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## **The Case for Geography through CLIL: Exploring the Linguistic and Intercultural Potential in Thrace**

### **Η περίπτωση της μεθόδου CLIL: εξερευνώντας την γλωσσική και διαπολιτισμική δυναμική στην Θράκη**

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*This article focuses on the CLIL approach as it was integrated into the teaching curriculum for a complete school year (2014-2015) and implemented with 6<sup>th</sup> year students at the 1st Experimental Primary School of Alexandroupolis, Thrace. Driven from the theoretical principles underpinning CLIL, the article argues for Geography as the most appropriate subject area justified by the students' linguistic profile and the sociocultural context in Thrace. The specific pedagogic experience views CLIL as a highly dynamic alternative to current mainstream teaching practices and a challenging approach, mutually beneficial for both content and language learning as well as for students' and teachers' linguistic and intercultural competence enhancement. The CLIL experiences in the particular educational context offer useful pedagogic insight with regard to a) learners' active and meaningful classroom engagement, b) enhancing learners' cognitive and metacognitive skills according to Bloom's revised taxonomy, c) developing a sense of community belonging into the classroom culture, d) constructing cultural and intercultural awareness in a noncompetitive learning environment, e) fostering learner empowerment. On the microstrategy level, the article focuses on a lesson plan detailed analysis, thus justifying its main argument that CLIL has a role to play in shaping future flexible, enriching and empowering multifaceted language learning and content learning experiences alike into current multilingual/multicultural contexts.*

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*Το παρόν άρθρο εστιάζει στην προσέγγιση CLIL, όπως αυτή ενσωματώθηκε στο πρόγραμμα διδασκαλίας και εφαρμόστηκε σε μαθητές της ΣΤ τάξης στο 1ο Πειραματικό Δημοτικό Σχολείο Αλεξανδρούπολης στην Θράκη το σχολικό έτος 2014-2015. Βασισμένο στις θεωρητικές αρχές, οι οποίες διέπουν τη μέθοδο CLIL, το άρθρο υποστηρίζει ότι το μάθημα της Γεωγραφίας αποτελεί την πλέον κατάλληλη θεματική, καθώς αυτό εξηγείται από το γλωσσικό προφίλ των μαθητών και το κοινωνικοπολιτισμικό πλαίσιο της Θράκης. Η συγκεκριμένη παιδαγωγική εμπειρία θεωρεί τη μέθοδο CLIL ως μια ιδιαίτερα δυναμική εναλλακτική απέναντι στις επικρατούσες διδακτικές πρακτικές και ως μια προκλητική*

προσέγγιση, αποτελεσματική τόσο στο περιεχόμενο του γνωστικού αντικείμενου και την εκμάθηση γλώσσας όσο και στην γλωσσική και διαπολιτισμική ενίσχυση μαθητών και εκπαιδευτικών. Επίσης προσφέρει χρήσιμα παιδαγωγικά δεδομένα σε σχέση με: α) την ενεργή και ουσιαστική συμμετοχή των μαθητών, β) την προώθηση της ενίσχυσης των γνωστικών και μεταγνωστικών δεξιοτήτων τους σύμφωνα με την αναθεωρημένη ταξινομία του Bloom, γ) την ανάπτυξη της αίσθησης της κοινότητας στην κουλτούρα τάξης, δ) την οικοδόμηση της πολιτισμικής και διαπολιτισμικής συνείδησης σε ένα μη ανταγωνιστικό μαθησιακό περιβάλλον.

**Key words:** Geography, language learning, cognitive/metacognitive skills, learner empowerment, community belonging, cultural/intercultural awareness.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Culture in Language Teaching and the CLIL potential

While there has been a renewed interest in the ELT practice for the potential of CLIL to foster students' cultural and intercultural awareness (Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols, 2008; Perez' Vidal, 2009; Sudhoff, 2010), it would be useful to think about what 'culture' is and how it is associated with language. Attempting a definition of *culture* is rather a multifaceted issue. Bayurt (2010) highlights the significance of the dynamic nature of culture and how difficult it is to give a simple definition of it. Kramersch (1998) seeks to expand the associations of culture with language and its verbal and non-verbal aspects; language embodies and symbolizes cultural reality. Speakers identify themselves and others through their use of language, their language represents a symbol of their *social identity*. Kramersch also (1998) deals with the difficult issue of *representation* and *representativity* when talking about another culture. Who is entitled to speak for whom, to represent whom through spoken and written language? Who has the authority to select what is representative of a given culture? According to what and whose criteria can a cultural feature be called representative of that culture? (Kramersch, 1998, p.9).

