

LEARNING IN TWO LANGUAGES (CLIL) IN PRIMARY EDUCATION IN EUROPE

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Throughout Europe there is a growing awareness that language learning is much more effective when linked to meaningful content. Through exploiting the synergies of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), children gain a second or third language (L2 or L3) and subject knowledge simultaneously with ease. Through CLIL not only the target language improves substantially: it also has a very positive influence on attitudes and motivation and on the cognitive development of children, as well as, a positive influence on subject matter knowledge and on the development of the pupils' first language. For the benefit of every child and to bring the vision of three or more languages (1+<2) within compulsory education to life, it is time to rethink primary teacher education. A recent publication brings together various perspectives from different corners of Europe and from different levels such as classroom practice, teacher education, academic research and European language policy. The main trends in this area throughout Europe is introduced in this study by one of the authors of the referred book.

Keywords: early language learning, primary education, CLIL

In the focus of this essay there is a language learning method: CLIL, which abbreviation stands for **C**ontent and **L**anguage **I**ntegrated **L**earning. With CLIL a language is learnt not in isolation: a second (a third) language and subject knowledge is gained simultaneously with less effort and in a shorter time, that is why it is especially effective in the primary school. Benefits of CLIL include increased self-confidence, self-esteem and improved language learning competence of learners. The use of two languages at school improves a child's language-learning competence. Children can learn about something in one language and talk and write about it in another, and this process helps them to understand the subject better. Learners can gain near 'nativelike' proficiency, especially in pronunciation. Students of CLIL are better problem solvers and risk takers.

The author of the article initiated a programme applying this method in a primary school and got invitation to present its results in an EU-project titled MOLAN (2007-2010). The aim of the MOLAN network is to bring about, on a large scale, a positive attitude among young Europeans in formal education towards the learning of foreign languages as well as towards other peoples and cultures. The emphasis of the MOLAN network is on the learning of a second or further language(s), the learning of less widely taught languages, European cooperation and, more specifically, cooperation

between schools and universities. The MOLAN network is based on the assumption that motivation can be enhanced by institutional and system-based policies, strategies and practices. The background of MOLAN is that young people in formal education have to acquire multilingual competence for the benefit of society and of themselves. MOLAN is built on case studies of successful policies, strategies and practices with a view to sharing good practice across Europe. The author of the present study was asked to send the case study on this initiative at the school she worked for; then she also had to analyse other case studies within the project and could work as one of its external experts.

In 2011 MOLAN project and its experts could find a joint basis to publish their results together with COMENIUS Regio Project, which lasted between the autumn of 2009 and the summer of 2011. The book published on these projects (Egger & Lechner, 2012) brings together various perspectives from different countries including classroom-level practice, teacher education, academic research, European language policy. The languages of the book are English and German. The book is structured to have four main parts:

- A. The Context of European Language Policy (2 articles),
- B. A Comenius Regio Project- Primary CLIL (5 articles),
- C. CLIL in Primary Schools Around Europe (13 case studies),
- D. Rethinking Teacher Education (3 studies).

The following case study is one of the 13 case studies on good practices in primary schools around Europe. In the Calvinist Primary School of Kecskemét we introduced a new programme to teach English and German in less formal, more motivating way. Hereby the initiative is to be introduced.

Description of the success case

Scope of the initiative

The initiative is undertaken at local level. Target group is primary students of grades 1-4 (6-10 years old).

The project involved cooperation with the University of Amsterdam. The University has asked us to become one of its practice institutions where graduate students can do their final teaching practice. Since the graduate students were involved in teaching CLIL, they were looking for schools abroad, where L2 could be the language of other subjects. Two graduate students of University of Amsterdam have completed their practice in our school, mainly in lower primary classes (6-10 years old).

CLIL method was in the focus of an Erasmus programme, CulTiFoLa as well. The school was asked by Gáspár Károli University (the Hungarian partner of the programme) to function as the practice school of the international students involved in the programme.

