



Research Papers in Language Teaching and Learning

Vol. 8, No. 2, February 2017, 170-174

ISSN: 1792-1244

Available online at <http://rpltl.eap.gr>

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CLIL 'ARENA'—EPISODE 8

Reflection on CLIL implementation in an EFL Secondary School classroom

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Having been an English language teacher for 20 years, I have always been concerned with employing the most optimal approach to language teaching so as to address my learners' needs. I was a Ph.D. student in the field of applied linguistics when I came across the Content and Language Integrated Learning approach to language teaching, most commonly referred with the acronym CLIL, which seemed worth to research further and implement in consideration of its potential to bring about changes in language education.

Since then, I have tried to in-depth explore CLIL while I have taken the time and effort to organize CLIL projects with my classes whether at secondary or primary education. However, for the present call I am going to refer to a CLIL project implemented in the context of vocational education (VE), in which I have been employed on a part-time basis. The present reflection focuses on a CLIL course concerning Travel, Tourism and Hospitality Management, with VE students attending the specialty 'Administrative and Financial Management Staff in the Tourism Sector' implemented for two semesters. The data presented resulted from a qualitative analysis of the reflective journal kept throughout the CLIL course by myself.

The rationale for deciding to implement CLIL in VE stemmed from the fact that practical examples of the organization, implementation and development of CLIL courses in such contexts are limited in Europe in general (Coyle et al., 2010) and Greece in particular. This was one of the reasons that the project "Content and Language Integrated Learning in Greek Vocational Education: Introduction to Tourism & Hospitality" was developed and implemented during the school year 2014-2015 in the context at issue.

Moreover, it should not be ignored that both EFL and ESP or EVP instruction have failed many vocational students in their attempt to respond to the need of educating a linguistically qualified workforce within an increasingly internationalized labor market. On the other hand, CLIL by promoting the learning of both language skills, and subject-specific knowledge can offer clear advantages for the particular target group of students by means of encompassing their real-life or occupational purposes.

It is my firm belief that students specializing in the Tourism Industry, need to develop better English language skills as well as knowledge of subject-specific skills and vocabulary, to cope with the demands of their future working life, which takes place in international contexts. Such linguistic demands and possibilities present the language teachers operating in the context of VE with a major challenge.

The learning objectives of the CLIL course in terms of subject-specific content were: a) to introduce students to the principles and practice of modern tourism; and b) to explore issues related to the Tourism & Hospitality Industry, i.e. classification of hotels, distribution channels, front office structure, services and communication.

As regards the set objectives of the CLIL course in terms of language skills, these comprised: a) Reading: understand authentic texts related to specialism areas (textbooks or web-based resources); b) Writing: write detailed specialism-related letters in standard format; c) Listening: understand main ideas and identify relevant information in conversations and discussions on specialism-related topics; d) Oral communication (Spoken Interaction - Production): understand, develop and communicate ideas and information; respond to main ideas and identify relevant information in conversations on subject-specific topics; analyze, evaluate and use information from various sources.

The expected learning outcomes were linked to the aims and objectives of the syllabus and comprised: a) acquiring subject-specific content knowledge; b) promoting language skills development. Regarding language proficiency, the anticipated learning outcomes were in accordance with level C1+ of the CEFR.

In total, 52 VE students streamed into two groups received 60 hours of instruction in total; Their age range was 18-28 years (mean age 21.9) while their level in English was: false beginners (10.4%); upper intermediate (51.2%) and advanced (38.4%).

The study followed the qualitative research paradigm; a reflective journal was kept by the teacher-researcher with the aim to provide in-depth information concerning the implementation of the experimental CLIL intervention. While running the course, taking the role of a teacher-researcher, I tried to observe consciously and reflect on the effect of my CLIL teaching on the VE students, with a particular focus on the development, implementation and appreciation of the CLIL course. From the analysis of the extracts, three basic typologies emerged which reflected: A. the CLIL teaching process; B. the roles assumed by the CLIL teacher; C. a general appreciation of the CLIL teaching intervention.

The following qualitative data provide insights into the potential of introducing the CLIL paradigm within the context of VE.

As regards the CLIL *teaching process*, it was identified that in order to address the aim and objectives set for the CLIL course, a balanced approach to content and language learning was adopted. Moreover, multimodal input from a variety of sources as well as authentic materials integrating all four skills were widely employed to ensure that the learners' interest and motivation would be kept at the highest possible level throughout the course. A variety of task types were presented to the learners, providing them with adequate input, allowing for processing besides encouraging output as well as establishing cooperative learning within the classroom.

Additionally, the experimental CLIL course provided ample opportunities for oral communication, both interaction and production. Such productive use of the language is generally regarded as more demanding since it requires sufficient linguistic competence in the TL. Nevertheless, establishing the learners' perceptions of developing in terms of functional fluency (Juan-Garau & Salazar-Noguera, 2015) rather than opting for accuracy only, along with being able to understand complex content through the TL, enabled them to increase their confidence and motivation while making use of it.

Furthermore, since willingness to take risks and communicate orally in the TL can only be achieved through adequate exposure and practice in it, the students' aim was largely in conveying their message and maintaining communication rather than being inhibited by mistakes that were inevitably expected to occur during the learning process. Such an approach opted for less pressure for accuracy in the TL so as to promote language learning within the CLIL context by lowering the affective filter.

Personality traits such as confidence, initiative and motivation influenced the learners' contribution and active language use within the CLIL classroom. Nevertheless, establishing a relaxed and non-threatening atmosphere in the classroom, encouraging VE students to cooperate with their peers besides providing them with adequate input were the means adopted so as to help them overcome any potential reluctance to get actively involved in learning and use the TL.

