

CLIL EDUCATION POLICIES IN CATALONIA: LOOKING FOR COLLECTIVE EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SCHOOL AUTONOMY

POLÍTIQUES EDUCATIVES A CATALUNYA: LA CERCA DE L'EMPODERAMENT COL·LECTIU A TRAVÉS DE L'AUTONOMIA DE CENTRE

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1. Summary

In this article we analyse education policies for language learning in Catalonia, within the European organisational framework. We present educational plans for Catalan schools, developed for empowering foreign language learning to increase academic success, focusing on how social and democratic participation can be built through plurilingualism and integrated language learning approaches (CLIL), as well as through international mobility and eLearning.

We believe that the EU can be a global co-leader. Not by imposing ideas, but by proposing solutions to our partners in the world! (Barroso, 2010).

2. The main organisational challenge: coordination

At the UN Millennium Summit of 2010, the President of the European Commission stressed that today's global interdependence requires common solutions because "ultimately, we are all in the same boat" (Barroso, 2010). As he said, "that is why the EU, with its transnational experience of peace and integration, is well-equipped to make a leading contribution to the globalisation process" (idem). This speech reminds us that collective empowerment, international collaboration and enriching diversity are the best paths for achieving the Millennium development goals.

The conclusions of the Council of the European Union of 19 May 2006 (Council of the European Union, 2006), on the European Indicator of Language Competence, had already reaffirmed the importance of cultural diversity and language plurality. Council experts affirmed that foreign language skills and mutual understanding between peoples are prerequisites for the workforce mobility, needed to bolster the competitiveness of the Union's economy. On 25 October 2011, the Council concluded:

While general language programmes help to develop essential communication skills for everyday use, methodologies such as content and language-integrated learning (CLIL) in both general education and VET can be particularly effective in enhancing the mobility and employability of workers (Council of the European Union, 2011)

In addition, the Council agreed: "In order to promote CLIL, teachers and trainers - in particular in VET - should be encouraged to acquire high quality language competences and should have access to high quality teaching resources".

Both these statements promote the involvement of schools, teachers and institutions, in a process of change that must move from traditional methods towards integrated approaches, through enhancement of the offer, quality and relevance of language teaching in general education.

Our challenges are also related to developing teacher co-ordination and student involvement. CLIL becomes an opportunity for organisational learning and for involving teachers in their own professional improvement, interacting and networking.

3. Catalan policies to implement CLIL

The world is becoming increasingly complex; for educational policies to be efficient and sustainable, both professionals and communities must participate. To promote this collaboration, Catalonia created its *Strategic Agreement*⁵ (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2008a) in 2007, between the regional government, stakeholders and enterprises:

To promote co-operation between education, innovation and research, the Generalitat de Catalunya has defined its education decisions between 2008 and 2011 within the framework of this *Acord estratègic per la internacionalitzaciò, la qualitat de l'ocupació i la competitivitat de l'economia catalana* (Strategic agreement to promote internationalisation of the Catalan economy, strengthen its competitiveness, and improve the quality of employment) (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2008b).

This agreement included CLIL as the favoured methodology for improving students' communicative competencies, and for developing plurilingualism, lifelong learning, and employability (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2008c).

Since 2009, the Catalan Education Law has provided a legal framework to develop autonomous school projects. They implement decision-making at the school level, and are promoted with organisational flexibility, international training and research, networking for teachers, student mobility, ICT tools, plurilingualism, CLIL approaches, and experimental language plans. Since 2011, they are empowered by the Council of The European Union, when it invites the member states to:

Encourage innovative forms of European co-operation, experimentation and new approaches to language teaching and learning, such as content and language-integrated learning (including in bilingual schools), opportunities for language immersion mobility and, where appropriate, more extensive use of ICT also in creative language learning environments (Council of the European Union, 2011).

⁵ Follow up of the strategic agreement (seguiment de l'acord estratègic) retrieved 28 March 2012 from:
http://www.acordestrategic.cat/seguiment_acord/documents_acord/index.html

Many European educational policies are targeted to involve users and professionals in acquiring *high quality language competencies*, essential for the internationalisation of higher education institutions and the enhancement of graduate employability. This strategic goal aligns the Catalan education system with European proposals.

The *Subdirecció General de Llengua i Plurilingüisme*, the official unit in charge of developing international school projects in several curricular languages in Catalonia, is now promoting CLIL initiatives by funding the new PILE 2012 (*Pla Integrat de Llengües Estrangeres*). The foreign language service, *Servei de Llengües estrangeres*, is also working on strategies to implement school language projects⁶ where European networking and classroom CLIL-tasks are blended: eLearning at eTwinning projects, mobility in Comenius associations and training in Grundtvig, are successful examples to take into account.

All these programs contribute to provide valuable strategies to develop a school's linguistic project, fostering plurilingualism, networking, CLIL approaches, eLearning, and European mobility.

4. CLIL for democratic engagement

Education policies should also focus on getting both immigrant and established communities involved, to avoid social gaps. Stimulating citizen participation in decision-making is a real challenge that puts democracy on the spot. Every school

⁶ In 2012, several CLIL programs will be promoted in Catalonia:

- a) PILE: *Pla Integrat de Llengües Estrangeres*. It gives funding to schools that include planning for curricular foreign languages under CLIL approaches. All school levels.
- b) AAI: *Ajut a l'Aprenentatge Actiu*. It facilitates international student mobility, after preparing projects where classroom-work is based on language and content learning. Secondary education.
- c) SAE: *Suport a les Activitats Extraescolars o estades per primària*. It offers fundings to organise after-classes in foreign languages with content and language learning approaches in Primary education.
- d) PAP: *Programa d'Aprenentatge Permanent* (Comenius and Grundtvig). It empowers networking among European schools and mobility for teachers and students.

project should include strategies for enhancing long-term commitments from teachers and should involve families actively, whatever their origin or social status.

School projects need to develop leadership among actors and users: the so-called BachiBac programme, for example, where the French Baccalauréat and Spanish Bachillerato are combined to produce an internationally accepted CLIL curriculum (Ministerio de Educación, 2010), requires determined support from the whole educational community. It can be an opportunity for reflection and debate among teachers and students, alongside families.

Co-ordinating holistic CLIL curricula at schools cannot be worked out without profound acceptance and participation⁷. Many other issues such as implementing plurilingualism with equity, improvement of academic results, consolidation of lifelong learning or future expectations, also need collective involvement if we want any successful level of achievement.

Education policies must be presented to school communities, open to suggestions and collaborative participation with transparency and democratic processes. School communities can feel involved if contextual decision-making and school-management autonomy is promoted: educators from formal, non-formal and informal educational fields can also work together to provide a major increase in resources, widening the scope for success.

CLIL offers opportunities for professional development, shared leadership, international collaboration, and for action-research at school: teachers, families and students can participate in designing, promoting, assessing and diffusing their CLIL school projects internationally, disseminating their success.

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⁷ In Catalonia, the Headmaster Committee (*Junta de Directors*) is where the main education policies are presented and explained to schools. This is a way for the education authorities to be open to suggestions and collaborative participation from principals, teachers, and communities, with transparency and democratic processes.

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