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New Approaches in English Language Teaching: Teacher Training in the Framework of Content and Language Integrated Learning

A. Fernández Costales^{a,*} and A.C. Lahuerta Martínez^b

^aProfesor Ayudante, Doctor, Departamento de Ciencias de la Educación, Universidad de Oviedo, Asturias, España

^bProfesora Titular de Universidad, Departamento de Filología Anglogermánica y Francesa, Universidad de Oviedo, Asturias, España

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Abstract

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is an innovative approach to foreign language learning based on the integration of language with (non-language) content in a dual-focused learning environment. This article addresses teacher training in the framework of CLIL, focusing on the specific needs and challenges for CLIL teachers. It also approaches the question of the existence of an “optimal profile” for these teachers, which is strictly linked to the educational stage we are working with. Moreover, the existing gap between the theoretical tenets of CLIL methodology and its application in the classroom is identified as a clear barrier in teacher training, which has to be addressed by building-up learning environments that allow for the exchange of knowledge and results. In this sense, this paper suggests creating university-school partnerships that serve as a breeding ground for transferring knowledge and exchange relevant information and results within the teaching community.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

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profesorado;
Multilingüismo

Nuevos enfoques en la didáctica de la lengua inglesa: formación del profesorado en el contexto del aprendizaje integrado de contenidos y lenguas extranjeras

Resumen

El aprendizaje integrado de contenidos y lenguas extranjeras es un enfoque innovador en el aprendizaje de lenguas basado en la integración de contenido curricular y una lengua adicional. El objetivo es analizar la formación del profesorado de aprendizaje integrado de contenidos y lenguas extranjeras, aproximándose a las necesidades específicas y los retos de estos docentes.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail: fernandezcalberto@uniovi.es (A. Fernández Costales).

Se aborda la cuestión de la existencia de un “perfil óptimo” de estos profesores, que está estrictamente unido a la etapa educativa en que la estamos trabajando. Además, se identifica la laguna existente entre los fundamentos metodológicos del aprendizaje integrado de contenidos y lenguas extranjeras y su aplicación en el aula como una barrera en la formación del profesorado, y se defiende que este desajuste debe afrontarse mediante la construcción de entornos de aprendizaje que permitan el intercambio de conocimiento. En este sentido, este trabajo sugiere que los modelos de colaboración universidad-colegio sirven como caldo de cultivo para transferir conocimiento e intercambiar información y resultados relevantes dentro de la comunidad educativa.

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Introduction

Over the last twenty years policies within the context of the Council of Europe and the European Commission have emphasized the potential of different forms of bilingual education in order to improve second language learning across all educational sectors. Thus, the Council of Europe has run relevant cross-European projects, such as the Modern Language Project, whose objectives are to promote large-scale multilingualism by assisting member states in encouraging all Europeans to achieve a degree of communicative ability in a number of languages to continue their language learning on a lifelong basis. This project also aims at diversifying the range of languages on offer, setting appropriate objectives for each language, improving the education/training of language teachers and promoting learner-centred communicative methodologies.

The European Commission for its part has followed a policy focused on diversity. One of its most influential works is the white paper *Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society* aimed at enabling all Europeans to communicate in two community languages in addition to their mother tongue. This document recommends that community language learning should be developed “as early as possible” and refers to the fact that increasing language competence increases mobility and also gives better possibilities for seeking jobs in different EU member states.

CLIL, standing for Content and Language Integrated Learning, is a pragmatic and professionally accepted innovative approach to foreign language learning that is based on the integration of language with (non-language) content in a dual-focussed learning environment. This approach has emerged throughout Europe to enhance the value of European linguistic diversity and to improve the second language competence of students at the primary, secondary and tertiary level (Coleman, 2006; Marsh, 2005).

As a way of combining the integration of the learning of languages and other areas of curricular content, CLIL has become a fast developing phenomenon in Europe, and interest is growing in an approach which seems to carry clear benefits for students at all levels of education (Lasagabaster, 2008; Marsh, 2002). But, as works like the Eurydice survey—which describes 30 different European CLIL experiences—show, it is also evident that there is a diversity of CLIL implementations in European countries, different terminology is used to describe models in different

contexts depending on the emphasis given to either the subject-based component or the language of CLIL. As De Graaf, Koopman, Anikina and Westhoff (2007) explain, CLIL is offered in a variety of forms within Europe and different CLIL programmes exist, which are manifestations of different ways of realising CLIL due to sociocultural settings and educational policies; even within the same territory, CLIL is implemented in different ways according to the particular features of the regions or areas involved. This is the case of Spain, where a decentralised educational system has led to the emergence of several policies, programmes and even methodological approaches as regards Content and Language Integrated Learning (Lasagabaster and Zarobe, 2010).

This paper supports the idea that CLIL is an “umbrella term” covering several methodologies and approaches (Lasagabaster, 2008; Lorenzo, Casal and Moore, 2009) and, therefore, different adjustments need to be done depending on the particular context. Moreover, we understand CLIL is an approach rather than (only) a methodology, as suggested by some authors (Ball and Lindsay, 2010).

Content and Language Integrated Learning revisited

As Coyle (2007b) explains, in the 1990s there was a need to find a common term for the diversity of European models existing in national and regional contexts. European approaches to bilingual education were described using terms borrowed from other contexts, but especially drawing on immersion and bilingual movements in the USA and Canada. According to Coyle (2007a), there were several grounds for hesitancy around adopting an existing “label” for European bilingual education: one reason was that certain terms had connotations which may be perceived as negative by a range of European countries due to socio-political ideologies e.g. “immersion”, though used in some European countries, was not widely favoured due to its close association with Canadian models where the goals and contexts differed from many bilingual programmes across Europe. A second reason had to do with the diverse origins and varied purposes of different bilingual programmes throughout Europe which made it difficult some unification. A third reason was that as newer initiatives became more widely disseminated in the 1990s, a group of pioneers began to advocate alternative terminology to account for emerging models and pedagogies.

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