Content Based Instruction…Learning for the moment?

"If the child is not learning the way you are teaching, then you must teach in the way the child learns" - Rita Dunn

In recent year, we have tried out some changes in education to do better the learning, especially in a second language acquisition, where the teachers have left aside the traditional methods to focus on new techniques that emphasize in the students' needs and interest. However, English language does not have a very important role in some institutions because it is not an important area for the population and the students do not like that kind of subjects. There are many opinions about the learning and teaching English language, but is concerned that teachers start from the positive assessment of learning a new language arousing the interest of the students, and giving to them the motivation to improve the opportunities and quality of life and to ensure the coexistence and cultural exchange since the short time increase your knowledge about another cultures.

As we said before, many techniques have been implemented to develop the interest of the students for learning. One of them is integrate a second language according to the students are learning in other subjects; it is the case of Content-Based Instruction, an approach that results agreeable for some institutions because they think as the students as the teachers can learn more about different topics in a different language, but a lot of doubts emerge about this teaching method and how it can be productive for the students. Actually, are the students prepared to learn a new language starting from the basic areas? Can they integrate this learning in their daily routines? About the teachers, are they prepared to accomplish with this new challenge? Do they have enough resources to carry out the objectives and purposes of English area and the subjects that are assigned?

Before we get down to business, it is appropriate to remember what Content-Based Instruction is. According to Crandall & Tucker (1990) cited in Met (1999 p.2) "It is an approach to language instruction that integrates the presentation of topics or tasks from subject matter classes (e.g., math, social studies) within the context of teaching a second or foreign language" while Curtin & Pesola (1994) in a restricted way, cited "Curriculum concepts being taught through the foreign language, appropriating to the grade level of the students." (p. 35).

Otherwise, Genesee (1994) suggests that content "...need not be academic; it can include any topic, theme or non-language issue of interest or importance to the learners." (p. 3). There are many definitions about this approach, but the important fact is the diverse characteristics of programs that integrate content and language can be used to determine their position on a continuum that illustrates the relative role of content and language.

Although the purpose of integrate a second language into the subjects of an institution is received positively, it is useful take into account the conditions of a teacher to get along in a different subject, what are his/her strengths and how should be the accompaniment that he/she is receiving to reach the correspondent achievements. It is a little bit complex teaching something new owing to some students are not in conditions to learn new concepts and contents of they are not motivated to do it. There are specific cases where students have difficulty learning certain subjects in their language, probably due to lack of interest in the area or because some factors are not allowed to be at the same level of their classmates; if his/her affective filter is high is clear that the student can experiment stress, anxiety and other factors that may inhibit success in acquiring a second language.

On the other hand, the teachers must be awareness and prepared for these situations, breaking the traditional schemes and implementing new activities to capture students' attention and feeling motivated and ready for this new challenge. According to Stryker and Leaver (1993) Cited in Met (1999 p.2) "students need to be prepared both psychologically and cognitively for CBI and, if they are not adequately primed, then missing schemata need to be provided or students need to be kept from enrolling until they are ready". The approach may have been new for most of the learners; hence some participants may have found it interesting and some others may have found it boring or confusing.

There are many factors that do not be viable at all this technique. In our conception, the most relevant is the use of terminology and the vocabulary that the students should learn, and how they can get on in an environment outside of class. According to Krashen (1984) cited in McDougald (2009), "second language acquisition occurs when the learner receives comprehensible input, not when the learner is memorizing vocabulary or completing grammar exercises". As a complementation towards Krashen's proposal, Swain (1985) cited in Nunan (2004) suggests that "in order to develop communicative competence, learners must have extended opportunities to use foreign language productively". The authors support the proposal of the project because as stated above, learners needed productive input, contextualized scenarios and interesting topics in order to have meaningful output.

