

Introducing Secondary Professional/Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) Student Teachers in Modern Languages to Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

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The revised Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) Key Stage 3 National Curriculum was launched in 2008. It encourages the “use of the target language in connection with topics and issues that are engaging and may be related to other areas of the curriculum” (National Curriculum, 2008).

In order to account for these national developments, the Initial Teacher Training Programme for Modern Languages was reviewed in 2008 and a bid to take part in the Integrated Learning Network Project funded by the TDA was submitted successfully in September 2008.

The rationale for the project was twofold. Firstly, it was to attempt to adopt a CLIL approach to language teaching and secondly was to give all the Secondary PGCE student teachers in Modern Languages the opportunity to experiment with the CLIL methodology. CLIL is increasingly being recognised as good practice in schools and it is perceived as motivational. Therefore, it may have an impact on student teachers’ attitudes towards Modern Languages pedagogy and it may inform their practice as newly qualified teachers.

The main objectives of the project were to enable student teachers

- to develop their awareness of the pedagogical benefits and challenges of CLIL
- to teach Year 6 and Year 7 pupils using a CLIL approach with some input from Year 3 Primary students in Modern Languages.

A number of subject sessions, a training session led by outside speakers and a planning session were put in place to address these objectives. The impact that those sessions had on student teachers’ attitudes to CLIL was monitored and evaluated throughout the project.

A part of the TDA funding was used to organise a training event in November 2008 at the University of Worcester for student teachers in Modern Languages and Year 3 Primary students in Modern Languages. Sessions were led by the Key Stage 2 adviser for Worcestershire, the Education Improvement Adviser for Worcestershire Children’s Services, the Director of Languages from Christopher Whitehead Language College and the Head of Department and a Deputy Head from the Chenderit School in Northamptonshire. Speakers highlighted the benefits of working collaboratively both cross-phase and cross subject. They also discussed the opportunities offered by the new Key Stage 3 curriculum and the positive impact that teaching in context can have on pupils’ learning.

Teaching languages in context can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Hood and Tobutt (2009, p.105) explain that language and content integration can take place at different levels and they suggest four possible models:

- “Surface cross-curricular linking.
- Integrating language while building on semi-familiar content.

- Integrating language and new content.
- Immersion (full or partial).”

Those models were later exemplified to secondary PGCE student teachers in Modern Languages. The follow-up sessions that were organised in the Spring Term focused on teaching Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) through a Modern Language. Student teachers experimented with the CLIL methodology to plan a PSHE lesson using the immersion model and they reflected on how to use visuals, semi-cognates, speaking frames and writing frames to enable learners to access subject content. The Drama workshop that was led by an outside speaker gave student teachers ideas on how to put a different slant on language teaching. Throughout the second placement, a few student teachers had the opportunity to experiment with CLIL in schools.

The second part of the TDA funding was used to organise cross-curricular workshops in a local Language College in June 2009. Student Teachers in Modern Languages and some Primary Year 3 students taught Year 7 pupils and Year 6 pupils from two feeder schools. The Drama, Music, Geography and Art cross-curricular day enabled students to put a different slant on language teaching. Workshops constituted an introduction to a topic and therefore, the emphasis was on language teaching with some cross-curricular links. For example, one group focused on painting and the use of additive primary colours. If this workshop had been part of a unit of work, pupils might have learned about figurative art and abstract art. Language and new content could have been integrated. The immersion model requires that Modern Languages teachers and subject specific teachers work collaboratively and teach the subject content through the medium of a modern language. As linguists, it was difficult for student teachers to pitch the subject content at the correct level. They wrote in their evaluations that teaching in context, using the target language and getting pupils to use the target language was fraught with difficulty. Despite those challenges, all the student teachers said that the experience had been enjoyable. One student teacher commented: *“This makes language learning more interesting, especially from the students’ point of view. It also improves their general knowledge and cognitive skills, which has a positive impact across the curriculum. Cross-curricular/immersion teaching is definitely the way forward in languages”*. This was confirmed by pupils’ positive evaluations of the day.

The project had a further impact. Three student teachers chose to focus their research project on teaching in context. One student reflected on how to teach Citizenship through French to motivate a group of disaffected pupils. Another student carried out a project on consumers’ rights and responsibilities and she got her pupils to reflect on ethical issues through German. The third student considered how a CLIL approach could increase the take up of languages at Key Stage Four in her placement school. Two of those student teachers completed the project at Master’s Level. In addition, about half of the student teachers wrote in their career development entry profile that they would be willing to develop CLIL approach to teaching in their NQT year.

The project is going to be repeated this year with the new cohort of student teachers. In response to student teachers evaluations, a CLIL day for Year 6 and Year 7 pupils is going to be organised in January 2010 and it is hoped that this will increase students’ confidence and that it will encourage them to consider a different approach to teaching.

Hood, P. and Tobutt, K. (2009) *Modern Languages in the Primary School*. Sage Publications

National Curriculum (2008) Key Stage 3 Programme of Study [Online], Available from: <http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/modern-foreign-languages/index.aspx> [Accessed: 15th October 2009]