CLIL: PERSPECTIVES FROM A COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH IN THE SPANISH CONTEXT

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Resumen

Si se observan las dinámicas educativas europeas en los últimos treinta años, contemplamos el cambio constante que se ha producido en los principios pedagógicos que inspiran los marcos legales nacionales y que deberían guiar las prácticas docentes. En el caso concreto de España, nos encontramos en un punto en el que asistimos a la confluencia de dos tendencias metodológicas en alza. La inclusión de un enfoque competencial que acompaña nuestro currículo, así como la irreversible influencia del Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenido y Lengua Extranjera en los programas de educación bilingüe y trilingüe en todo el país nos ofrece una oportunidad única para optar por una nueva senda educativa donde, finalmente, se puedan superar prácticas docentes obsoletas.

Palabras clave: AICLE, enfoque competencial, Sistema Educativo Español, Didáctica.

Abstract

The observation of the pedagogical dynamics within Europe in the last thirty years will undoubtedly make us reach the clear conclusion of the constant change in the principles guiding not only our official legal frameworks but also what our teaching practice should be. In the particular case of Spain, we can consider ourselves evolving from a specific point in which two major methodological trends meet. The adoption of a very particular competency-based approach in the national curriculum together with the irreversible influence of the CLIL approach within the bilingual and trilingual education programmes all over the country provides us with a golden opportunity to follow a new educative path where old strategies and habits could be definitely left behind.

Key words: CLIL, competency-based approach, Spanish Education System, Didactics.

1 INTRODUCTION

The links between the evolution of the historical contexts of societies and the design of their Education systems are more than evident. These days, we witness the efforts of European, national and regional Education authorities to perform strategies which can adapt the teaching-learning processes to the new society our pupils live in: "we live in a knowledge economy, a knowledge society. Knowledge economies are stimulated and driven by creativity and ingenuity. Knowledge society schools have to create these qualities; otherwise their people and their nations will be left behind" (Hargreaves, 2003, 1)

In the particular case of Spain, our country is one more example of the creation of a new concept of citizenship, which is definitely associated to the European and international spheres of decision-making in the last decades. We can evidently talk about an identity overlapping process in Spanish citizens, who are also European and Basque, or Catalan, or Castillian…with different impacts on self consciousness. Together with this, we have to observe Spanish citizens as global citizens who face the growing identification of the English Language as World English, assuming the ideological load that this implies.

In this sense, the habits of the Spanish society are more and more dependent on the world economic trends dominated by the United States of America. Language is not an exception in this dynamics and some elements of the English Language are introduced in our national "semiotic landscape" (according to the brilliant expression proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen). Thus, these terms are not external realities anymore and become something natural in our daily lives: "the place of visual communication in a given society can only be understood in the context of, on the one hand, the range of forms or modes of public communication available in that society, and, on the other hand, their uses and valuations" (Kress y Van Leeuwen, 1996, 33).

If we stick to social considerations, the presence of the English Language in the Spanish society has a direct relationship with all the processes associated with the phenomenon of globalization: "a process in which basic social arrangements (like power, culture, markets, politics, rights, values, norms, ideology, identity, citizenship, solidarity) become disembedded from their spatial context (mainly the nation-state) due to the acceleration, massification, flexibilisation, diffusion and expansion of transnational flows of people, products, finance, images and information" (Beerkens, 2004, 13) This phenomenon is represented, reflected and enhanced by the presence of the English Language in Spain and some of its political, historical and social causes; some of its formal, informal, planned, not planned, cultural and subcultural ways; and some of its social and cultural consequences.

2 THE COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH

The origins of the Competency-Based approach come from a psychological and industrial background. Back in the 1930s the government of the USA implemented their Competency-Based Norm Equation in response to a real need for training in workforce. Decades later, in the 1970s, The Performance of Competency-Based Teacher Education Programs (P/CBTE) belonging to the entrepreneurial world searched efficiency through repetition in training (based in both Behaviourism and the Human Capital Theory). Constructivism is firmly grounded in the 1980s and Vocational Studies become the perfect Education environment to deepen into the previous stages in the evolution of the Competency-Based approach. Sandra Kerka pictures the situation in the following years: "Popular in the United States in the 1970s in the performance-based vocational teacher education movement, competency approaches are riding a new wave in the 1990s with the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) system in England and Wales (begun in 1986), New Zealand's National Qualifications Framework, the competency standards endorsed by Australia's National Training Board (NTB), and the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) and the National Skills Standards initiative in the United States" (Kerka, 1998, 1)