In the ELT context we find Adaskou, Britten and Fahsi's (1990) characterization of *culture* more applicable to our study. Adaskou, Britten and Fahsi (1990) define *culture* as a multidimensional concept. According to their definition, the four senses of *culture* can be listed as: (i) the aesthetic sense (media, cinema, music and literature); (ii) the sociological sense (family, education, work and leisure, traditions); (iii) the semantic sense (conceptions and thought processes); (iv) the pragmatic (or sociolinguistic) sense ("appropriacy" in language use). Henceforth, when we refer to *culture* we will be referring to four senses of "culture" as defined by Adaskou, Britten and Fahsi (1990).

Despite the different definitions of culture the connection of language and culture is undeniable, thus language teaching cannot be separated from culture teaching. Byram (1989) and Kramersch (1991) contributing to this revisitation and understanding of the place of culture in foreign language teaching, observe that it cannot take place without teaching the culture of its speakers since language refers to their knowledge and perceptions of the world, the concepts of culture, and cultural learning. Therefore learning a foreign language involves acquiring the cultural frames of reference of the target language culture (Alptekin,

2002, p.58). Kramsh (1991, p.8) also highlights a third essential layer of culture that of 'imagination'. Members of a culture belong to *'imagined communities'*: language is intimately linked not only to the culture that is and the culture that was, but also to the culture of the imagination that governs people's decisions and actions.

However, the English language is not tied to a particular culture. The multinational nature of the English speaking community as well as the increasing use of English by nonnative speakers has turned it into an international language, the current *lingua franca*, or *world English*, which to quote Modiano (2001, p. 342) "is public property" and "is used by anyone to express any cultural heritage and any value system" (Smith, 1987, p.3). *World English* is used by people coming from different cultural backgrounds and it cannot be taught as related only to one native English-speaking culture (Yoshida, 1995, p. 98). This 'cultural turn' in the human and social sciences in the 1980s, brought about the issue of cultural awareness as an aftermath of the development of post-modern society. Globalization also with international cultural changes and exchanges gave birth to a new interest in cultural differences and the relationship with 'the other'. New concepts and issues such as *reflexivity* (Byram 2000, 2005) allege that insight into the individual's cultural understanding of self and one's own identity is significant to gain insight into the practices of other cultures. Also, discussions on *cultural awareness* highlighted the 'translocation' from ethnocentrism to a more relativistic model in which the individual transcends the barrier of the 'self' towards the realization that the world can be seen from many different perspectives (Byram, 1989).

The above revisitations and understandings of culture had implications in language teaching. As Adaskou et al (1990, p. 5) support "almost everything in a language course is capable of carrying a cultural load of some sort". However, until very recently in the foreign language classroom, culture has been provided in the form of supplementary materials, as the transmission of information about the people of the target language/country (Kramsch, 1993, p. 204) or as a fifth skill supplementing the four language skills (Savignon, 1995, p. 141). This is mainly due to the fact that culture was seen as information carried by the language and not as a feature of language itself (Kramsch, 1993 in Bintaka, 2003). Thus, it became important the intercultural component to be introduced in national curricula. The Council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEFR) highlights the significance of an intercultural approach in language education in order to raise awareness of cultural diversity and promote respect for otherness. The potential for intercultural learning is clearly described:

The learner of a second or foreign language and culture does not cease to be competent in his or her mother tongue and the associated culture. [...] The learner does not simply acquire two distinct, unrelated ways of acting and communicating. The language learner becomes plurilingual and develops interculturality. The linguistic and cultural competences in respect of each language are modified by knowledge of the other and contribute to intercultural awareness, skills and know-how. Council of Europe, 2001, p. 43).

