Piotr Romanowski

CLIL's Role in Facilitating Intercultural Learning

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Piotr ROMANOWSKI
University of Warsaw
E-mail: p.romanowski@uw.edu.pl

Abstract: Alongside the globalisation phenomenon, many European countries have already situated their educational practice in existing multilingual contexts. The multilingualism policies of the European Union provided an ideal backdrop to the development of integrative approaches such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and, as a result, the term CLIL was coined in 1996 through sustained interest and pedagogical activity in the field of bilingual education across Europe. CLIL environments can also facilitate the promotion of intercultural communicative competence as described in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. In addition, as culture seems to be one of the five dimensions of CLIL provision, it is essential to discuss and consider the incorporation of an intercultural perspective in CLIL. The integrative nature of CLIL gives an opportunity for a simultaneous combination of foreign language learning, content subject learning and intercultural learning.

Keywords: CLIL, bilingual education, intercultural learning, intercultural competence

1. Defining CLIL

The teaching of certain content subjects in a foreign, regional or minority language has existed in European schools for a very long time. Initially, back in the 1950s and 1960s this type of provision was mainly available in regions linguistically distinctive, i.e. close to national borders or where two languages are used. It thus involved very limited groups of students living in somewhat unusual linguistic or social contexts. Obviously, one might assume that the main objective was to turn them into bilingual speakers who could acquire proficiency in languages comparable to that of native speakers (K. Papaja 2014). In the following decades the development of this provision has been influenced in particular by the Canadian experiment with immersion teaching. It originated as a result of efforts made by the English-speaking parents from the province of Quebec who considered that proficiency in French to be crucial in a French-speaking context. They hence sought to offer their children education in this language that would lead them to acquire significant linguistic skills. Programmes for immersion teaching have been enormously successful in Canada (Y. Ruiz de Zarobe/ R.M. Jiménez Catalán 2009, D. Marsh/ G. Langé 2000). While it became instantly obvious that the Canadian experience was not directly transferable, it was nevertheless valuable in encouraging experimental activity in this matter in Europe as well (D. Wolff 2002). Immersion teaching may take a form of 'early' or 'late' provision depending on the age of the learners for whom it is intended. It may additionally be

considered 'total' if the entire curriculum is offered in the target language, or 'partial' if the language of instruction is used for the teaching of just selected subjects. These different approaches are a reflection of the rich variety of linguistic and educational environments, as well as the varied ambitions and aims of pupils or their parents and the education authorities (K. Papaja 2014).

CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) as such started to become the most widely used term for this kind of provision during the 1990s. It is the platform for an innovative methodological approach of far broader scope than language teaching. Accordingly the CLIL methodological approach is intended for the teaching of content subjects through the medium of a foreign language. It seeks to foster the integrated learning of languages and other areas of curricular content (D. Wolff 2002, P. Mehisto/ D. Marsh /M. J. Frigols 2008). The main premise is that a foreign language is best learnt by centring on the transmitted content taken from school subjects, e.g. Mathematics, Geography, Biology, Physics, Chemistry, etc. As such, it can be stated that CLIL referred to the promotion of innovative methods and, in particular, to the teaching of classes in a foreign language for disciplines other than languages, providing bilingual teaching. Following the same line of reasoning, it should be openly declared that CLIL has been very explicit about delineating that Learning involves the Integration of both Content and Language, i.e. learning of any content must involve the learning of the language associated with it. At the level of schooling, successful education in either a first or additional language requires from the learners to be equipped with the language for thinking about the content. When learning through CLIL, where an additional language is used, language-supportive resources, methods and activities are actively and coherently used to enable learners the use of language purposefully. This support acts as a form of scaffolding helping learners to effectively process information, negotiate understanding, and co-construct knowledge (P. Mehisto/ D. Marsh/ M.J. Frigols 2008). Therefore, the underlying principle of CLIL refers to the belief that learners should be more effectively prepared for the multilingual and cultural requirements of diversified culturally, ethnically and linguistically Europe. It is probably interesting to note that CLIL is being realised in more than 20 European countries (D. Marsh/ D. Wolff 2007, C. Dalton-Puffer 2011).