In 1996, the Delors Report establishes the four basic pillars of Education: learning to know; learning to do; learning to live together and learning to be. The Definition and Selection of Key Competencies document (DeSeCo) specifically describes the social requirements for the new European citizen: "Today's societies place challenging demands on individuals, who are

confronted with complexity in many parts of their lives. What do these demands imply for key competencies that individuals need to acquire? Defining such competencies can improve assessments of how well prepared young people and adults are for life's challenges, as well as identify overarching goals for education systems and lifelong learning" (DeSeCo 1997, 4)

The European Commission assumes the concept of "Key Competencies" in its Lifelong Learning Programme within its European Reference Framework on Education and Training and the following years represent the constant approval of this Education policy by all European institutions with specific milestones like the Lisbon Council (2000); the Tuning Project (2001); in 2002 DeSeCo is taken as the basis for the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA); the European Union assumes the four key competencies broad categories as they were defined by DeSeCo (2005) and, finally, The European Parliament passes a recommendation for all its member states so as to incorporate the Key Competencies in all their national curricula (2006)

In spite of the initial enthusiasm developed by all European institutions there is "a growing chorus of critics arguing that the approach is conceptually confused, empirically flawed, and inadequate for the needs of a learning society (Chappell 1996; Ecclestone 1997)

In Spain *The Ley Orgánica de Calidad de la Educación* (*LOCE*, 2002) mentioned the competencies, without defining them or establishing which competencies were relevant. They appear in the Spanish education system four years later with the *Ley Orgánica de Educación* (*LOE*, 2006) and its curricula which is described as the sum of objectives, basic competencies, contents, methodology and assessment criteria of every of the teaching areas regulated in the law (article 6). These basic competencies are: Competence in Linguistic Communication; Mathematical Competence; Competence in Knowledge of and Interaction with the Physical World; Competence in Processing Information and Use of ICT; Competence in Social Skills and Citizenship; Cultural and Artistic Competence; Learning to Learn; and, finally, Autonomy and Personal Initiative.

The characteristics of theses "basic competencies" in the Spanish national curriculum are the following:

1. They have a holistic and integrated character (knowledge, abilities, attitudes, values and emotions cannot be understood separately)

2. They have a contextual character (all competencies are performed and developed in different action contexts)

3. They have an ethical dimension (competencies are continuously fed by attitudes, values and commitments adopted by individuals in their lives)

4. They have a creative transferring character (understood as a creative adaptation process depending on the context)

5. They have a reflexive character (as they imply a permanent reflexive process so as to optimize the initial intentions with the real possibilities of every context)

6. They have an evolving character (either they are developed, perfected, widened throughout life or they are deteriorated and restricted)

According to Ángel Pérez: "competencies are basic or key competencies when they are valuable for society as a whole, no matter gender, social condition or cultural and family background, and they can also be applied to multiple contexts" (Pérez 2007, 16)

With this grounding and an adequate perspective after six years of implementation of a theoretically assumed Competency-Based approach in the Spanish national curriculum, it seems that time has indicated that critics were right when they pointed out the undeniable lack of precision of the approach when it comes to its practical application. We seem to bump into a theoretically, empirically, and pedagogically unsound (Chappell 1996; Hyland 1994) approach which needs more clarification for teaching professionals. The way in which "basic competencies" are present in the national and regional curricula does not help either. It does not seem appropriate to include our eight basic competencies as annexes to our curricula under the generic denomination of "contribution of the basic competencies to the area of …" In other words, the inclusion of these new "basic competencies" in our curricula is a mere desideratum added at the end of a traditionally designed Education scheme. The adoption of a real competency-based curriculum implies the necessary change of its basic principles, starting with the promotion of competencies as the centre of the document. Unfortunately, Spanish curricula cannot be fully defined as competency-based curricula as they stick to a predictable design inspired in traditional curricula with just a superficial mention to this new concept of "basic competencies".

3 CLIL

After almost two decades of the creation of the term "CLIL" the spread of this approach around Europe and the success of its pedagogical proposals are more than evident. We are currently witnessing the boom of the CLIL methodology as it is understood by Peeter Mehisto and David Marsh: "CLIL is a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language (Mehisto et al, 2008, 9). This basic definition is wide enough to establish a new ground for a so called "umbrella term" (European Commission) in which all teachers are progressively becoming familiarized with the implications of the approach. That is the way in which the term is being shaped by teachers themselves, adapting the core concept to their own contexts.