The process of becoming *plurilingual* and developing *interculturality* as well as the notion of merging the "linguistic and cultural competences in respect of each language" shows parallels to Kramsch' concept of *thirdness* in foreign language education (Kramsch, 1993). Her metaphor of *third space* explores the potential for foreign language learners to construct an enriched cultural identity – one which is enhanced by the integration and fusion of the various cultural influences present and presented within the learning process. Subscribing to the premise that English is the main linguistic vehicle for international, and

therefore intercultural communication, the teaching of English as a foreign language should develop goal and practices so that not only “members of one culture find ways of interacting effectively with minimal misunderstanding in another culture” (Brislin & Pedersen 1976, p.1 in Bintaka, 2003) but also construct enriched cultural identities. In the light of the above considerations the implementation of CLIL approaches into the language classroom appears to be a promising educational potential particularly multilingual/multicultural contexts (Wildhage/Otten, 2003; Breidbach, 2007 in Sudhoff, 2010).

The intercultural potential of CLIL can also be seen in connection with its engagement with subject areas and topics that contribute to the formation of the cultural identity. History, Geography, literature, art, evolution theories, studying the World Wars, learning about judicial or political systems can be seen as examples of school mediated additions to the process of constructing cultural identity. Undeniably, all school subjects could serve as building blocks in the learners’ process of growing into a culture, i.e. enculturation process. However, in CLIL classes, the intercultural dimension of teaching is added and plays a central role.

### ***1.2 Schools in Thrace: the linguistic and cultural context***

The student population in Thrace varies from monolingual to bilingual and multilingual ones. In schools coexist monolingual students whose L1 (first language) is Greek, bilingual students of Greek and some other language(s) mainly Russian and Albanian and bilingual students of languages other than Greek coming from the Muslim community of Thrace whose L1 is Turkish or Pomakish. Students in the multilingual/ multicultural Thrace are of various religions, the majority of them Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Armenians and a few Jews. The culturally dominant community is the Greek Christian Orthodox whose values influence all the others communities living in the area. According to the goals and specific aims of the Revised 2001 Curriculum for EFL teaching English language state school teachers of primary and secondary schools in Thrace need to:

- i. Include a cultural element in their lessons and integrate culture instruction in their teaching;
- ii. Demonstrate the international features of English primarily and secondarily the cultural elements of English speaking countries;
- iii. Prepare their students to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds, in other words help them develop intercultural communication skills;
- iv. Make their students aware of their own culture and of the other cultures that coexist in the area of Thrace.

It becomes clear that the linguistic and cultural diversity in schools of Thrace claims more than anywhere else in Greece the development of a language pedagogy that embraces cultural and intercultural awareness and the implementation of teaching approaches and practices that focus on students’ cultural consciousness and foster intercultural communication. CLIL approaches can serve and fulfill the above aims and one of them is described as it was experienced at a state primary school in the area.

## 2 CLIL implementation in Thrace

### 2.1 'Life in deserts'

The following lesson plan approaches CLIL as a teaching practice that was integrated into the Geography teaching curriculum for one teaching hour per week for a complete school year (2014-2015) and implemented with 6<sup>th</sup> year students at the 1st Experimental Primary School of Alexandroupolis, Thrace. Its philosophy lies on following two benchmarks:

(A) The core integrated components of CLIL (or CLIL pillars, also called the '4Cs' CLIL Framework): *Content, Communication, Cognition, Culture* (Citizenship or Community). The 4Cs framework for CLIL starts with content (such as subject matter, themes, cross-curricular approaches) and focuses on the interrelationship between content (subject matter), communication (language), cognition (thinking) and culture (awareness of self and 'otherness') to build on the synergies of integrating learning (content and cognition) and language learning (communication and cultures). It unites learning theories, language learning theories and intercultural understanding.

The 4Cs Framework holds that it is through progression in knowledge, skills and understanding of the subject matter, engagement in associated cognitive processing, interaction in a communicative context, developing appropriate language knowledge and skills as well as acquiring a deepening intercultural awareness through the positioning of self and 'otherness', that effective CLIL takes place whatever the model. From this perspective, CLIL involves learning to use language appropriately whilst using language to learn effectively (Coyle, 2008).

