



GENERAL THOUGHTS ON BILINGUAL TEACHING

Problematic Fields and General Principles of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

Bilingual history and geography lessons aim at offering pupils a better knowledge and understanding of other European countries. They try to achieve this by inspiring the pupils and providing a multiplicity of perspectives and views of the world.

However, this endeavour is problematic in two ways. Firstly, it is necessary to re-define lessons in the foreign language, as the language is being used as a tool to teach another subject. Secondly, linguistic, cultural and intercultural skills have to be developed by teaching the given subject with authentic materials and by showing how the same event or fact will have different perspectives, depending on who is perceiving it.

The Subject, Self-Experience and Experiencing “the Other”

The content subject gives pupils an excellent opportunity to open up to another culture and to increase their knowledge of their own culture. This is also an effective starting point for introducing the two concepts of self and “the other”- something that it is important to understand in order to discover one’s own identity and becoming an integrated member of society.

When endeavouring to perceive and understand cultural differences, pupils have to undertake quite complex work involving decentralising and abstraction processes, which nevertheless prove very helpful in their own learning process and personal development. Even if differences deserve to be highlighted, to focus solely on what is different involves a lot of risks and paradoxes. Concentrating on what keeps things (and people) separate is more often than not based on more or less conscious, coded value judgements. There is a great danger that a perception of cultural differences can suddenly lead to these differences being placed in a hierarchic order, which ultimately results in unconditional rejection or approval. The loss of a critical distance is also a danger of such one-sided analyses of difference, preventing any real process of understanding by falling back on superficial and stereotypical classifications.

Only the use of truly comparative methods can protect us from such mistakes and can enable pupils to really recognise themselves. This can be done by making them aware, not only of that which is different, but also of what their own culture and target language culture have in common. This orientation towards the pupils is essential because it should enable them to grasp the multiplicity of dimensions (family, place, region, nation) inherent in each culture. The content subject therefore should offer the opportunity for pupils to come to terms with ideas and personal experiences rather than to restrict themselves to an observation of “national” culture, which might be quite fossilised and removed from reality.

The mirror effect brought about by their opening up towards another culture encourages pupils to start reflecting on differences and similarities. This makes it easier for them to understand themselves and fosters positive social behaviour.

It is imperative to critically analyse the stereotypes and prejudices to be found in authentic material and to mention the stereotypes popular with young people. Working on such preconceptions necessitates differentiated procedures, especially as they touch upon the pupils’ identity.



The Content Subject and European Citizenship

The Status of Language in the Relationship between Foreign Language and Content Subject

Language is a secondary objective in history and geography lessons. Research by the MOBIDIC teams has shown that, despite similar starting points, methodological approaches to problems vary tremendously in different countries, depending on the national educational context. Terminological definitions themselves are culturally determined. One therefore has to decide whether language is to be used as an alien code and applied to national patterns of interpretation, or if language is to be regarded as an indivisible carrier of culture. Even behind the words of the foreign language there are hidden political, geographical, historical, philosophical and social differences. Metaphors, rhetorical devices, phrases, classifications, diverse points of view, etc. are linguistic elements leading the language lesson straight into a multiplicity of perspectives. Such cultural indicators are interesting less for the acquisition of factual knowledge, more so because they create an awareness that other cultures describe reality in quite specific ways that might differ from one's own culture.

Seen from this angle, language is a highly significant carrier of information, an essential source, which can be used to arrive at a real understanding of another culture. What is more, in the content subject this work of decoding opens up possibilities of integrating intercultural learning objectives. Therefore, one might well speak of an added value and additional dimensions whenever interaction between perceptions of one's own and another culture takes place.

In the content subject, the construction of language is contextualised on several levels: methodological construction (orientation, argumentation etc.) as well as syntactic and conceptual construction. If it is possible to reflect on synergies between the conceptual basis of the content subject and language acquisition, then it seems plausible to develop comprehensive skills that embrace both.

Cooperation between Foreign Language Teachers and Subject Teachers

The linguistic learning objectives of a history lesson cannot be identical with those of a foreign language lesson. It is necessary for subject teachers and language teachers to complement one another, rather than one or the other taking sole responsibility for a CLIL lesson.

This raises the question of the possible mode of cooperation between the subject teacher and the foreign language teacher, which might ensure coordinated progression with regard to the linguistic needs of the subject.

This co-operation should take place within the framework of contextualisation and de-contextualisation. In order to create suitable learning situations, it is important to place events or linguistic means in contexts that make sense. At the same time, it is important that previous knowledge and skills can be activated from analogous situations and contexts. CLIL lessons offer this opportunity, by reactivating general strategies – for example reading strategies –, by the willingness to make contributions in class and by working on common topics with the help of subject-specific methods.