Considering the fact that English has become, on one hand, the language of science and academic research and, on the other hand, an obligatory subject in all schools, the most logical decision would be to combine the two achievements so that a learner could take advantage of them simultaneously. This is the core of CLIL also labeled as a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of content and language with the objective of promoting both content and language mastery to pre-defined levels (D. Marsh et al. 2010). It is essential to highlight that the additional language is not supposed to be the only medium of instruction and thus, it should be used interchangeably with the mother tongue. Its frequency of use will largely depend on its level of advancement among teachers and students as well as the complexity of discussed issues. That is why integrating language and non-language content has been referred to as the hallmark of all forms of bilingual education (J. Cenoz/ F. Genesee 1998).

For M. Byram (2010), the only way to go beyond the constraints faced by teachers and learners alike in achieving the intercultural dimension of language teaching and learning is to seek to realise them through CLIL curriculum models.

Although some similarities can be drawn between CLIL and other content-language theories and practices such as CBT or immersion programmes, Coyle argues that its discriminating factor is the planned pedagogic integration of contextualized content, cognition, communication and culture into teaching and learning practice (D. Coyle et al. 2010).

CLIL describes the teaching and learning of content subjects through the medium of an additional language. This model is based on the symbiosis between communication, content, cognition and culture, within specific contexts (D. Coyle et al. 2010) – although it is important to establish that in a CLIL approach, both the language and content have equal importance and, while the focus on one or the other will shift to meet the particular knowledge, skills and understanding being taught and learnt, the two aspects remain interdependent and have parity (D. Marsh/ G. Langé 1999).

The content matter in a CLIL paradigm does not have to equate to predefined curriculum subjects. What matters is that both language and content are developed for a purpose which is authentic and relevant to the particular context in which it is implemented. However, humanities are often perceived as the best content subject areas for CLIL implementation, and citizenship education is often presented as an ideal vehicle for content-language integrated models of curriculum, through the way in which they already offer opportunities for reflection on otherness and differing perspectives (M. Byram 2010, D. Wolff 2002). At the same time technological and scientific subject content should not be disregarded, as these will often provide less ambiguous concepts as well as a strong potential for instrumental motivation.

Last but not least, CLIL is a paradigm in language education advocated by some researchers as a holistic approach which engages students intellectually and cognitively in both language and content and which may, therefore, have an impact on mental activities. It is claimed to promote cultural literacy and fluency in the target language while students apply prior knowledge and use cognitive skills. The use of real-world topics respecting foreign viewpoints reinforces the potential for combining language and intercultural learning. The importance of this approach lies in the fact that learning contents in another language can affect our conceptual mapping, modify the way we think, and, in addition, broaden our thinking horizon (D. Marsh 2012). CLIL is an integrated dual-focused approach to FL teaching that could easily include the cultural dimension in order to provide a more comprehensive and pluralistic view of foreign cultures. L. Blanton (1992) contends that only content-oriented curricula can help college students develop "the deep literacy on which their academic success depends". In the same vein, D. Wolff (2007) sustains that the educational objective of intercultural competence may be best implemented within CLIL approaches. It could be argued that the potential of CLIL contexts for enhancing intercultural competence seems to be high since this framework allows teachers to deal with topics linked to the construction of people's cultural identity. Hence, the integrative nature of CLIL

classes provides an opportunity for taking not only a dual-focused but a triple-focused approach: simultaneously combining foreign language learning, content subject and intercultural learning.

From an intercultural perspective, the topics selected for CLIL programs might allow students to explore and to ponder on cultural topics self-reflexively. The topics organizing the syllabus in CLIL contexts seem to be ideal for introducing and exploring cultural issues connected to the themes. Moreover, as one of the aims of this pedagogical approach is to develop students' critical thinking, it could promote an awareness of worldwide problems and consequently contribute to intercultural competence.