There are almost as many definitions as authors devoted to CLIL research and those definitions vary according to the proximity to practice they show. Phil Ball summarizes the current impact of CLIL according to the commonest definitions: "it is a member of the curriculum club; it has a dual focus; it buys us time; it causes change and it motivates" (Ball, 2011, 1)

The methodological load implied in the adoption of CLIL also gives the possibility of establishing new definitions like: "the implicit emphasis in CLIL on problem solving and knowing how means that the student is motivated and able to solve problems and to do things using other languages as well. (Navés y Muñoz, 2000, 2) or like Francisco Lorenzo´s: "through CLIL, the focus changes from language as a vehicle of culture to language as a means of communication in academic settings. A new vision of language called for a new vision of learning. CLIL is linked to experiential views of second language acquisition and consequently a new methodology of language teaching" (Lorenzo, 2007, p.28).

The main goals of CLIL refer basically to the dual focus mentioned plus the specific skills associated to a new learning path, breaking with the traditional content-based pattern and offering a whole range of methods and forms of practice in a clear effort to establish real links between the classroom and the world outside. In other words, the Education space goes

beyond the limits of four walls and is expanded to the world itself, obtaining resources from practically any bit of reality and taking advantage of the massive spread of the Information and Communication Technologies.

According to Dalton-Puffer "an extract of the list of goals formulated in the *clil-compendium* will demonstrate this:

- develop intercultural communication skills
- prepare for internationalization
- provide opportunities to study content through different perspectives
- access subject-specific target language terminology
- improve overall target language competence
- develop oral communication skills
- diversify methods & forms of classroom practice
- increase learner motivation (Dalton-Puffer, 2008, 1)

These goals should be achieved through effective teaching practice based on four basic concepts known as the four Cs (Content, Communication, Cognition and Culture). In this way Bloom´s taxonomy and its revised version by Anderson and Krathwohl is frequently mentioned, as it offers a perfect picture of the different conceptions of the teaching and learning processes throughout time. Nowadays, it seems reasonable to affirm that these processes have to be constantly reanalyzed according to the evolution of society. We do think that this is the case of a methodology such as CLIL, where tasks should be carefully selected so that learners manage their own learning process in a progressive way (remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate and create) taking into account their particular knowledge domains (factual, conceptual, procedural and metacognitive)

All the implications associated with the implementation of CLIL around Europe have determined that teachers defending a dual focused practice did have to rethink their teaching principles in order to give a successful response to their pupils. The mere fact of acquiring a particular type of content through a foreign language obliged teachers to establish new groundings for their professional practice, development and training. In the particular case of Cantabria, the first bilingual program implemented in the region was held by a Primary School thanks to the official agreement by the Consejería de Educación (Regional Authority), the Ministerio de Educación (National Authority) and the British Council back in 1996. Later on, bilingual programs were designed and implemented by the Regional Authority on its own with its particular organization pattern and with the participation of dozens of teachers in the region. Nowadays, there are 48 Primary and Secondary Schools with a Bilingual Education Program (English, French and German) with a total sum of 50 programs in Cantabria.

For most CLIL teachers, this new methodological approach has been presented as a challenge and opportunity to definitely change old teaching habits which do not correspond to the social and historical moment we are living. The spread of the English Language as a new *lingua franca*, the constant presence of ICT in all environments and the implementation of new national and regional Competency-Based curricula establish a new Education scenario in which CLIL can turn out to be one possible good answer for many teaching professionals.

4 MEETING POINTS

4.1 Planning.

When thinking of planning competency-based or CLIL activities we should do it very carefully, mainly because we should make our biggest teaching efforts from a task-based perspective. "A task is any structured language learning endeavor which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure, and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task (Breen 1987, 23) After all, task-approaches and CLIL share common principles like their analytic sense, as students analyze language; their dual attention to content and language; and the importance of implicit learning together with specific moments for explicit learning.

