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Resistances and Barriers to the Introduction of CLIL Courses

Abstract

Some Hungarian faculties retreat from fully integrating into the world of international higher education and this failure to open themselves hinders departments teaching languages for special purposes departments from reaching their potentials within their faculties. The author will focus on how to introduce CLIL courses and discuss the benefits of doing so.

The introduction of CLIL programs into the curriculum of any faculty presents stakeholders at all levels with a wide range of challenges, the most significant of which is that all the individuals and organizations involved in the process of establishing such a program have to work together towards a common goal. Similarly, Stoll *et al.* (2006: 5) define the professional learning community as a group of people which is “inclusive”, which not only work together, but offers mutual and shared “support”, in order to “learn new and better approaches that will enhance all pupils’ learning”. The key ideal I wish to focus on and relate my entire interrogation of the problems associated with introducing CLIL courses into some Hungarian faculties is the notion of inclusiveness.

While multiple factors may impact a CLIL program throughout its lifecycle, problems associated with inclusiveness will deal any CLIL program a death blow. This is because CLIL programs, by definition, involve the process of integration on many levels, the goal of such programs being the unique integration of research, subject and language teaching methodologies with the need to develop critical thinking in the learner, in order to ensure that outcomes are cognitively challenging, new research and educational communities are constructed and meaningful horizontal and vertical communication lines are established to foster new generations of offshoot programs which will sustain the evolution of the gained multiple focused learning and research processes. (Compare Short 1991 and Lindholm *et al.*, 1998; Cloud *et al.*, 2006, Marsh *et al.*, 2001, Swain, 2001, Lyster, 2007, *et al.*)

While certainly not a problem characteristic only of Hungarian higher education, at some of our faculties, an expressed unwillingness to become receptive to new approaches which involve collaborating with colleagues from departments such as those teaching ESP is endemic. This negativity originates from far in the past, and is difficult to surmount. There is at times a completely irrational resentment and discriminatory attitude taken towards language teaching and research colleagues which flies in the face of the direction which EU decisions on developing higher education take. (For the latter, compare Maljers *et al.* 2007) Whether out of a choice to reject language teachers as being equals or out of fear of incompetence in teaching their courses through a foreign language, and therefore having to reveal L2 weakness to their colleagues, the refusal to adapt and to collaborate to diversify programs and to create the proper environment for the establishment of programs for international students represents a roadblock to any CLIL in these faculties. Even more inexplicable is the lack of understanding of the

benefits which integrating content and language have on one's research and teaching career, on one's departmental budget and on a faculty's regard abroad.

Strengthening learning also involves exposing students to alternative opinions and other sources of knowledge. Where are therefore our foreign-born or trained faculty members? We need new ideas to be able to find our place as legitimate members of a European network of educators and researchers. How can we do this, if we have no staff from the other Member States in our faculties? We are not recruiting experts to join us, even temporarily, but merely sending a small portion of our Ph.D. students abroad for 3 months, hoping they will learn something within that time that they might use here at home. Guest professors too often only come within a 1 week ERASMUS exchange program: they come, they lecture and they leave. There is rarely any sustainable impact. Where are the students from abroad who can contribute to our budgets and take our research and transform it from a domestic finding with local significance into one with international impact? Why is it too often the case that it is our students who go abroad and pay tuition there, but we are not receiving foreign tuition here?

Over the years since 1990, faculties marred by exclusive and rejectionist behavior have become forgotten islands in the sea of European higher education. When reading the homepages of my own faculty and its departments, I find long lists of universities with which we are supposed to have meaningful partnerships. Yet, I have to call into question how meaningful these really are. I see no international faculty on campus, excluding myself. I see no students in my faculty from abroad, excepting those ERASMUS exchange students who take most of their courses in department, as they cannot read, write or understand Hungarian, and no courses are available for them in my faculty in agricultural subjects taught in any other language. What I do see are our best students, often technical translator students, fleeing our university to finish degrees abroad in so-called dual degree programs. The term dual is misleading: while our students venture abroad and pay our partner universities fees to finish their studies there, I have yet to see a single student from our partner universities here, working towards finishing a degree from our institution. Equally suspect is the lack of impact-factor point winning, international publications in many departments, as the staff lack the proper preparation in academic skills to have their papers published. Too often, colleagues from other departments seek me out to proofread manuscripts translated into English, hoping my proofreading and corrections will help garner them publication in an esteemed journal. Too often, it is not the translation at fault: it is the out-of-date research method, the lack of applicable data, the failure to address current enquiry and to place one's research into an international context and, most damning: the failure to read and follow publication guidelines in the journal in which one wishes to publish.