2. Defining intercultural communicative competence and its components

Intercultural communicative competence has been the focus of a number of studies since the 1960s when the term was introduced by researchers interested in overseas technical assistants and by Peace Corps volunteers (G.H. Gardner 1962, B.F. Hoselitz 1954). It has become of interest for studies with such diverse conceptual themes as immigrant acculturation, culture shock, cross-cultural training, social change, international management, and foreign student advising. Hence, it has been referred to by means of alternative names such as cross-cultural adjustment, intercultural adaptation, intercultural understanding, overseas success, personal growth/adjustment, cross-cultural effectiveness, and satisfaction with overseas experience. In the last two decades, however, there has been a growing consensus on how to define it. Finally, it has been agreed that intercultural communicative competence involves knowledge, motivation, and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures (G.H. Gardner 1962).

Consequently, intercultural communicative competence entails the use of language that is proper in a given cultural context, and of actions that meet the expectations and demands of intercultural communicators who act in a culture-specific situation. As a result, effective intercultural interactants must recognize constraints imposed on their behaviour by different sets of rules (L. Lee 1979), avoid violating them with improper (e.g. impolite, abrasive, or bizarre) behaviours (H. Getter/ J.K. Nowinski 1981), and enact communication behaviours in a proper (e.g., clear, truthful, considerate, responsive) manner (R.R. Allen/ B.S. Wood 1978). Effectiveness and appropriateness combine to influence the quality of the interaction. They are also used as the two criteria evaluating a communication success.

Following the findings of such prominent researchers as M.R. Hammer, W.B. Gudykunst, and R.L. Wiseman (1978), M.J. Bennett (1993), S. Ting-Toomey's (1994), G.-M. Chen and W.J. Starosta (2000), B. Spitzberg (2000), W. Fritz, A. Moellenberg, and G.-M. Chen (2003), two basic assumptions have been made with regards to the dimensions of intercultural communicative competence. Firstly, the role of extra-linguistic determinants of intercultural communicative competence tends to be even more important than of the verbal language in a communication success of intercultural communicators. Secondly, intercultural sensitivity has been assigned the role of its essential non-verbal component and skill determining a proper development

of other communication skills. M.J. Bennett (1993) considers intercultural sensitivity as the main variable accounting for a communication success of intercultural communicators. He understands it as the ability to be aware of other cultures and to accept the differences resulting from them. Based on his observations that if individuals are taught how to confront cultural differences by becoming more sophisticated and sensitive to them, they may predict at least some of them and diminish their misunderstandings and failures.

Also, for G.-M. Chen and W.J. Starosta (2000) intercultural sensitivity is a basic dimension of intercultural communicative competence. It is an ability to understand similarities and differences of other cultures, which embraces a person's emotional desire to acknowledge, appreciate, and accept cultural differences, his/her multiple perspectives on an event or behaviour, his/her recognition of his/her own cultural values and those of others as well as his/her empathy and ability to adjust to different ways of communicating.

In a more recent approach to intercultural sensitivity W. Fritz and A. Moellenberg, G.-M. Chen (2003) have concurrently isolated intercultural awareness and intercultural adroitness as equal and additional constituents of intercultural communicative competence. Intercultural communicative competence is an umbrella concept that consists of a person's cognitive, affective, and behavioural abilities in the process of intercultural communication. Intercultural awareness is the cognitive dimension of intercultural communicative competence, intercultural adroitness acts as a behavioural aspect and ultimately, intercultural sensitivity performs the role of affective aspect of intercultural communicative competence.

