

The impact of the residential course

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Last summer, I had the opportunity to go on a CLIL course in Málaga, 22-29 July 2023. The course was offered exclusively to ALL members, funded by Erasmus+, organised by LFEE and facilitated by a very talented multilingual team consisting of Rocío Salgado Fernandez, Teresa Salgado and Daniel Zappi.

As a secondary teacher of French and Spanish, I was particularly interested in refreshing my knowledge of CLIL as well as having the opportunity to enjoy some Spanish immersion. I also thought this would be a great way to network with colleagues from all over the country and beyond.

What is CLIL?

CLIL stands for Content and Language Integrated Learning. This involves teaching educational content through the medium of the foreign language rather than just using content to teach the language.

Aim of the course

The course aimed to introduce participants to a wide range of CLIL activities in the Primary and Secondary settings. There was a focus on Music, Drama and Dance as well as the opportunity to experience the activities as learners, share ideas and work in mixed settings/languages groups.

Reflection on possible CLIL implementation

I particularly enjoyed reflecting on how I would be able to implement CLIL in my own context. Apart from the obvious differences between the implementation of CLIL in primary and secondary schools, I considered various ways in which a small CLIL project could be introduced and then upscaled to a whole year group in my own secondary context.

The course gave participants an opportunity to look at different types of CLIL implementation. It introduced us to many individual CLIL activities as well as a sample CLIL curriculum/ Scheme of Learning that could be adapted in different ways.

The opportunity to work in cross-phase teams and cross-topic was particularly valuable, with secondary teachers learning how to plan topics primary-style. The teams included teachers from the Primary, Secondary, Further Education and Higher Education sectors.

Barriers to CLIL implementation

We also were given ample time to consider the possible barriers to CLIL implementation in our own context. As a secondary teacher, I felt at times that CLIL implementation

seemed more intuitive at primary level, especially when the approach to curriculum planning was already broadly topic-based.

The same barriers seem to exist in terms of staff specific subject knowledge, but the cost was possibly higher in secondary due to the curriculum being affected by sustained examination pressure (even in KS3) as the foundation for KS4.

The difficulty in promoting CLIL in secondary is often that instead of being considered as a way to maximise curriculum time allocation, it can be seen as some subjects “getting in the way” and taking time from other subjects. Is the subject being taught through the medium of the foreign language really benefitting as much as the foreign language? This perception can also be amplified by the pressure to implement CLIL across a whole year group and across all abilities. In the absence of suitable ready-made resources, concerns may also develop about workload.

CLIL activities can be traditional communicative activities

One of the main benefits of the course is to show participants that it is possible to dip your toes into a CLIL curriculum and develop your confidence in a small way, before (or without) developing the approach extensively. To be successful, all colleagues, parents and pupils also need to be clear about the rationale and benefits of the approach.

The course allowed all participants to work on mini-projects with colleagues from the primary, secondary and higher education sectors. This was very valuable as it led to the dissemination of good language practice from those different settings. It also provided on-going inspiration to consider new ways to adapt different ideas and approaches to different settings.

CLIL and Cultural Awareness

The course provided opportunities for participants to complete cultural visits and share interesting approaches to include a strong cultural input in CLIL activities. We visited La Alcazaba, the Picasso Museum, the Central Market of Atarazanas and watched a Flamenco show. In addition to the visits we heard examples of how to include Flamenco and dancing in lessons, as well as develop pupils’ knowledge of events such as la Feria de Sevilla and regional stereotypes.

Examples of activities

Music: singing in different groups to practise specific vocabulary/harmony singing to improve focus on pronunciation

Hand gestures and singing to help with memorisation

Dance: following instructions and demonstrating understanding through movement

Drama: making a geometrical shape as a group, following instructions and miming and many more activities to develop team-building and creative thinking

Speaking association activities, such as linking activities and opinions, names and adjectives or meaningful numbers

Reflection on pedagogy

Another major benefit of the course was to have the time to reflect on our own practice, to remember “things we used to do” and to engage in conversations with like-minded colleagues. The time to consider the adaptations of “old activities” was particularly welcome as it is something practising teachers do not usually have time for.

Benefits of CLIL

Last but not least, the course makes it easier for all participants to promote the benefits of CLIL.

Cross-curricular collaboration of teachers to plan and deliver the CLIL curriculum ;

Meaningful use of the target language which also makes the content more compelling ;

Creative ways to learn and use the target language for real communication purposes ;

Opportunities to empower students and build their self-confidence through Drama, Music and other practical subjects