As regards the use of the English language by the teacher, it included the purposes of giving instructions, involving repetition or paraphrasing, as well as providing clarifications and checking for understanding whenever it was necessary.

Concerning the use of L1, Greek, it was more often resorted to on the part of the students for communication purposes and managing interactions at the beginning of the course while using English became gradually more and more natural with code-switching between the two languages, being present even towards the end of the course. Nevertheless, my general impression is that the less competent of the students, false beginners and very few upper intermediate ones, often used L1 only to make sure that they had properly comprehended the message while their comprehension was at an acceptable level.

However, despite the popularity CLIL has recently gained, and its undisputed merits it cannot not be mistakenly considered as an approach easy to implement and deliver, which in fact I experienced myself. This can be primarily adhered to the fact that CLIL has by nature brought about a change in perspective, with the TL functioning as a tool for content learning besides being a subject in itself. Inevitably, this 'dual focus of CLIL' (Coyle et al., 2010) has been identified to pose a heavy load on the language teacher, who assumes *multiple roles*, among them, the roles of course developer and syllabus designer. In effect, the CLIL teacher needs to cope with policy issues and be able to adapt CLIL to the unique demands of the local context as well as integrate it into the curriculum.

A further role assumed by myself as a CLIL teacher is that of the materials provider, which involved presenting my learners with a variety materials, which offered them rich input in terms of both content and language, supported their learning outcomes, and were identified to be in accordance with the VE learners' needs, besides considering their different learning styles. Therefore, the CLIL teacher ideally needs to possess adequate knowledge of the subject discipline(s) as well. Given that this is not the rule as only a few teachers possess a

double degree, the amount of collaboration between the content teachers and the language teachers can prove critical in determining the success of CLIL programmes.

Nevertheless, getting involved in CLIL projects necessitates considerable awareness as to how to perform in the CLIL classroom as well as implement and manage the CLIL process due to the significant methodological changes it requires. It goes without saying, that in order to operate effectively in CLIL, EFL teachers need to be able to adapt their teaching methodology to cater for balanced, integrated learning of both content and language by using different methods appropriate for the teaching context as suggested by CLIL principles and practice (see 4Cs, Coyle et al., 2010).

In the context considered these entail, among others, a consideration of aspects such as the affective side of learning; the application of an interactive methodology; the promotion of learning skills with a focus on knowledge and awareness of cognition and metacognition; the fostering of cultural and inter-cultural awareness; the provision of CLIL-specific assessment and evaluation (Bertaux et al., 2010, p.5-9). Evidently, the importance of possessing all these competencies calls for diversified roles of the CLIL teacher which however, are not all CLIL-specific.

In an attempt to provide *a general appreciation of the CLIL teaching intervention*, the data emanated from the records in the reflective CLIL journal revealed the potential of the experimental CLIL project in providing VE students with adequate input in the TL, especially in relation to the subject discipline, making it possible for them to experience not only the roles of language learners but also of language users (Meyer, 2010). This can be adhered to the fact that having used the TL to teach content had a substantial impact on the VE students' performance; it provided a more intensive exposure to the TL while offering meaningful opportunities to make active use of it. Despite the fact that the CLIL experience was regarded as cognitively demanding for many of the VE students in the case considered, learning took place in a naturalistic, relatively anxiety-free environment, which is believed to have positively influenced their performance in both the TL and the subject discipline (Dalton-Puffer, 2007).

Additionally, having been presented with cognitively challenging tasks, is considered to have helped VE students to foster both higher-order and lower-order thinking about the TL along with content and learning skills (Marsh et al., 2010). Moreover, they were offered the chance to develop an increased ability to process input, as a means of promoting a broader capacity to think, which could also help improving their meta-cognitive ability (ibid).

On the whole, I believe that the CLIL experience was advantageous for the students, who benefited from being provided with rich, meaningful input, efficient in developing both their TL skills and content knowledge. In particular, considerable improvements were exhibited in terms of mastery of both content knowledge and language (language skills and vocabulary) as well as in terms of involvement and motivation. Nevertheless, the students' perspectives, as well as quantitative data, would be useful to substantiate further these data.

My experience as a CLIL teacher in VE was highly positive despite the fact that not everything went by the book. I feel that at times, I could have functioned differently in terms of coping with the fixed beliefs that adult learners tend to have in result of their previous learning experiences. Also, I consider that I could have found further ways of supporting my students as regards the cognitive or linguistic demands they faced when dealing with communicative situations that threatened to lower their motivation. Also, I think there was

more to offer in terms of enhancing their self-regulation. On the same line, I think that there was more to do in terms of decreasing competition among the students and establishing a more cooperative spirit during group-work. However, as the course progressed, it was possible for me to reflect, reconsider, adjust and deal more efficiently with any CLIL-specific aspects.

All in all, my engaging in the particular experimental teaching intervention was professionally fulfilling, since not only it made it possible for me to gain experience but also, gave me the chance to explore my practices and improve them so as to gain deeper insights and develop further as a CLIL teacher.

Concluding, the reflections based on my observations and understanding as the teacher of the particular VE CLIL course indicate that developing and implementing CLIL necessitates a move away from the traditional roles assumed by language teachers. Given the diverse teacher roles and methodology in CLIL contexts, the importance of teacher education for CLIL should be highlighted to ensure the development and delivery of effective and efficient CLIL courses. Clearly, the training of CLIL teachers should consider the needs, implications and challenges that teaching content through a foreign language entails. Last but not least, CLIL training constitutes a fundamental part of teacher education while every teacher should be given the opportunity to train as a CLIL teacher.

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