For the purpose of the present work and its research findings, special attention should be paid to the aforementioned intercultural sensitivity, which has been largely discussed in The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), created by M.J. Bennett (1993). It constitutes a framework explaining the experience of people who were observed in intercultural workshops, classes, exchanges, and graduate programs,. Based on the conducted observations M.J. Bennett (1993) assigned intercultural sensitivity the crucial role in determining an intercultural speaker's level of intercultural communicative competence. During his studies it appeared that learners confronted cultural difference in some predictable ways as they acquired more intercultural competence. Employing concepts from cognitive psychology and constructivism, he organized these observations into six stages of increasing sensitivity to cultural difference. The underlying assumption of the model is that as one's experience of cultural difference becomes more sophisticated, their competence in intercultural relations potentially increases. Bennett assumed that each stage was indicative of a particular worldview structure, and that certain kinds of cognitive processing, attitudes, and behaviours would typically be associated with each such configuration of worldview.

The first three DMIS stages are ethnocentric, meaning that a person's own culture is experienced as central to reality to some extent. In Denial, one's own culture is experienced as the only real one, and consideration of other cultures is avoided by maintaining psychological and/or physical isolation from differences. In Defense,

one's own culture (or an adopted culture) is experienced as the only good one, and cultural difference is denigrated. In Minimization, elements of one's own cultural worldview are experienced as universal, so that despite acceptable surface differences with other cultures, deep down those cultures are seen as essentially similar to one's own.

The second three DMIS stages are ethnorelative, meaning that our own culture is experienced in the context of other cultures. In Acceptance, other cultures are experienced as equally complex but different constructions of reality. In Adaptation, one attains the ability to shift perspective in and out of another cultural worldview; thus, their experience potentially includes the different cultural experience of someone from another culture. In Integration, a person's experience of self is expanded to include the movement in and out of different cultural worldviews.

In general, it must be emphasized that the ethnocentric stages can be seen as ways of avoiding cultural difference, either by denying its existence, by raising defenses against it, or by minimizing its importance. The ethnorelative stages are ways of seeking cultural difference, either by accepting its importance, by adapting a speaker's perspective to take it into account, or by integrating the whole concept into a definition of one's identity.

B. Spitzberg and W. Cupach (1984) isolated three such factors contributing to a speaker's becoming consciously and consistently competent in intercultural interactions: knowledge, motivation, and skills. The likelihood to act as a competent intercultural communicator significantly diminishes when any of them is either absent or poorly performed. Knowledge refers to the speaker's awareness or understanding of requisite information and actions at the criss-cross of cultures. A knowledgeable communicator possesses information about the people, the communication rules, the context, and the normative expectations governing the interaction with the interlocutors from another culture. Without it, s/he will invariably make misattributions, choose incorrect communication strategies, violate rules of etiquette, or cause the loss of face for self or other. Furthermore, s/he may not be able to correctly ascribe the reasons for communication erroneous behaviours and remedy them. To obtain the needed knowledge, speakers need to be not only sensitive to their interlocutors' feedback but also cognitively flexible to accommodate that feedback (C.R. Berger 1979, W.B. Gudykunst 1992). Thus, the knowledge component of intercultural communicative competence entails both the body of information necessary to interact appropriately and effectively as well as the cognitive schemata or orientations to facilitate the acquisition of such information. In terms of the necessary information, researchers have found a positive correlation between intercultural communicative competence and awareness of the other culture (R.L. Wiseman/ M. Hammer/ N. Nishida 1989) and self-awareness (W.B. Gudykunst/ S.M. Yang/ N. Nishida 1987). They increase the intercultural communicator's understanding of others and of self, which, in turn, facilitates his/her making accurate predictions and attributions. Favourable cognitive orientations have been found in terms of open-mindedness (P.S. Adler 1975), non-judgmentalness (B.D. Ruben 1976), self-monitoring ability (M. Snyder 1987), problem-solving ability (R.W. Brislin 1981)

and cognitive complexity (R.L. Wiseman/ H. Abe 1985). All of them facilitate perspective-taking and adaptation to new information.