The initiative is broadened and now teachers of the schools are involved as well. A teaching material has also been developed. An exchange programme for teachers and students is to be launched next year.

Range of languages studied

The languages that are covered in the programme are English and German. The free choice of languages is guaranteed. However, it can be influenced by the availability of teaching staff. English is much more popular than German. If a student hesitates or is not determined to learn English, teachers try to persuade him/her to learn German. This way there can be some language choice impose.

Learning outcomes

A 'real' motivation for students to learn L2 has been achieved by creating an authentic communicative demand.

Communicative competences have been developed. Students' listening skills have improved, their oral competence is better; they are much more ready to initiate communication in L2.

There is no writing input during the project. Active skills are to be improved. Students are encouraged to talk, use the language in speech. Their mistakes are not corrected all the time. This way a peaceful, relaxed learning atmosphere has been created which promotes students' self-concept as a learner.

The language learning process is connected to other, more general learning processes like, cooperative learning, working with peers, making projects, learning to learn strategies, achieving intercultural awareness.

Practical realisation

The initiative has a specific structure: it is a group of teachers and the initiative is not officially controlled.

The project aim is to improve students' competences in L2, create and maintain their motivation to learn a foreign language

The project is outside the official curriculum. Students of 6-10 years have a 15-minute lesson in L2 every day, usually in the afternoon, in their free time. Their attendance is voluntary, but everybody has equal chances to be present at the lessons. There is no formal assessment. Students do not write or read in L2 in these lessons. There are modules that are close to their interests (family, animals, colours, home, weather and seasons, holidays, sports, clothes) and students tell rhymes, sing songs, do craftwork activities connected to the module. There are, of course, references to their subjects and covered material (e.g. they practice numbers they have learnt in Mathematics) in these language lessons. The language lessons have a separate corner in the classroom; without a formal seating arrangement. There is a carpet where students can sit. Their projects, drawings are put on the notice board of the classroom.

In Hungary L2 as a subject is introduced in year 4. The project goes along in that year with the official national curriculum. The afternoon classes are related to the topics, modules of the official lessons that are in the morning. Students are not assessed in that lesson.

Extra pedagogical and financial support is given to the programme in the school. Since students are put into small groups (not based on their achievement, usually following alphabetical order), an extra teacher is provided to take care of the others. Teachers are paid for these lessons; and those who start further studies to be qualified for this job, are also supported.

An exchange programme for teachers and students with a school in Ireland is to be launched next year.

Specific structure of the initiative: the project was initiated by the University of Amsterdam; then 3 teachers introduced it in the school, one of them is a Lecturer at Kecskemét Teacher Training College. With a constant presence of a Researcher, a close interaction with international trends in teaching L2 has been created. CulTiFoLa and Pri-Sec-Co are those EU-programmes in which our project was represented as a good example. Now 13 teachers (one third of the staffs) are involved in the project teaching English/German. The initiative is so popular and has such a high prestige that more and more teachers want to work in it.

Strategic goals of the initiative

The initiative is undertaken at the level of our lower primary section partly to promote early language learning and to boost language learning in general.

The initiative originally was aimed at implementing new learning strategies, especially CLIL. That was the method the University of Amsterdam has asked us to implement and allow their students to practice. The more general aim was to implement early language learning and applying new learning approaches (cross-curricular activities, competence-based teaching).

Development of general communicative skills in the L2 is to be achieved is one of the main goals.

Promoting language competences; especially oral skills, communicative competences.

Motivating pupils and teachers to undertake further language learning, whether in-depth learning of a known language or the learning of a new language is in the scope of the programme.

Students' cultural openness (partly due to CulTiFoLa) is promoted. Development of pupils' autonomy with a view to lifelong language learning is realised.

Success indicators

The initiative has proved to be successful since the intensity of learning L2 has increased. The number of students involved has been increasing year by year. Students involved had better test results.