In the present lesson plan *content* concerned the geography topic, *communication* was about the geography language, which learners would communicate during the lesson, *cognition* referred to the thinking skills, which would be demanded of learners and *culture* concerned the cultural focus in the lesson; for instance whether students were encouraged to share descriptions of the physical and human features of their home environments and helped to understand the reasons for any differences (University of Cambridge, 2014).

(B) Bloom's Revised Taxonomy of higher and lower order thinking skills (Figure 1). Today there is international recognition that "education is more than just learning knowledge and thinking, it also involves learners' feelings, beliefs and the cultural environment of the classroom. Nevertheless, the importance of teaching thinking is an important element in modern education" (Brewster, 2009, p. 2).

The above chart concerns taxonomies of the cognitive domain and goes from simple (bottom of the pyramid) to more complex and challenging (top of the pyramid) types of thinking. The development of LOTS (Lower Thinking Skills) is encouraged by asking learners *what, when, where* and *which* questions. The development of HOTS (Higher Thinking Skills) is encouraged by asking learners *why* and *how* questions. The Taxonomy intersects and acts upon different types and levels of knowledge — factual, conceptual, procedural and metacognitive. This melding enables teachers to see how they teach at both *knowledge* and *cognitive* process levels. Using the Taxonomy Table to classify objectives, activities, and assessments provides a clear, concise, visual representation of a particular course or unit. It can be used to examine relative emphasis, curriculum alignment, and missed educational opportunities. Based on this examination, teachers can decide

where and how to improve the planning of curriculum and the delivery of instruction (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). The classification of levels of mental behaviour is important in learning for it enables teachers measure students' ability.

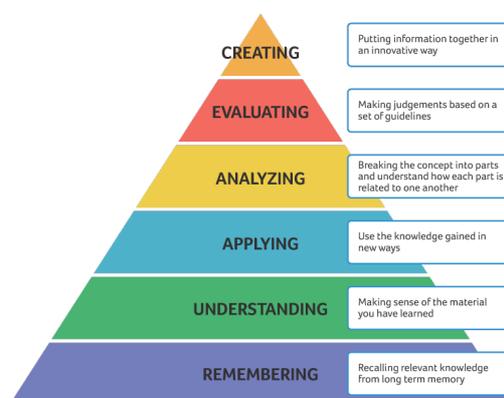


Figure 1: Bloom's Revised Taxonomy

The specific lesson plan had a total duration of two teaching hours. The target group, which consisted of twenty two students (six boys and sixteen girls), was a typical example of a mixed ability group as it comprised of students with different linguistic profile, what Ellis (2003) calls *learning style*; the more or less consistent way in which a person perceives, conceptualizes, organizes and recalls information, and sociocultural background and four students with diverse language background belonging to the Muslim minority (two boys and two girls). Thus, for some students Greek was the second language to be taught and English was the third one.

The stages of lesson planning that the class teacher went through can be summarized in the following five:

- Identify learning objectives;
- Identify challenges;
- Break down challenges;
- Use a memorable context;
- Provide language support.

The teacher's basic concern was not making any unrealistic assumptions about students' overall ability so that learners would be encouraged to participate in classroom interaction. Thus, for instance longer *wait time* (time teachers wait between asking questions and learners answering them), compared to an EFL (English as a foreign language) lesson, was needed, so that learners could process new subject concepts in the foreign language. Moreover, the teacher was both flexible and tolerant enough considering the use of code switching from L2 (second language) to L1 (first language), while explaining and repeating in order to check understanding. The tasks' type and design was underpinned by Richards and Rodgers (2001) following assumption: Activities that involve real communication are essential for language learning. Activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning. Language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process. Tasks involved learners in producing key subject-specific vocabulary and

structures in meaningful pair or group work activities. The lesson plan form used was the British Council Teaching English CLIL Essentials template (2010).

## 2.2 Outcomes

*Content:* Learners can describe the earth relief, fauna and flora of deserts.

*Language:* Learners can use the present simple tense to talk about deserts and the daily activities of desert tribes.

*Learning skills:* Learners can work in groups / pairs cooperatively.

*Timetable fit:* Learners are working on a unit entitled: 'The Earth as the living space of man.' The chapters of the unit concern the distribution of people on earth, languages and religions, life in deserts, the polar zone, rainforests, and temperate regions.