In this sense, project-based approaches are also offered to develop both competency-based and CLIL approaches. This proposal tries to enhance the importance of previous planning as far as objectives, contents and procedures are concerned with explicit communication to students: "Project-based learning is a comprehensive perspective focused on teaching by engaging students in investigation. Within this framework, students pursue solutions to nontrivial problems by asking and refining questions, debating ideas, making predictions, designing plans and/or experiments, collecting and analyzing data, drawing conclusions, communicating their ideas and findings to others, asking new questions, and creating artifacts" (Phyllis, C. et al 1991, 371)

It seems that all planning strategies or approaches when thinking of both competency-based or CLIL focuses consider particular strategies like carefully selecting material; promoting processes of class research (searching, experimenting, thinking, applying and communicating the possible outcomes); observing reality outside the classroom like a potential learning scenario; or proposing learning flexibility as a basic principle provided the constantly changing world our students witness every single day.

Do Coyle provides us with a basic tool for CLIL lesson planning which we think may be really useful as it shows a comprehensive competency-based character. It is defined as "the 3As tool": "Stage 1: Analyze content for the language of learning. Stage 2: Add to content language for learning. Stage 3: Apply to content language through learning" (Coyle, D. 2007, 7)

Once again, there is a huge overlapping area between these competency-based and CLIL approaches which is intensified when we consider implementing both of them in our classrooms.

4.2 Implementing.

Taking into account the specific Spanish context in which we teach, assuming new approaches for language and content learning necessarily means a sheer change in most old traditional teaching habits. Although it could be thought that certain teaching transitions have already been performed in our context, daily practice and contact with schools in our region indicate that there is a big percentage of teachers who are reluctant to change, especially in the sense of altering the centre of the teaching activity from teacher to student, that is to say, transcend heavily assumed principles to search for new answers for new students in a new context. This transition is precisely at the core of the definition of "scaffolding", one of the basic concepts which is proposed for a correct implementation of both competency-based and CLIL approaches: "This concept, which derives from cognitive psychology and L1 research, states that in social interaction a knowledgeable participant can create, by means of speech, supportive conditions in which the novice can participate in, and extend, current skills and knowledge to higher levels of competence" (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976, 91)

The idea of integrated and progressive learning (which is present in all pedagogical ideas associated to both approaches) does entirely match with the six features which define scaffolding: "1. - recruiting interest in the task 2.- simplifying the task. 3. - maintaining pursuit of the goal 4. - marking critical features and discrepancies between what has been produced and the ideal solution. 5. - controlling frustration during problem solving 6. - demonstrating an idealized version of the act to be performed" (Van Lier, L. 2004, 150)

These considerations involve, to a big extent, a required learners´ autonomy which becomes another key concept to observe when implementing this kind of approaches. Promoting learners´ autonomy requires a whole bunch of specific strategies and tools oriented to develop the learners´ awareness. In this sense, Viljo Kohonen refers to language learning goals as a process where teachers should promote the acquisition of the learners´ task awareness, personality awareness and process and context awareness, that is to say, a complex vision on awareness which necessarily gives us the idea of acquiring a language as a integral, complex, dynamic and holistic process. Thinking of specific tools for this, portfolios appear as an answer to test and assess the linguistic competence of pupils in the three facets mentioned: "Considering such a holistic personal and language competence to aim at, developing learner autonomy in language learning requires time, commitment and explicit pedagogical guidance (…) portfolio assessment opens new ways for promoting the above kind of outcomes in language learning. It can offer new possibilities for making at least some of language learning more visible to students, teachers and other stakeholders of school (…) In my understanding, the language portfolio may constitute a major part of the "missing link" between the goals of learner autonomy and the pedagogical ways of fostering it in language education" (Kohonen, V., 2000, 14)

If portfolios had some disadvantages as far as their use was concerned, for some of the original formats proposed were difficult to handle, manipulate or keep (European Language Portfolio is a good example of that), ICT appeared to ease our way in this particular tool, as they do in many other aspects of our daily work. Many opinions about the spread of ICT in all social environments have been expressed to highlight some of the peculiarities of this 21st century. Some of those opinions are negative in the sense of placing ICT in the spotlight as responsible for people´s isolation, for the creation of a new social paradigm only based in audiovisual culture, for the drastic change in the conception of human relationships…However, provided that the overwhelming presence of ICT is constant in all aspects of our daily lives, teachers have found ICT as a new endless resource for our classes. To a greater or lesser extent, we simply cannot teach without ICT and we can find many authors who give us examples of how important this kind of technology has become: "Multimedia can: enhance learning in different locations and institutions of diverse quality; present opportunities to students working at different rates and levels; provide (tirelessly, without holding up other students) repetition when repetition is warranted to reinforce skills and learning; and compensate, in the short term, for high student populations and limited numbers of trained and experienced. (Fitzpatrick, A. 2004, 12)

And it is in this universe where teachers can take advantage of new class organization to enhance the presence of "collaborative learning" in our classes. According to some of the aspects mentioned above and the new teaching scenario we face every day, it seems reasonable to promote this strategy: "The term collaborative learning refers to an instruction method in which students at various performance levels work together in small groups toward a common goal. The students are responsible for one another's learning as well as their own. Thus, the success of one student helps other students to be successful (Gokhale, A. 1995, 1) It is precisely in this communal sense of learning where students´ support is found among

themselves, inserting new teaching and learning dynamics into this new path where students become the centre of work and where we try to stimulate their own competences.