Enhanced classroom interaction is noticed; students are much more ready to use L2 inside and outside the classroom (e.g. more and more students find foreign pen-friends).

Since students got familiar with L2 earlier than before the initiative, their previous knowledge is wider when L2 is introduced as a subject. Therefore we could change the coursebook we use in the school; students meet higher requirements in language lessons.

A new type of formal assessment is initiated as well. In the upper primary section end of year exam is introduced. The structure of the exam follows the one of ECL exams. In the exam students are asked to give a short description on a picture, and then talk about the topic the picture reminds them of. Their assessment is based on CEFR criteria. The achievement of those who were already involved in the project in their lower primary years is higher than the ones who had been not.

The number of subscriptions to magazines in L2 has increased. Regarding the sustainability of the initiative it should be mentioned that in

September bilingual classes are to be introduced for the incoming first year students. A new curriculum is written based on the results of the initiative

Success factors

Strong institutional support was provided for language teaching. The pedagogical skills and motivation of the language teaching staff; teachers are committed to the success of the initiative and highly motivated. They do take part in training courses on the most recent expectations in teaching L2 (e.g. creative thinking).

The range of learning possibilities on offer has increased: self-study facilities are provided in the library where readers, picture dictionaries, stories in L2 can be found. Their purchase has been financed by the school. Students like these books and read extra-curricular materials in their free-time.

The continuity of the initiative and its follow-up indicate that the project was highly appreciated among teachers, students and parents.

Conclusion

Introducing early language teaching was a good decision. The number of applicants to the school has increased since there is such a high demand for learning L2 in Hungary. Both students and the teaching staff value the initiative. However, we have to look for a better timing for the project. Our experience shows that instead of the afternoon activities the morning ones would be more effective. Therefore we are to shift them and incorporate them in students' lessons in the morning. It means that 15-minute sessions are included in Mathematics, Science, Art and PE lessons in L2. This change requires a higher number of qualified teachers.

Our initiative is a good example of an informal way of language teaching. As it is known, young students are highly motivated to learn, and we take advantage of this fact. By creating a relaxed learning atmosphere, we make students confident in L2. They are not made aware of the fact that they learn; they seem to pick up the language without realising it. No direct teaching of grammar or vocabulary is involved. The teaching material (songs, rhymes, TPR activities) meet the interest of this age group. Since they like playing with their peers, we let them do it in L2. They are very creative, so they can draw, cut and stick, colour following instructions in L2. This way the students' motivation for learning an L2 is enhanced.

As a result of being a partner in the MOLAN project, language teaching has really become an issue in the primary school this report is written about. A year after this report had been written, bilingual education has been introduced in that school. This is a qualitative result. We started to teach art, music, PE in English (so instead of teaching the language, something else is taught while using it). This initiative is so successful that this school has become the largest one in the town (which is a county capital and the 7th biggest town in Hungary), and the school has officially become a bilingual school. This position means higher funding by the state and needed a legal procedure. Students involved in this education are highly motivated, parents compete for the places. This increase in the number of students required staff recruitment. College students were more interested in the topic and four of them applied for Erasmus grants. They spent a term in Austria and Ireland visiting schools there and looking for good practice. Now they are teachers of this bilingual project with experience of teaching in bilingual schools of

Krems, Austria and they are familiar with the CLIL method. The initiative started in September, 2009, so we are in the third year.

Due to the good reputation of the initiative, two other schools have also started a similar programme, and three more are planning to introduce it, since they have inquired about the structure of our bilingual education and have asked for the documents to get familiar with its content.

There are also trainees from teacher training colleges and Erasmus students who can observe these lessons. Maybe by them and through them further impact can be reached.

Reference

EGGER, Gerlinde, & LECHNER, Christine (Eds.) (2012). *Primary CLIL Around Europe. Learning in Two Languages in Primary Education*. Marburg.