Skills refer to the actual performance or the communicative behaviours felt to be effective and appropriate in the communication context. For B. Spitzberg (2000), skills must be repeatable and goal-oriented. If a communicator accidentally produces a behaviour that is perceived as competent, this would not be adequate, since s/he may not be able to replicate the same behaviour with the same effect. S/he needs to be able to perform the script fluently and with cause (i.e. an appropriate rationale for its performance).

The final skill component of intercultural communicative competence reflects the behaviours necessary to interact appropriately and effectively with members of different cultures. Researchers have discovered several behaviours that are positively correlated with intercultural communicative competence. They are: mindfulness (W.B. Gudykunst 1992), intercultural adroitness (G.-M. Chen/ W.J. Starosta 2000), interaction involvement (D.J. Cegala 1984), recognition of nonverbal messages (J.W. Anderson 1994), appropriate self-disclosure (H.Z. Li 1999), behavioural flexibility (A.P. Bochner/ C. Kelly 1974), interaction management (J.M. Wiemann 1977), identity maintenance (S. Ting-Toomey 1994), uncertainty reduction strategies (J.A. Sanders/ R.L. Wiseman 1993), appropriate display of respect (B.D. Ruben 1976), immediacy skills (P.G. Benson 1978), ability to establish interpersonal relationships (M.R. Hammer 1987), and expressing clarity and face support (M.S. Kim 1993). They allow for adaptive, flexible, and supportive communication.

3. Defining intercultural learning

D. Marsh et al. (2001) deem culture to be one of the five dimensions of CLIL. B. Rozas (2009) also underscores culture as one of the dimensions of CLIL, consisting of 'building intercultural knowledge and understanding, developing intercultural communication skills, learning about specific neighbouring countries/regions and/or minority groups, and introducing the wider cultural context'. Following M. Byram, B. Gribkova, and H. Starkey (2002), Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) can be defined as a whole made up of: (a) knowledge about other peoples and cultures and about the processes underlying human interaction, including how we perceive the interlocutor, the representation social groups have of other communities and how this affects the communication process; (b) attitudes such as respect, tolerance and empathy; (c) the intercultural skill of interpreting and making connections, interpreting a cultural event or fact in the light of the target culture's meanings attached to it and relating it to an event or fact from one's own culture with a comparable degree of significance; (d) the skill of discovery and interaction, the discovery of alien cultural elements and meanings and their operationalisation under the constraints of real-time communication; and (e) critical cultural awareness, the reflection on one's own and the other cultural practices and beliefs from an informed and critical perspective and the understanding that neither of these cultures is superior to the other. In addition, further elements can be added to these in a wider ICC framework: (1) the understanding of the relevance of identity (M. Byram/ G. Zarate

1995); (2) the skill to solve intercultural conflicts and problems which result from differences (M. Meyer 1991) and the skills of negotiation, mediation and diplomacy (J. Corbett 2003); (3) the capacity to shift the frame of reference, cultural versatility and flexibility (M. Meyer 1991); (4) action-taking (M. Byram et al. 2009), the possibility of reacting and taking action in intercultural contact situations; and (5) bridging the gap and the culture of third places (C. Kramsch 1993), the creation of a new cultural place which is neither one's own nor the foreign culture(s) but a place where they meet. The first step towards the incorporation of an intercultural perspective in CLIL, perhaps even prior to the encounter with otherness, is self-knowledge in order to build the links for intercultural understanding. In this sense, CLIL helps to explore learners' 'dominant symbol systems'.

Intercultural education is defined as 'learning to react in non-ego/ethno/sociocentric ways to certain aspects of societies different from one's own, or to "unknown" cultures' (J.P. Beacco et al. 2010). For them, the increasing diversity in classrooms around the world is acknowledged as both a challenge and an opportunity for intercultural teaching, and also as an imperative for more to be achieved in terms of policy development and implementation. The integration of intercultural education in the curriculum is dependent on the context in which it is to be applied. In order to achieve this integration, 'existing curricula may have to be modified substantially - but without abandoning the aims of the previous curriculum'.