*Assumptions:* Students are late beginners-pre intermediate English learners. They have already acquired some of the key vocabulary to discuss deserts but their speaking is weak and therefore needs work. Present Simple tense will not be new to them.

*Anticipated problems and solutions:* Learners may be slow to start the brainstorm as they may have difficulty in expressing their knowledge in a second or third language. Therefore the teacher should expect learners to use some L1 and the translate. Learners may be unsure of some key vocabulary in the video; therefore a matching definition and word task will be done prior to video watching.

Materials: computer, projector, board, worksheet, A4 paper.

## 2.3 Procedure

*1<sup>st</sup> teaching hour* (40 minutes)

*Warmer:* Activate prior knowledge: Teacher gives learners A4 paper. Learners write down all they know about deserts (names, fauna, flora, tribes) and report back to whole class after 2 minutes. Interaction: group work.

*Outcomes:* To explain aims of the lesson. Teacher shows three aims on the board and discusses them with the class (3 minutes). Interaction: whole class (Teacher-Students, TSS).

*Vocabulary input:* To check understanding of key vocabulary. To prepare for watching a video about the Sahara desert on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLRO-K2Wpb0>. Teacher gives each learner a card with either a word or a definition on it (Table 1, Word bank). Learners must find their partner who can match their word and definition. Learners dictate their words and definitions to the class (5 minutes). Everyone writes the vocabulary down. Interaction: Student-Student (SS).

*Content input:* To understand the geomorphologic elements and living conditions on the Sahara desert. After watching the video learners take down notes individually. Then they check their answers in pairs and then with a group answer key. Then learners watch the

video again to check answers (10 minutes). Interaction: individual work, pair work, group work.

precipitation	Rainfall
date palm	χουρμαδιά
corrosion	erosion (διάβρωση)
sand dunes	hills of sand
oasis	όαση
Bedouin	Βεδουίνος
breeder	someone who breeds (keeps in order to reproduce) animals (κτηνοτρόφος)
Nomad	a community of people who live in different locations, moving from one place to another (Νομάς) καραβάνι
Caravan	

Table 1: Word bank

*Language input:* To practise present simple tense. Learners watch the video about the Gobi Desert on [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFa-4Ni\\_62k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFa-4Ni_62k). Learners are asked to either draw a T chart or discuss the differences between hot and cold deserts in relation to the tribes' daily activities (10 minutes). Interaction: group work.

*Production of language and content:* Learners form groups/pairs. They choose a desert and either prepare a Venn diagram about the Sahara and Gobi deserts or talk about / draw pictures of fauna and flora, oasis, tribes (10 minutes).

2<sup>nd</sup> teaching hour (40 minutes)

*Warmer:* Learners fill in the names of deserts in a worksheet (Figure 2). Interaction: group work. (5 minutes).

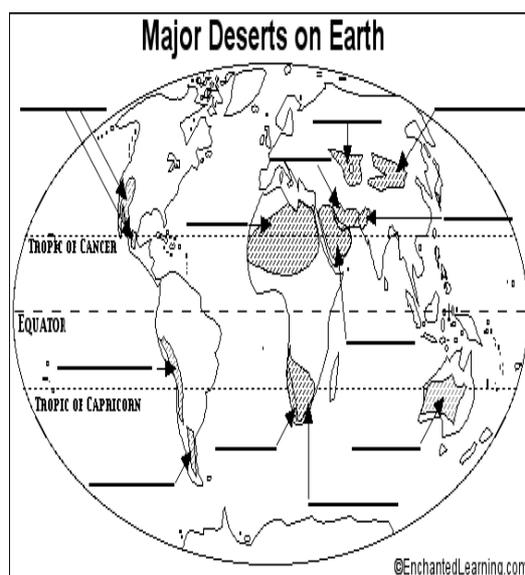


Figure 2: Worksheet

*Content input:* Learners watch the video about the Bedouin lifestyle on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Q3uhqv8epM>. Next, students are asked to comment on the desert tribe and their daily activities (5 minutes). Interaction: whole class (TSS). Finally, students discuss on a consolidation mind map (Figure 3) to reactivate awareness (5 minutes). Interaction: whole class (TSS).

