describe their favourite planet explaining the reasons they chose this particular planet. Some pupils suggested they invent their own planet and indeed they were given the opportunity to do so. The results of this task were extremely interesting. By doing such an activity learners not only expressed their creativity, but also revised and used terminology, concepts, and knowledge which had been covered in the previous lessons.

The physics teacher who was also the art teacher helped them use a mathematical equation to determine the size of the planets in relation to each other. They further went on to create their own solar system using styrofoam. In this way, a cross-curricular approach to the teaching of geography was adopted with the inclusion of mathematics, physics and art. What is important to mention here is that the pupils were unaware that they were learning about so many subjects as they were concentrating on a 'theme' (the solar system) and producing creative work. When the planets were completed they were hung up in the classroom by the pupils whose sense of pride was immense. The whole class was involved in one way or another- whether it was solving an equation or painting the planets. They all had something to contribute. We finished off the unit on the solar system with a song about the planets and the music teacher showed them how to perform the song with the use of musical instruments.

All I can say is that this was one of the most satisfying moments in my experience as a teacher and after a feedback session with parents, teachers and pupils we realised that they had been left with a very satisfying and positive feeling as well. Even though I was unsure of how to proceed at first, I was slowly able to get a grasp on things. The lesson itself showed me the way. One of the challenges a CLIL teacher faces is how to present new knowledge using a foreign language and at the same time making sure that all the pupils understand. I believe that my experience as an EFL teacher was beneficial in this as I dealt with vocabulary and new concepts as I do in a language class. Preparing materials and worksheets is also quite demanding as it is necessary to find the balance between language and new knowledge.

Experiencing the enthusiasm, the acquisition of knowledge and development of the class I found teaching geography through CLIL extremely rewarding for both pupils and teacher.

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