AN INITIATIVE FOR THE INCLUSION OF PLURILINGUALISM/CULTURALISM IN CLIL: THE EUROPEAN PROJECT ConBaT+

UNA INICIATIVA PER INCLOURE EL PLURILINGÜISME I LA PLURICULTURALITAT A AICLE: EL PROJECTE EUROPEU ConBaT+

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1. Point of departure and objective of the experience

In October 2010, *Factworld*, a forum 'to support the teaching of subjects through the medium of a foreign language, bilingual education, immersion education, content and language integrated learning (CLIL)' launched a discussion among CLIL practitioners across the world. The topic was 'The cultural dimension in CLIL'. The discussion referred to the concept of 'culture' in CLIL as 'baffling'; as a result and unsurprisingly, the discussion progressed quickly toward a definition of CLIL - as opposed to an exploration of what might be understood by 'culture'. The reflections below give a flavour of the discussions:

> I think it's a mistake to want to get culture into a CLIL lesson by hook or by crook. CLIL is mainly subject teaching in L2: the teacher's business is to teach the subject – make sure their kids get grades in maths or geography or whatever it is (J. Clegg)

or

> CLIL is not the savior of the educational world, the purveyor of 'culture'- although it might seem to be in a position to help. That is because, surely, it is a *methodology* and not an ideology… (P. Ball).

A few attempts to define culture were made and this included references to 'surface culture' such as 'food, clothes, customs, etc' as well as 'high culture' such as literature, music, art, etc' or viewing 'curricular concepts through the prism of L2 and the culture it carries' (J. Clegg). The first two definitions of culture were perceived to be difficult or impossible to integrate into subjects that do not lend themselves easily to this type of content, such as science or mathematical subjects. With regard to the third definition, culture was restricted to cultural limits of the L2. The limits remained undefined, even if, as was pointed out by one of the contributors, that L2 carries more than a single worldview when linked to diverse cultures as English is to Britain, America, Africa, India, etc. (M. Pérez Galván).

This paper proposes to define the role of culture in CLIL as a dynamic construct based on the reality that is diversity as reflected in our classrooms today. This view is based on the concepts of plurilingualism/culturalism and explores ways in which these

concepts can become an integral part of a CLIL programme. In this model, the aim is not to teach a multiplicity of languages, but to use languages as instruments/ tools that will open doors to their associated cultures. It gives a voice to the languages of the class and their speakers (so often silent). It also ensures that as educators, we do not limit the learning experience to a single worldview. The inclusion of the concept of plurilingualism/culturalism in content should be seen as a pedagogical tool, in the same way as the concept of 'scaffolding' is in CLIL. By promoting scaffolding we pass on useful and constructive skills while developing useful and constructive attitudes for the business of learning the subject in question. Similarly, by promoting the inclusion of plurilingualism/culturalism in content, we pass on skills and positive attitudes for the business of living in a diverse and dynamic world. In this way, 'we do culture' (as opposed to teaching culture as one would teach and objectify content) and we ensure that the 'baffling word' of culture is not just a token element of a CLIL programme, simply because it has to appear in any educational context.

2. Context

These views, i.e. proposing culture as essentially diverse and dynamic, have been developed within the European Centre for Modern Languages[2] through the ConBaT+ project and are presented here in the form of practical applications of plurilingualism/culturalism for the CLIL classroom.

The materials were elaborated by CLIL practitioners working in a wide variety of European educational contexts. They are assembled in a training kit including 26 plurilingual/cultural didactic units in subjects such as mathematics, science, physics, biology, chemistry, history, geography, art, music, physical education, economics, civics and social sciences for the primary and post-primary sectors of the education system. The materials were developed in three languages, namely, Spanish, French and English and implemented in 12 European countries. The project's dedicated website also contains many additional resources and a rationale.

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[2] The European Centre for modern languages (www.ecml.at) is a Council of Europe institution promoting excellence in language education.

3. 3. Development, didactic strategies and materials elaborated or used

Below is an excerpt of a didactic unit on statistics developed, in this case, by O. Pallarés and C. Petit (Fig.1). Here, the languages of the class and their speakers are formally, yet naturally acknowledged by the inclusion of a dedicated column entitled 'your language' and 'other languages'.

- Rellenad la tabla siguiente:

Concepto	Ejemplo en nuestro pequeño estudio anterior	Definición general (en español o en alguna de tus lenguas)	En tu lengua	En otras lenguas
La población que participa en el estudio / el grupo objetivo				
Tamaño de la población				
Individuo				
Una muestra (representativa o no)				
Tamaño de la muestra				
Variable estadística (numérica o cualitativa)				
Frecuencia absoluta				
Frecuencia relativa				

En el pequeño estudio estadístico que hemos realizado, hemos intentado sacar conclusiones a partir de los conceptos *frecuencia absoluta* y *frecuencia relativa*. Algunos **parámetros estadísticos** con los que todavía no hemos trabajado, pero con los que deberemos trabajar más adelante y que seguro que recuerdas de años o actividades anteriores, son **la moda**, **la mediana** y **la media** aritmética. ¿Podéis intentar rellenar la tabla siguiente?

Concepto	Definición general (en español o en alguna de tus lenguas)	¿Cómo se calcula? (con un ejemplo de la actividad anterior)	En tu lengua	En otras lenguas
Media				
Moda				
Mediana				

Fig.1.

4. Evaluation and conclusions

The materials were developed in two phases. Phase 1 included the piloting of the team of experts' materials which were developed as experimental models for the teachers present at the first ECML workshop. The aim was to transfer the concepts developed in

the rationale of the ConBaT+ project to real-life situations in European classrooms. Teachers appraised the materials critically, made suggestions for improvement and adapted them to their own context. This process empowered participants to develop their own CLIL materials, all containing a plurilingual/cultural dimension. The materials were also subsequently critiqued by the team of experts and suggestions were made to further enrich the content and strategies with a plurilingual/cultural dimension. The didactic units presented here are the result of this synergy which evolved over the 4 year duration of this ECML project (2007-2011).

The principal outcome of the ConBaT+ experience is the realization that the concept of plurilingualism can be easily integrated into content; equally, for many among the participants, the experience opened doors to new possibilities never considered previously by this very experienced cohort of CLIL teachers.

5. Proposals for future

The work conducted in the ConBaT+ project aims to change attitudes both at learner level and at teacher level. Successful and sustainable attitudinal shifts towards the integration of a languageS-sensitive approach take time. This is why the concept of a plurilingual/cultural mindset within CLIL must focus on more awareness-raising exercises combined with more classroom applications of the kind described here.