CLIL teaching opens up a field of active experimentation with the language. Mistakes are not sanctioned in the same way as they are in foreign language lessons because the CLIL teacher is more concerned with developing contextual connections within his/her subject area.



The Creation of Subject-Specific Learning Processes in History and Geography Lessons

The use of authentic materials allows CLIL history and geography lessons to create learning processes that are sound both in terms of terminology and methodology.

Implications and Difficulties

Authentic material should not be seen as a substitute for reality that simply has to be decoded, but rather as a representation of reality created by an author within a specific context. The author was involved in this context him-/herself; he/she had particular interests and intentions, which can be explicit to a greater or lesser extent. The document produced by the author carries traces of these influences, which have to be carefully identified. In other words, it is a point of view, which not only has to be reconstructed, but also has to be compared with other views in order that its relevance and argument can be evaluated. This way of establishing links between an external and an immediate analysis of material is essential. If this is done in the classroom, it will have a great influence on developing pupils' critical thinking skills.

The optimum goal here is to make explicit procedures that enhance improve critical thinking skills through the pupils' active participation. It is not primarily about imparting indispensable factual knowledge, but rather about offering an opportunity to be involved in cognitive processes suitable for the teaching of critical thinking skills. In short, instead of the teacher providing basic information from one social context, efforts should be focused on making history and geography lessons a real experience.

However, the difficulties of this are not to be underestimated as it presents a clear break with traditional practice in History and Geography. Nevertheless, the framework of "European Classes" offers benefits that have to be taken advantage of. Work with L2 should only take place after the history or geography teacher has taught an introductory session on the topic in L1. Thereby, the pupils already have clues they can refer to when looking more closely at a specific area of the subject. This area can then be worked on by using authentic material. Since the (illusionary) interest in basic factual knowledge has been suspended, one can hope that this endeavour does not impede any critical examination of the material.

Working with Authentic Material: Developing Sustainable Skills

- The ability to question authentic material
- The ability to formulate hypotheses with regard to the historical or geographical significance of a document
- The ability to look for more evidence from a pool of diverse additional material, which supports the assumed hypothesis and answers remaining questions
- Developing reading strategies (cursory reading for discovering a topic, selective reading for answers to selected questions, close reading to discover implicit statements, critical reading for checking the relevance of a text for the learning targets, inter-textual reading for the comparison of statements from different documents etc.).
- Identifying different aspects and information to be deduced from the material. Identifying the ways in which these pieces of information overlap or differ. Developing an interpretation, which pays tribute to these different aspects by relating them to the author's status, the implied audience, the type of text and its dissemination area.



- Constructing a synthesis from the different results of the textual analysis by taking into consideration the assigned tasks (size of the text, addressee, reference to or abstention from certain material)
- A reflected evaluation of the chosen methods of analysis

The Content Subject changes the Pupils' Attitude to Learning

CLIL lessons are immediate sources of intercultural learning. This is why they need to make pupils question opinions and stereotypes. (For example: French pupils assume that there is more migration to France than to Germany; a comparison of actual numbers, however, proves that the contrary is true.) It is recommendable to tackle such wrong, sometimes even ethnocentric, assumptions during the subject lesson in order to put them to rest. In addition to the intercultural objectives of the content subject, the focus should be turned towards discovering differences in the way authentic material is received and interpreted and its analysis with regard to nation- or subject-specific cognitive models, the decoding of stereotypes, as well as the recognition that latter emotional rather than rational (fostering European citizenship).

The implementation of these strategies should involve questioning pupils, using their own experience of the world as a “hook” for their new knowledge. (Example: One lesson is started by asking pupils about their parents' background. The resulting reactions bring about intrinsic motivation, strong enough to make the pupils to ask questions that are different from ones the teacher might have asked: “What would be the result of the regulations for citizenship if we lived in Germany?”)

It is also necessary to start with the pupils' opinions and prejudices (non-manifest and declarative knowledge). The teacher's task is then to negotiate possible meanings in order to make the relation between facts and their interpretation in the L1 and in the target language (L2) comprehensible. This requires the application of decentring methods from the teacher.

What should never be neglected are the pupils' learning styles. It is common to ask pupils to become involved and to comment – a situation that is often psychologically uncomfortable to the pupils. It is nevertheless a method frequently applied in foreign language lessons in order to stimulate the pupils' participation. However, this step should only be considered after real methodological input on using and analysing material (images, texts, video), since it is often very difficult indeed to arrive at a point of view without having gone into any effort of critical thinking.

Generally, one should be aware that the acquisition of new concepts and new meaning can only be achieved at the expense of existing ideas. Also, one has to acknowledge that training in critical thinking skills, expressing experiences and knowledge are complex procedures. Such procedures are unthinkable if they do not involve developing a certain maturity that enables exchange of opinion, controversy and the quest for solutions. To organise CLIL subjects around fixed timetables might in fact be a great impediment to achieving an efficient constructivist approach.