While I see trouble at present, I do recognize a path for the future – should faculties such as my own *chose to change*. Teacher and researcher and retraining is the first step in that process, and as a prerequisite to such a move, the leaders in the faculty must show leadership. Hungarian higher education is at a crossroads which even the Board of Rectors and the head of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences recognize. (See *A*

felsőoktatás 2009, Pálinkás: A 2009, Pálinkás: Teljes 2009) This leadership is based on accepting and adopting as educational aims five core aims of CLIL:

1. Strengthening vocational learning
2. Improving and modernizing programs through student-centered education
3. Reflecting the demands of working life in education by focusing on skills and not only rote learning
4. Authenticity and topicality must be key factors determining course content and materials
5. Courses should strive for comprehensiveness in their contents (Compare Short, 1991 and Swain, 2001)

The first core aim addresses the need to give learners practice in developing and using the basic skills most study programs and jobs require: reading, writing and speaking competencies. For reading skills development, the student should learn how to find, follow and update knowledge in their field. In other words, they should know how to properly use a library, as well as the relevant hypermedia resources. Writing exercises should be based on the types of writing used in the student's chosen career/professional area, i.e. does a student need to know how to draft a lab report or a negotiation report? Speaking skills could be better referred to as communication skills and competencies. Our students come from an educational culture which tells them to passively listen and to speak when requested, but this limitation in daily communication at school, i.e. *their workplace*, does not engender mature, professional communication abilities in them. The student must learn, e.g. to use proper voice register and pace, to consider influencing factors which limit or liberate them in communicating with others at work, to consider cultural differences and to employ metacommunicative tools. Each of these three areas not only influence vocational learning, but equally determines the success of language acquisition and use. This core aim is probably the easiest to realize. All that faculties need to do is to realign the course requirements from students' attending lectures and taking end of term exams, to demanding mid-semester assignments from students, as well.

The second core aim could prove to be the toughest for many Hungarian faculty members and, indeed, students, to accept. Equally challenging will be the need to carefully structure and monitor student study and work performance and methods, in order to assure quality control, plagiarism-free written assignment preparation and knowledge development and mastery. The linchpin involves motivating the student to understand that their successes will rise or fall on the quality and quantity of the breadth of knowledge and competencies they chose to gain while at university. The keywords for the success of this aim are that kind of responsibility and motivation brought about by a reflection which is promoted by sound mentoring. Faculties need to introduce a conscientious mentoring program for incoming students, to finally give our young people the guidance they need to establish the mental link between learning in higher education and advancement towards a career goal. The majority of incoming freshmen have neither any idea why they are studying, nor do they have any idea about what they want to accomplish during their studies, nor about what career they would like to pursue.