The most common form of CBI goes on in those countries in the world where the population speaks many different languages or English, at least. A different alternative is when the school has a bilingual emphasis, where many students are then studying in a second or foreign language. The goal is to be compatible in the language in order to study further, broaden job opportunities or to be able to communicate with people throughout the world. Canada, United States and many countries in Europe have been applying this approach for years as many different languages are spoken by the population. The same rationale for applying CBI does not really exist in Colombia, at least not yet. The biggest part of the population speaks Spanish. If we look at this in our city, we can find only few private schools that put on practice this way to teach. In some universities, the most of the students ask for a better English teaching, where teachers have the ability to train students of different careers where they can get on by in English-speaking countries when it comes to getting a good job offer out of Colombia , it is the case of ILEX at the Technological University of Pereira , where most of the student population is in disagreement due to the way teachers are teaching a second foreign language because they think the issues are isolated and are not suitable , nor consistent with what they are learning in their environment . But keep in mind that in order to carry out these kinds of proposals, teachers should be able to master at least one area, either through an immersion program, seminar, training or depth on specific topics; probably it is more appropriate and motivating for students interested in learning a language, but are the institutions the responsible to take care of expenses?.

It is clear that teachers are not sufficiently prepared to enter and compete in this new form of teaching form many reasons; for instance: They must spend the double time and dedication that an English teacher usually takes for planning a lesson; some students may feel confused or may even feel that they aren't improving their language skills; it can be hard to find information sources and texts that lower levels can understand, also the sharing of information in the target language may cause great difficulties; the teacher must have a correct pronunciation and the topics must be clear to avoid misunderstandings about the explanations; and the most important weakness in our concept is that the students will only be immerse in the second language only for a few hours; at the end, they will keep practice Spanish rather than English.

Stryker & Leaver (1993), state that CBI anticipates a change in typical roles of language teachers. Instructors must be more that just good language teachers. They must be knowledgeable in the subject matter and be able to elicit that knowledge from their students. The assumption before mentioned portrays a challenge for teachers, because they need to develop language teaching skills and content teaching skills in order to use the strategy well. Not too far from above, The linguist Stephen Krashen"s theories in second language acquisition have had a great influence in the field of language teaching and especially in foreign or second language teaching.

He states that a language can only be acquired through comprehensible input. Moreover, the level of the input must be just beyond the learner's competence level in the language, and then both understanding and language acquisition will take place (Lightbown and Spada, 1999).

If Krashen affirms that the language is acquired, so what impact can have the CBI in the classroom? The students only use the second language at the school, but not for their real life, due to they do not have the necessity to do it. For that reason, we think that they do not acquire the language although they listen their classes in English, they learn English because they follow rules, grammar and vocabulary, just for accomplish in their school or institutes, but not for using it with a specific purpose. It is evident that most of the population only learns for the moment. As a result, the integration of Content-based instruction in the classroom it is not entirely necessary for acquiring a language, actually, the students are not in the real context where they can communicate and interact with people who speak the same language (in this case English), in order that they have the chance for traveling and working, and it is essential communicate themselves through a second language and implement what they have learnt.

In Krashen's terms, while learning is a conscious process of studying and paying attention to the language, its rules and form, acquisition on the other hand happens through exposure to the language; as the result of using the language to communicate, much like children pick up their first language. Furthermore, Krashen puts emphasis on acquisition as being a more natural language development process (Lightbown and Spada, 1999).

In relation to the words mentioned above, the respective dates of some authors who have revealed important studies on language acquisition and development of a second language , we see that it is more practical to apply this method of learning a second language at universities that private or public institution . In the first room, a college student will learn only in the moment, not going to link what they are teaching to their environment, or with what you like, we see that in a school would be used in certain cases as CBI that the student will perform their secondary education abroad, but not as a way to completely learn a language like English. On the other hand, the students who already have defined his academic vocation may be more involved with learning a second language based on CBI, because most of them have aspirations outside of Colombia and as a first requirement is a minimum knowledge in another language. This can be a motivational strategy for engineers, doctors, chemists, teachers or whatever profession.

Bringing this topic to a more real and concrete setting, we can take as an example, again, the ILEX students, in few words, this is what they are looking for at the moment to learn a language; They do not want only learn new words and topics that possibly not going to get in practice as well as the topics they are really interested and are according to their special needs. But we cannot ignore the fact that teachers in these cases, they need much more supporting from managers and even the government itself for these specializations to reach their own goals of the class, and the student can also do it. It would be a good choice for teachers who wish to contribute to the high performance of programs that implement the improvement in their classes (especially in CBI) to have an aid by the university and colleagues certified and specialized in this area; because learning of a second language is not measured by how many hours , or topics covered in a given time, but the quality of what has been taught and the satisfaction of having carried out as planned.

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