According to J.P. Beacco et al. (2010), Intercultural Competence 'makes it easier to understand otherness, to make cognitive and affective connections between past and new experiences of otherness, mediate between members of two (or more) social groups and their cultures, and question the assumptions of one's own cultural group and environment'. The wider role of educational institutions in providing opportunities for learners to develop intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes is therefore central.Indeed, a focus on intercultural understanding is possible at all levels of the curriculum, but should not be the sole remit of language teachers. As the teaching and learning of intercultural issues has now become a necessity, even if only for instrumental purposes, the teaching of critical intercultural skills is not only a desired outcome that educational institutions should strive for in their learners, it is a duty they have to fulfil if indeed the role of teachers is to develop global citizens (L. Aktor/ K. Risager 2001).

M. Hennebry (2014) also argues that cultural knowledge has taken a lesser role in ICC approaches, yet it should play a greater role if that knowledge is necessary in order to develop and acquire a higher level of intercultural communicative competence, namely the ability to reflect critically on one's own culture as well as the culture of others. This need for criticality is also acknowledged by M. Byram (1997). Integrating the two approaches, M. Hennebry (2014) argues, could lead to a more effective model than either of the approaches taken separately.

The seminal model for intercultural communicative competence proposed by M. Byram (1997) established a set of required knowledge, skills and attitudes: savoirs, savoir-faire, and savoir-etre. Many interpretations of this model have followed; for instance, D. Lussier (2007) used the knowledge / know-how / being terms.

A.E. Fantini (2000) further added awareness and language proficiency to define the concept of the intercultural speaker, and provided a wide range of attitudinal attributes learners should acquire or possess in order to achieve intercultural communication competence: in particular, empathy as a conscious and active willingness and ability to change one's viewpoint. It can be argued that this particular attitudinal attribute is a key one, therefore, that teachers should aim to facilitate it in order to achieve intercultural communicative competence for their learners. It must be noted however that Intercultural Competence is a process rather than an acquired attribute (M. Byram/ B. Gribkova/ H. Starkey 2002).

In developing students' intercultural awareness and understanding, their understanding of own culture is essential in evaluating similarities and differences, which is at the heart of teaching and learning of culture. There is also evidence that learners can benefit from reflecting on their own culture and on taking an alternative stance when doing so, before investigating a particular aspect of another culture. The concept of 'intercultural speaker' involves both the competences of interaction and of mediation between one's own perceptions and those of others (M. Byram 2010). It is the ability to constantly shift between one's own culture and another, and in doing so of being able to have different perspectives, which represents intercultural competence. Many contend that a content-based approach to language learning offers the learners opportunities to evaluate similarities and differences with their own language and culture, thus developing intercultural awareness and competence (D. Coyle et al. 2010). H. Starkey (2007) however warns of the dangers of presenting the other culture as overly and stereotypically different to learners' own. Whilst intercultural competence can sometimes be viewed as overly simplistic in their representation of otherness, and in particular in the way in which other cultures can be narrowly represented in existing materials such as textbooks, it can be argued that teaching towards intercultural competence goals is a more 'holistic' approach to language learning than communicative models. As long as the critical approach to cultural awareness is applied, it could also be argued that simplification and selectiveness are a necessary part of teaching, in order to ensure accessibility to learners (C. Brumfit 2001).

4. Defining the relationship between CLIL and intercultural learning

It is argued that CLIL models can foster the improvement of learners' linguistic competence. In order to achieve successful content and learning integration, general education theories - steeped in the influence of socio-cultural constructivist theorists of Piaget and Vygotsky – must be considered along theories in Second Language Acquisition (D. Coyle et al. 2010). Indeed, although most of the research is based on the benefits of CLIL models resulting from the field of SLA, some of the key benefits include increased exposure to the target language, and the opportunity for learners to develop linguistic skills in a more naturalistic environment, as reported from a range of empirical studies (C. Dalton-Puffer 2011, C. Dalton-Puffer/ T. Nikula 2006, C. Dalton-Puffer/ U. Smit 2007).