The third core aim requires leadership in higher education to augment the way we as teachers impart students with knowledge. All too often, the students are involved solely in passive, rote learning, which takes the form of lectures in which the student's only activity is to quietly sit and take notes. The knowledge given through lectures is important, but it only goes so far to developing young professionals to enter the job market. Learning at a university should be the crown of two decades of education, and should therefore require active participation of students, than passivity. My department took a key step towards ensuring competency-based classes in our curriculum when we developed and introduced our Professional Language Communication program almost a decade ago. (See discussion in Wiwczarowski & Silye, 2003) Meta-learning exercises, such as using actual case studies as background materials for problem-based learning exercises in using negotiation techniques to solve business dilemmas in group negotiation training are only one example of how we teach competencies through active student-centered learning. At our faculty, students in e.g. stud farm management studies should literally get out of the classrooms and into the stalls, if they are to hone the skills needed to run one in the future. The key to successfully introducing this core aim into education is to develop a student's (micro)cultural competences (e.g. how should one approach horse owners with daily or specific problems), to ensure that they have behavioral competences (e.g., do they understand how to work with horses), to hone psychological skills (e.g. how might they calm down nervous customers who have never ridden before), to develop interaction skills (e.g. how to cultivate and maintain a customer relationship), and, of course, to develop strategic skills (e.g. how to rejuvenate a run-down stud farm and make it into a world class equestrian center). Without providing students with direct exposure to the world of equestrian farm management, the student will not be properly prepared for his/her chosen field. As more specifically relates to us as L2 teachers, unless we bring our students to use language as a tool for solving problems and negotiating daily routines in their fields, they will not be able to work with, e.g. foreign guests to their horse farms.

The third core aim goes hand-in-hand with the forth. Rather than simply downloading 'something interesting' for use in class, we need to check with experts to ensure that the subject matter we wish to use in class is legitimate, up-to-date and to be used correctly, especially from the view of how the knowledge or subject matter is properly expressed in the target language. (Compare Tella *et al.*, 1999: especially pp. 26ff.) Equally, we should be careful that we understand how the use of a foreign language can alter the way we teach a subject and especially how a student learns the course material. Authenticity is a consideration which requires rigid evaluation and review of how the intended course subject matter *and* the language study subject matter are presented to the student, internalized by that student and checked for consistency and correctness by the instructor. This is a key point in which one sees that language learning should not play only a supporting role in CLIL: CLIL has as its goals *both* subject matter *and* language learning. For example, in developing a CLIL course in plant protection, it is one thing to know the names of diseases affecting an apple tree; it is entirely another competency to know how to discuss their treatment with a local farmer or more specifically how a particular disease is described or named by that local inhabitant. Do, e.g. fungicides have alternative, more

commonly used colloquial names or are these referred to by a brand name, rather than a Latin term, when asking for them locally? If the language component is underestimated in designing authentic subject material, the significance of the learning is lessened for the student, and a program risks returning to the rote learning stage, in which a student receives a great deal of information, but is doomed to not knowing what to do with that information in the field. (Compare Tella *et al.*, 1999: 65ff.)

Of course, the question of ideal timing of a subject's placement into a program greatly influences the success of development and learning outcome. The goal of comprehensiveness in our curricula must therefore be seen within a background of proper planning. For us, it is vital that our accompanying language courses be offered within a course when students are familiar enough with their field to enable suitable assimilation of language content with the content of their subject area studies. To be more direct, language training in CLIL cannot be seen as a last-minute add-on element to the CLIL curriculum. Rather, language courses must be interwoven into the CLIL curriculum where these can have the greatest positive and supportive effect on student development.

In closing, there is a sixth aim which one should legitimately add here: to prepare our students to work in an internationalized workforce. Actually, this sixth aim naturally flows forth from the preceding five: many of our graduates do find work with international, multinational employers and increasing numbers of them in reality end up seeking employment abroad. The key question for us in higher education is whether our course offerings are in fact preparing our graduates to find work abroad in their chosen fields. Too often, I meet with former students for whom this is not the case. Instead, degreed agricultural engineers are relegated to finding work as pizza delivery boys in the UK, because they are informed that they do not have the proper exposure to their chosen fields to find employment in agriculture. While CLIL is not a magic bullet, with a will to make the right decisions to make its core aims the foundation for our offerings, if our colleagues across the curriculum can agree to work together with us in language education, we can at least ensure that - finally - we in higher education in Hungary are opening ourselves as instructors, as researchers and as professionals to the opportunities which elude us. We can not only better prepare our students, but can train our faculty to host students from abroad and thereby bring much needed funds into our budgets, we can better integrate visiting faculty into our running educational programs and thereby strengthen our education through diversification and, more importantly, build stronger cooperative programs with our international partners, ensuring vital publications in globally recognized journals.

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