The newest forms of Education try to facilitate students´ autonomy for better self awareness and better knowledge of the world around them. This better knowledge has to lead to the ability to critically judge their own society so that they can see, choose, judge and experience by themselves, in other words, they have to empower their critical thinking: "Critical thinking is a higher-order thinking skill which mainly consists of evaluating arguments. It is a purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanations of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, or contextual considerations upon which the judgment is based" (Astleitner, H. 2002, 53)

4.3 Assessing.

The consideration of assessing processes in both approaches includes the implementation of diverse strategies, techniques and tools. Careful planning is much recommended so as to design evaluation criteria and instruments and let students know them all from the very first minute. That is a basic strategy which adds transparency to the overall assessing process. These new assessing perspectives acquire a most relevant role with the diversification in the use of instruments like: the observation of students´ tasks from both individual and collective perspective; the daily analysis of students´ work; the consideration of students´ implication in the dynamics of the class with special attention to its quality; and the appreciation of collaborative work.

Assessing is considered to be a continuous process which serves the whole teaching design. We teach for students to learn, but we also assess for them (and us) to learn. That is the basic point of view which guarantees the development of students as far as their competencies are concerned. That is why we should focus on assessment as a global task where we design, plan, organize, stimulate, implement and redesign our teaching proposals. Therefore, knowledge (simply understood as content) is not the only aspect implied in this kind of assessment view, but also skills, procedures and values…in other words, key competencies guaranteeing a lifelong learning.

Assessment should not be a student-centred process anymore, it is highly recommended to establish assessing dynamics characterized with a mixture of assessing approaches where teacher, pupils and teaching procedures as a whole are assessed. In this sense, the use of rubrics and other instruments for self evaluation, co-evaluation and traditional evaluation are considered as an essential part of both competency-based and CLIL approaches.

5 CONCLUSIONS

We are involved in a historical context in which Education has become one of the major focuses of interest for the correct evolution of our global society. Spain is not an exception. We can definitely assert that we are a fully integrated European country establishing direct links with the European official spheres of decision-making. Therefore, our national curriculum should necessarily share a common ground with other curricula across the continent.

In a globalised world, the English language has experienced a massive spread in the last century, becoming the new *lingua franca* which establishes the 21th century boundaries between new forms of illiteracy and literacy, that is to say, English has become a potential

element for social exclusion. Moreover, there is a commonly shared need for instruction and immersion in the English language inscribed in the bilingual and trilingual Education programmes promoted by all our regional authorities.

The design of our national curriculum observes a competency-based approach as it is defined by the European institutions from the 1990s. However, this design cannot be strictly defined as competency-based for it includes our eight basic competencies as addenda to a traditional kind of curriculum based on contents.

The spread of CLIL partially coincides with this set of pedagogical beliefs and it is inserted in all European countries as a guarantee to provide a high quality type of Education contextualized in the 21st century. The social impact of bilingual or trilingual Education programs is so big that regional Education authorities do not hesitate and enhance the promotion of this type of teaching and learning patterns all over the country. The case of Cantabria, for example, is pretty significant with a whole sum of over fifty bilingual education programs in a region with a population of approximately half a million people.

There is a sheer need for training in our country in both competency-based and CLIL approaches, as they mean a total revision of our most established teaching and learning habits. The adaptation of our Education system to these new times is urgent. Taking into account the voracious presence of the English Language and the permanent mediation of the Information and Communication Technologies is so essential that it will certainly determine what kind of Education we want to implement for our future generations.

We believe that both approaches are grounded in so many common principles that we observe the implementation of CLIL as a golden opportunity to empower the need of a real change in our Education system. Using CLIL as a catalyst for change (Marsh and Frigols, 2007) should be observed as the defining of a new Education path to follow, using its whole range of planning strategies, techniques and tools to perform a real competency-based approach in our national scenario.

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