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6th EPISODE IN CLIL 'ARENA'

Reflection on CLIL implementation in an EFL Secondary School classroom

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I am an EFL teacher in a junior high school in Thessaloniki, Greece. I also teach History in all three classes of junior high school. Considering the benefits of CLIL (see Coyle, 2006; Dalton-Puffer, 2007), I have very often used a cross-curricular approach to my teaching trying to highlight the use of the English Language as a means rather than an end and thus stress its pivotal function in the learning process.

In the past two years I have developed a project with third class students (9th graders) involving World History and World War I, in particular. The project has run for two years and this year I am thinking of running the project with a fellow History teacher in another school. I chose 9th graders for a number of reasons the most obvious being that their level of English is quite advanced by now, which makes following the material much easier. Additionally, the state-prescribed textbook does not offer much of a challenge to them rendering it almost imperative to seek additional material. Finally, their organisational skills and willingness to do group work has been adequately "groomed" the previous years, making it easier to embark on a highly collaborative project.

World War I was chosen because although it is an event that has changed the course of modern history it is given minimal coverage in Greek History text-books. Furthermore, it is material that would not be extensively covered by their History teachers, thus limiting the possibility of "clashes" and "turf wars" between subjects and instructors.

Another important element in the project was TET (Technology Enhanced Teaching). The whole project was operated on electronic platforms, with the material mounted on web pages and tools devised by me. An additional goal was to make this a "paperless" project with students using only their laptops and tablets and no pen or paper. The project was called "It's a Long Way to Tipperary – World War I", and its effects on the lives of the people involved. Its causes, its break-out and its fronts through Literature, Art and personal accounts of the time and the students worked in four groups investigating various aspects of the war.

Working with English came surprising natural to my students. I believe that this was largely due to the fact that they were reading and discussing events that took place outside Greece. It would, perhaps, have seemed more 'awkward' for them to be talking about a Greek-specific period of History, say, the Golden Age of Pericles or the Peloponnesian War in English. Authenticity of the material was another key element in their acceptance of the English language as a means of navigating through the material and producing their own material.

Of course the preparation of the material demanded a lot of time on my part and one might think that it is impossible to ask a single person to put in so much work for just four hours of classroom time. I will not disagree. I believe that the Greek educational system is very far from adopting CLIL as a generally accepted practice. It is both a matter of resources and mentality. It could be an "off-the-books" practice for some English language teachers but I think this is as far as it could go for a number of years to come. Furthermore, it might be a practice that can easily be applied with some subjects such as History, Geography, Art, Music, Home Economics but I hardly see it being applied to "hard core" subjects like Math, Physics, and so on.

The mentality of both teachers and students/parents also comes into play. There will be a number of people who will talk of the necessity of double degree and who will question the secondary skills of the teachers who implement CLIL practices. There is already widespread discontent and distrust for Language Teachers who teach History so imagine what would happen if, say, History became the sole responsibility of Language teachers. There will also be 'purists' who will argue that the use of the English language will undermine national identity.

Even if all obstacles are overcome, we are still looking at a serious training time needed for people who will be involved in any CLIL implementation. The need of each individual will vary based on the degree of prior exposure and personal knowledge, but what remains a constant is that it will have to be a carefully organized process that will lead to some sort of certification.

Note: Examples of the project that I have mentioned can be found on my webpage (<http://www.pdomvros.mysch.gr>) in the following sections:
<http://domvrosww1b.pbworks.com/w/page/89200013/CONTENTS> (2014-15)
<http://domvrosww1.pbworks.com/w/page/76877816/FrontPage> (2013-14)

References

- Coyle, D. (2006). *Content and Language Integrated Learning: Motivating learners and teachers*. Scottish Languages Review.
- Dalton-Puffer, C. (2007). *Discourse in content and language integrated learning (CLIL) classrooms*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.

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