

TEACHER COGNITION IN UNIVERSITY CLIL: LINGUISTIC LIFE STORIES OF UNIVERSITY CLIL PROFESSORS

LES COGNICIONS DEL PROFESSORAT EN UN CONTEXTE UNIVERSITARI AICLE: RELATS DE VIDA LINGÜÍSTICS DE PROFESSORAT AICLE UNIVERSITARI

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Keywords: CLIL, teacher cognition, plurilingualism, university professors

Paraules clau: AICLE, cognicions del professorat, plurilingüisme, professorat universitari

1. Theoretical Framework

This paper looks at the dynamics of teacher cognition, plurilingual contexts and the instruction of CLIL by university professors in Barcelona. The research is qualitative in nature and ethnographic in orientation.

The central theme of this paper concerns teacher cognition: the beliefs, knowledge and representations of university professors (CRS in Spanish: Creencias, Representaciones y Saberes) (Cambra Giné, 2003) at the University of Barcelona. Teacher cognition research looks at what teachers think, know, and believe" (Borg, 2003). Within the study of classroom teaching practices, teacher cognition research tries to better understand how these mental constructs are related to what teachers do and accomplish in the classroom. (Woods, 1996, 2009; Borg, 2003, 2006, 2009). While there is a significant body of literature concerning teacher cognition, very little research has been published concerning teacher cognition of university professors engaged in CLIL.

This paper is also about the nature of plurilingual contexts, and how university teachers are responding to a new and changing educational university context where students from different countries and cultures form a part of their classroom. These changes in university classroom compositions in Catalunya are largely the result of the implementation of the Plan Bologna, a European education policy to unify the standards and degrees offered by Catalan universities to permit mobility cross Europe and its member states.

Finally, this paper is also concerned with the basic skills and instructional tools university professors need in order to teach their specialized content material in English. Within the public university system here in Catalunya and Spain, the possibility for university professors to give their classes in English is a relatively new phenomena with new experiences currently underway. To date, this area has received less study particularly at the undergraduate level. (Naves & Victori, 2010)

2. Objectives of the Research

The objectives of this research include the following:

1. Explore university professor beliefs, attitudes, knowledge and representations concerning CLIL in plurilingual university contexts.
2. Explore our understanding of the plurilingual phenomena in our universities occasioned by the Plan Bologna.
3. Contribute towards a greater understanding and use of effective and informed instructional practices of CLIL within a plurilingual context amongst the university community.
4. Encourage an awareness of and a reflection on the reality of plurilingualism amongst the research participants through the use and analysis of linguistic biographies, oral interviews, and class debates.
5. Identify and put into practice, instructional practices which could serve as new pedagogical approaches and resources for university professors in order to proffer and deliver effective CLIL classes.

3. Methodology

This explorative, qualitative ongoing research project involves 9 university professors at the University of Barcelona from various faculties who signed up to participate in an in-service course entitled, “Basic skills and tools to teach content subjects in English”. This course was organized and offered by the Institut de Ciències d’Educació, University of Barcelona.

The body of data to be presented includes the linguistic biographies written by the professors and the recorded transcriptions of oral interviews and class discussions. The qualitative analysis of this data (both descriptive and interpretive) as well as the presentation and discussion of strategies and classroom approaches used during the 30 hours of instruction to explore basic skills and tools to teach content subjects in English forms the basis of this paper.

4. Results and Discussion

With this paper, I am presenting the findings of this research currently in progress, at the University of Barcelona. I will show how 9 university professors through written linguistic life stories, oral interviews and a class discussion reveal their linguistic repertoires and beliefs concerning linguistic diversity and the offering of specialized university content in English to students from all over the world. The analysis and interpretation of this data, offers an insight into how ideas and beliefs about plurilingualism and the instruction of specialized matter in English are constructed within this learning community. It also highlights concerns and areas of tension related to individual linguistic and methodology capabilities. Finally, this paper provides a discussion of approaches and strategies for professionals working with university professors to provide CLIL.

The researcher is part of the PLURAL (Plurilingualism in the Classroom and Language Learning) research group, at the Faculty of Teacher Training, University of Barcelona. PLURAL’s work is dedicated to investigating, revealing and learning more about teacher thinking, specifically teacher beliefs, representations and knowledge in plurilingual environments.

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