

Review of Integration of theory and practice in CLIL

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Book Title: Integration of Theory and Practice in CLIL

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Overview

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has now become a feature of education in Europe from primary school to university. This method has been used in programs in order to challenge teachers to integrate language learning with content learning, that is, to explore different areas of the curriculum such as geography, history, art, among others, using an additional language as the language of instruction.

CLIL classrooms use a foreign language to teach their contents and, additionally, students have language classes in order to improve learning. Then, they are going to be able to develop better learning strategies to understand the contents that are being taught in a language that is not their mother tongue.

Summary of Contents

This book brings together ten articles about the use of CLIL in different educational contexts. It is divided in two sections: the first one is dedicated to the explanation of theoretical approaches of content and language integrated learning. The second section provides examples of experimental studies in CLIL programs.

The first chapter, written by Ana Halbach, shows how students, language teachers and content teachers perceive language in this new approach provided by CLIL and how this target language plays an important role for increasing language learning and for better teaching of content subjects by creating meaning and knowledge in an accurate way.

In chapter two, Aoife Ahern offers reflections about the use of CLIL in primary education. He suggests that it is important to incorporate practical models for the integration of language skills in these programs since the teachers involved in it are more content specialists than language specialists.

The third chapter investigates the effect of reading strategy instruction in young learners in a CLIL group during two academic years. The study by Yolanda Ruiz de Zarobe and Victoria

Zenotz shows a positive result in reading competence when using explicit strategy instruction as well as positive effects on the metacognitive reading competence of students in CLIL contexts.

In the fourth chapter, Surmont, Craen, Struys and Somers provide an evaluation of a CLIL student and shows that being multilingual enhances the child's cognitive development. Therefore, some clear evidences show that a student educated through content and language integrated learning have a more efficient brain due to the stimulating environment that CLIL provides, and this learner is more apt to learn.

Chapter five reports a German context where CLIL students have a high interest in the English Language (used to teach in this CLIL context). Dominik Rumlich presents a comparison between students that are involved in the CLIL program and students that are not, and how the non – CLIL students do not have the same interest in the English Language in a quasi-experimental study.

Chapter six, written by Ignacio Pérez-Ibáñez, addresses the differences between Task Based Learning and Project Based Learning in Spanish language CLIL courses and gives an example of an activity that joins both approaches. The author describes how students not only learn linguistic structure but also authentic and meaningful language used in real life contexts.

In the seventh chapter, Jiménez, Muszynska and Romero describe some innovative teaching experiences in Spanish high schools in two case studies, one using writing techniques in a CLIL history class and the other using drama techniques in CLIL literature classes. Through these studies, the authors conclude that both activities increased student's motivation to a considerable degree.

The eighth chapter by David Lasagabaster promotes a discussion about the role of the content teacher and the language teacher in the CLIL context and how it affects students, especially at the university level. The author observed that in this specific study both language and content teachers had few differences in terms of developing language awareness in students.

In chapter nine, Ruth Breeze identifies student needs in English medium university courses highlighting their listening comprehension abilities in courses taught in English. The study shows that learners with higher levels of listening comprehension abilities will have great gains from the course and can learn more, while a lack of language skills will have a negative impact on student's motivation. Furthermore, particular areas of difficulty were identified, which affect students when attending lectures in English in CLIL educational contexts.

The last chapter, by Barbero and Gonzálles, presents an empirical study with a group of CLIL teacher in primary and secondary levels in order to create a university level CLIL course. Techniques to reach a new educational path with content and language integrated learning are presented. The authors also state the importance of considering student-centered approaches.

Evaluation

The editors from the book were able to present the goals of the CLIL methodology with articles that enhance the positive issues of programs that use a foreign language as the language of instruction. Additionally, the author from the articles could demonstrate how innovative practices can contribute to multilingual education and how this integration has improved and can improve teaching and learning in several ways by generating abundant comprehensible input.

According to Surmont, Craen, Stryys and Somers, in chapter four, CLIL learners often have better grades than their traditionally schooled peers. When evaluating a CLIL student, all aspects should be evaluated, not only the linguistics issue. It is important to look at the aspects involved, such as cognitive development, positive attitude towards language and the development of better learners in general. Consequently, as Marsha (2000) states, CLIL offers opportunities to allow students to use another language naturally, in such a way that they soon forget about the language and only focus on the learning topic.

It seems that CLIL has come to stay, in other words, it is the new successful teaching principle. However, the researchers still need to know how it works, in terms of oral production and its assessment. According to Ballinger (2008), teachers ask questions in order to convey content, but the majority of their questions do not create opportunities for students' increased output. Moreover, the students ask few questions to clarify the content, then they are not able to understand the subject that is been taught and they do not have the chance to produce academic language properly in terms of explanations, definitions or hypotheses.

There are many points, stated in chapter eight by Lasagabaster, that should be discussed such as the training of the content teachers – professionals who should teach their disciplines using a foreign language different from the one spoken in that specific region. – That is, these teachers should be proficient in the target language and trained to develop ways and techniques so that their audience is able to learn. Besides that, one has to take into consideration that teachers, depending on their theoretical background, tend to pay more attention to content or to language, which is why teacher training should be a must.

Content language and Integrated Learning can work more easily in an appropriate context, in which students are open to it, or in which the participants of have good language skills, good cognitive competence and interest in learning an additional language, which is required in order to attend to global changes. As Rumlich states in his study in the book, in chapter five (p.90), “the implementation of CLIL students in North- Rhine Westphalia creates a support structure for the “good” students, those that already display favorable language learning dispositions and above- average language competence”. It is important to be aware that not all of the students can participate in these programs since there are students that do not have language skills and cannot adapt to this approach, especially if they do not like, or have interest in or a goal with the target language. Furthermore, there is no research that demonstrates

whether primary CLIL students can benefit from the integration of content and language learning in their further education. In other words, there is no clear evidence that participation in CLIL programs differ from young students who learn an additional language with a different methodology.

Although the book, for the most part, shows how successful is the integration of content and language using a foreign language to teach at schools in European contexts, it may be a challenge to implement this approach in countries with different educational contexts. Different from the European social level, Brazil still faces problems in economic and social dimensions. As a matter of fact, it reflects on education. In this case, the idea of implementing CLIL programs in public schools may not be positive due to several reasons. As an example, students from public schools are not engaged to cultural globalization (despite teachers' efforts), so the goal of learning a language that they may not have contact with outside the classroom would not enhance a positive attitude towards their motivation and learning. In contrast to this reality, students that experience different contexts in Brazil, especially in private schools where learners have higher social levels, the insertion of CLIL programs would be very interesting.

Conclusion

According to the studies presented in this book, the importance of the approach to comprehend the processes involved in the language teaching and learning is clear. Content language and integrated learning is a very recent trend and there are many questions to be answered such as increasing students' output who participate in these programs; the assessment of their oral production; the effects of CLIL in terms of learning in different disciplines, among others. The authors provide many studies about teaching, but there are few discussions about what is learned.

Although the book stated many positive aspects in CLIL programs, further studies need to be carried out to discuss the weaknesses of this methodology. As Lagasabaster points out in his chapter, many teachers are not aware of the role of language in their teaching of subjects. For this reason, teacher training and language proficiency development for this kind of program is very relevant. Moreover, as Rumlich states, CLIL methodology may have different effects on learners with less favorable language learning dispositions, so there is a need to develop more research studies on these aspects.

Finally, this kind of program, from a general point of view, especially from the Brazilian educational context, would be considered education for an elite population, not only for the high intellectual capacities of the students, but also for the favorable financial conditions.

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About the reviewer

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