However, it is also important to note that there is to date still insufficient evidence that CLIL approaches provide learners with improved performance in aspects of target language learning. In particular, T. Mughan (1998) argues that the development of intercultural skills is dependent on the level of linguistic proficiency of the learners, and contends that not only may a higher level of linguistic competence be necessary for learners to access certain aspects of the target culture, but also that the integration of culture with language learning may slow down the linguistic development processes. However, many also contend that there is no need for learners to have acquired advanced levels of linguistic competence in order to be able to access intercultural learning (S. Duffy/ J. Mayes 2001).

Regardless of the choice of stance taken when considering the potential benefits of CLIL models on learners' linguistic competence, it is important to situate a chosen CLIL model within a cognitive and knowledge framework, and to acknowledge that learners' linguistic competence is likely to be less developed than their cognitive skills (D. Coyle et al. 2010).

Language acquisition involves the development of cognitive processes. In addition, the level of cognitive challenge is essential for successful learning (C. Dalton-Puffer 2011; C. Dalton-Puffer/ U. Smit 2007). One of the key benefits of CLIL approaches is to provide learners with opportunities to develop their cognitive competence through processes of conceptualisation (D. Marsh/ G. Langé 2000). However, whilst there is a need to provide learners with sufficient cognitive challenge, and while CLIL models will often provide this for learners at an age-appropriate level, linguistic progression needs to be scaffolded to avoid demotivation.

In the same way as it is important to challenge learners, it is also essential to ensure that the learning environment is one which promotes the early use of language learnt, regardless of proficiency or accuracy levels, as successful communication is not necessarily reliant on either of these traditionally accepted standards of 'successful' language learning.

For A.T.S. Campos (2009), CLIL methodology may prove more successful in developing students' cultural understanding than snippets of explicit cultural teaching. Although the role of all curriculum subjects is acknowledged as contributing to the development of learners' own culture, CLIL classes offer the 'added dimension' of interculturality by offering differing perspective on a wide range of topics. In addition to this, CLIL models also offer learners the opportunity to address a wide range of diverse cultures. Developing a learner's intercultural competence by giving them the required tools to approach a wide range of other cultures successfully and confidently goes beyond their knowledge, understanding and skills in dealing with a set, single target culture. For K. Arens (2010), the scope of intercultural learning can describe such competencies in the plural, as 'a set of interlocking cultural literacies' which must serve to move the purpose of the curriculum beyond the linguistic and towards the cultural.

However, I.A. El-Hussari (2007) also suggests that the complex make-up of a wide range of potentially differing sets of beliefs within the four walls of a classroom poses a challenge when attempting to develop intercultural understanding. This view

that language classrooms can offer a poor environment for cultural immersion experiences is widespread, and in order to make intercultural learning possible in the language classroom, we must reflect on learners' experiences and the depth of their engagement with language and culture.

The prerequisites for intercultural learning seem fulfilled in CLIL contexts and, thus, a number of researchers suggest that the potential for intercultural learning processes in CLIL is particularly high (S. Breidbach 2007). The ascribed intercultural potential of CLIL can be seen in connection with its engagement with topics that contribute to the formation of the cultural identity of people. It may well be argued that all school subjects – regardless of their CLIL or non-CLIL nature – serve as building blocks in the learners' process of growing into a culture, i.e. enculturation process. In CLIL classes, however, an added dimension can be introduced: the intercultural one. In addition to approaching a culturally loaded topic from one's own cultural perspective, a foreign perspective can easily be accessed and (re)constructed.