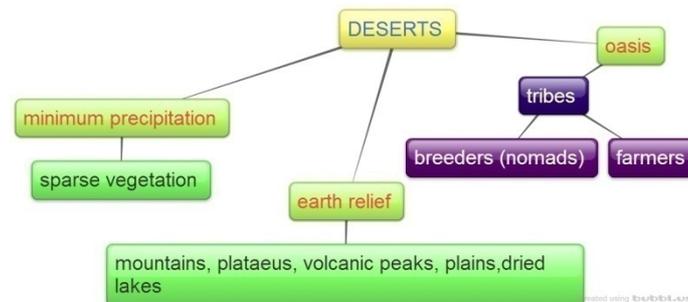


Figure 3: Mind map

In this lesson, the teacher focuses entirely on the production of content and language stage. Setting as a personal aim to minimize Teacher Talking Time (TTT) and maximize Student Talking Time (STT), engaging students both actively and meaningfully in the learning process, the teacher organizes learners in mixed ability groups and offers them a variety of activities (Figure 4) according to Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy. All groups present their work to the class plenary (25 minutes).

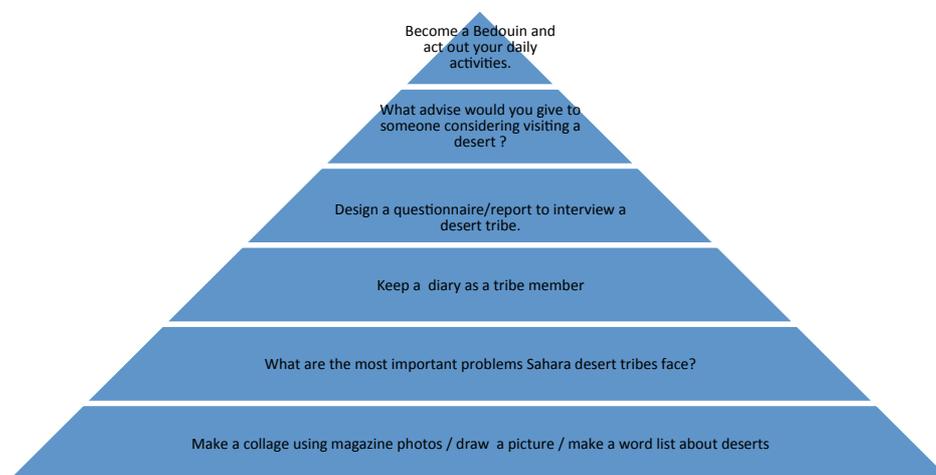


Figure 4: Activities based on Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy

### 3. Concluding remarks

The outcomes of the CLIL approach implementation in the particular school context can be summarized in the following:

- Learners’ motivation was increased, as language was seen in real life situations, which concerned language acquisition rather than enforced learning.

- Learners with different learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile), according to the four modalities of learning by Bandler and Grinder (1979), were actively engaged in the learning process developing balance between self reliance and cooperation.
- Learners' cognitive skills (mental abilities and processes related to knowledge, attention, memory and working memory, judgment, evaluation, reasoning, problem solving, production of language) and metacognitive skills (thinking about thinking, or knowing about knowing), knowledge about when and how to use particular strategies for learning or for problem solving ), according to Bloom's revised taxonomy, were enhanced.
- Learners constructed cultural and intercultural awareness in a non-competitive learning environment by means of a comparative exploration of the regional, national and global environment.
- Learners developed a sense of community belonging into the classroom culture.

In a nutshell, there is no doubt that learning a language and learning through language and culture are concurrent processes. However, implementing CLIL approaches into the EFL classroom requires rethinking of the traditional concepts and issues bound up with the language classroom and the language teacher. CLIL implementation can develop students' linguistic skills and social skills, enrich their capital of knowledge, enhance their thinking skills and also contribute positively towards making the classroom a place of cultural understanding, acceptance and multicultural celebration. In a culturally conscious CLIL classroom teachers are required to act not only as reflective practitioners but also as transformative intellectuals that create environments where students develop holistically in an international global society through understanding and communicating with the 'other'. In the current postmodern multilingual and multicultural societies where cultural understanding and intercultural communication through English as *a lingua franca*, CLIL as an educational approach and teaching practice has definitely a multifaceted role to play.

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