It is the foreign language which may serve as an initial stepping stone to open a learner's eyes to a foreign perspective. In CLIL contexts, it is not only the linguistic level that enables the initiation of intercultural learning processes. In trying to create a rich CLIL learning environment, it seems almost logical to resort to authentic materials in the target language which are taken from respective foreign cultural contexts. In addition, the digital world offers ample opportunities to access such authentic materials for CLIL-subject purposes. Foreign textbooks, i.e. "target culture" textbooks, may serve as additional points of reference. Additionally, using a foreign language should trigger and support the efforts to draw on foreign cultural examples to work on content subject matter.

Authentic materials, foreign textbooks and foreign cultural examples can all be utilised in an intercultural learning process: they can be used to develop an understanding and reconstruction of a foreign perspective on a particular topic. To make this an intercultural endeavour, however, it is necessary to accompany these foreign cultural insights with an awareness of one's own cultural perspective. In turn, these perspectives are brought together in a process that does not lead to a decision for or against either of them but rather to an integration of both. As such, it becomes possible to shift and mediate between the different perspectives (L. Skopinskaja 2003). She claims that in acquiring knowledge about and reflecting on the target language culture, students need to be encouraged not simply to observe similarities and differences between the two cultures, but they should also analyse them from the viewpoint of the others and try to establish a relationship between their own and other systems (M. Byram 1997). This "perspective consciousness", or the ability to "decentre", or establishing "a sphere of interculturality", is the precondition for successful intercultural communication as well as understanding other cultures. Relativising cultural perspectives and the ability to shift between them can be seen as a key element in intercultural learning and development of intercultural competence (M.J. Bennett 1993).

The high intercultural potential of CLIL classes is strongly connected with the learning environment that is created in practice. CLIL teaching may open doors to a

student-centered, function-focused, task-oriented, authentic and constructivist classroom. It may even serve as a means of promoting learner autonomy.

5. Conclusion

It is paramount to emphasise that the relationship between CLIL, plurilingualism, foreign language learning and ICC in this context does not aim at acculturation. ICC endeavours to endow individuals with the knowledge, attitudes and skills required to meet and enjoy otherness in all its manifestations, not just restricting learners' scope to a specific target community of a particular language.

Important factors in the concept of intercultural competence are the assumptions that learning a foreign language creates greater awareness of the mother tongue and its influence on thinking, widens learners' worldview and favours some type of cognitive change. As a result, attitudes of respect for personal and cultural identities are likely to emerge, showing the potential of CLIL and language learning for fighting against racism and xenophobia. ICC should then be intrinsic to CLIL as it has the potential to add value to the regular curriculum through intercultural teaching which includes self and otherness and curricular linking for interactivity and reflectivity.

In sum, CLIL is said to pave the way for fundamental aspects such as intercultural knowledge, understanding and attitudes. However, further key factors such as intercultural skills, critical cultural awareness and action-taking are not so clearly apparent. Intercultural competence equips individuals to manage their relationships with others but, in spite of being closely linked to plurilingualism, ICC does not automatically develop out of language teaching. Mere exposure to otherness may not yield this unbiased and non-ethnocentric perspective without explicit intercultural teaching and methodology.

Fostering intercultural communicative competence is one of the challenges facing education in the globalised world of the 21st century. The integrative nature of CLIL classes provides an opportunity for taking not only a dual-focused but a triple-focused approach: simultaneously combining foreign language learning, content subject learning and intercultural learning. CLIL environments can be designed to promote intercultural communicative competence as described in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

To enable and facilitate intercultural learning processes various measures can be taken. First, CLIL curriculum designers, authors of CLIL textbooks and materials, CLIL teacher trainers, and CLIL teachers and learners, as the architects of rich CLIL environments, would need to develop an increased awareness of the intercultural potential within CLIL contexts. Secondly, learning materials can be analysed from an intercultural viewpoint by extracting similarities, differences and the author's perspective. As well, the use of modern, student-centred paradigms of teaching methodologies that foster task and project work, authenticity, and real world orientation can provide ample opportunities for intercultural learning in CLIL contexts.

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