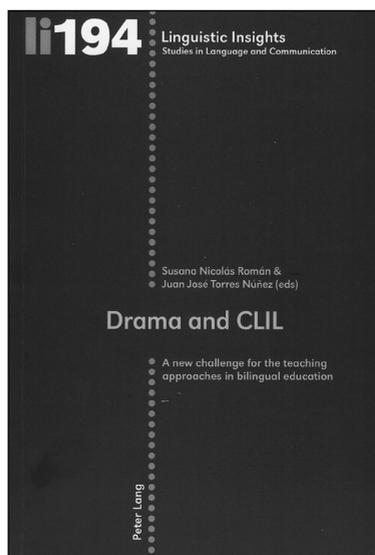


## Drama and CLIL: a new challenge to the teaching approaches in bilingual education

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Although the use of drama has been thoroughly investigated in relation to either foreign/second language teaching or content teaching classrooms, its application to educational contexts which integrate language and content learning, namely CLIL, had not been extensively considered before the publication of this volume, edited by S. Nicolás Román and J.J. Torres Núñez. Moved by the ambition to highlight the points of connection between drama and CLIL, the two authors give us a collection of six papers that, from different perspectives, relate literature in the field to concrete educational examples, as if they wanted to remove any scepticism in those who do not see the possibility of effectively using drama in CLIL environments.

The volume opens with a substantial foreword written by Leni Dam, a retired teacher who has dedicated her professional life to the development of language learner autonomy, first in her own language classrooms, then supporting teachers with her knowledge and competence. Declaring herself a non-specialist in either CLIL or drama, Dam would evidently prefer to enter the volume on tiptoe, but the part she plays is so persuading that she ends up playing a key role in the book.

In her view, autonomous language learning, the application of which is still limited due to the traditional mode of teacher-fronted lessons, perfectly matches the 'drama-and-CLIL' connection because of their mutual cornerstones, i.e. engagement in active learning, sustainment of learner motivation, authenticity in communication, responsibility in making choices and reflecting on the process and the results. Dam's pragmatism is deeply rooted in her personal experience, from which she reports examples of drama activities taken from her beginners' classes, as further proof of the fact that learner autonomy is achievable even with lower level students if activities are meaningful and finely tailored to the learners. In order to get the most from their teaching, especially if teachers choose to apply

types of activities (like drama-based tasks) with the aim of enhancing the learners' active cognitive involvement, Dam openly invites scholars and teachers to be more sensitive to a pedagogy that promotes learner autonomy and considers it as a pivotal learning goal in their classrooms.

It is no coincidence that when Hillyard, the first author of the collection, starts reflecting on the connection between drama and CLIL, both psychological aspects (like motivation, self-efficacy, etc.) and cognitive issues (e.g. thinking skills) are mentioned, as Dam anticipated. Hillyard thoroughly explains the extent to which the components accounted for in the CLIL approach (culture, learning, environment, content, language, engagement and learning outcomes) are naturally embedded in drama forms, convincingly maintaining that the use of drama in contexts of content and language integrated learning can be not only feasible from a curricular point of view (whatever the learners' level and age), but also extremely beneficial to CLIL students, who will find a different – more dynamic, individualised, meaningful – way to express themselves and to transform even complex and abstract content topics into new knowledge, through a personal understanding and interpretation of facts. The selection of drama-based tasks listed at the end of the paper provides concrete teaching ideas to apply drama to CLIL classrooms: hopefully, examining the list, subject teachers will be inspired by at least some of the activity inputs described and decide to have a try, according to their discipline, curricular objectives and classroom characteristics.

Motos and Field propose a different use of role-taking situations: in their paper, Playback Theatre (an original form of improvisational, unscripted theatre, where stories come from the real life of audience volunteers and immediately take artistic form through the actors' interpretation) is presented as an educational tool to help students to express their intelligences and individual learning styles. Of great interest is the reflection on the choice of using a second language in Playback Theatre-based activities, which, as the authors explain, makes language learning much more effective and intensive. Being a combination of elements like physicality, thoughtfulness, creativity, language communication and use, and cultural values, this approach is recommended for CLIL contexts. Playback Theatre and CLIL are in fact described as sharing many features, from scaffolding techniques to active learning, from student cooperation to authenticity of the topic discussed. The paper closes mentioning a couple of ideas of how to apply Playback Theatre to CLIL classrooms – ideas capable of satisfying the need to enhance learners' active role and participation in the lesson. Teachers are made aware that students need a certain level of language competence and performance skills for these kinds of activity to be profitably used, time-wise, in classroom.

After all, time (or, to be more precise, *lack of time*) is a major issue in teachers' considerations. Curricular objectives and actions need their time to be fulfilled and introducing

uncontrolled, spontaneous and interactive tasks, like those based on drama or theatre performance, is a risk that not many teachers want to run. This is true not only in school classrooms, but also in teacher-training courses. In Özmen and Balçikanlı's paper, analogies between acting and teaching are discussed with the aim of stressing the value of training student teachers to develop skills like effective use of voice, body language, nonverbal awareness and so on. Although, at first, the article seems to be partly in contrast with current learner-centred pedagogies (for instance, when the importance of the centrality of the role – and physical position – of the teacher in the classroom is pointed out), what the authors want to emphasize is the positive influence that some acting techniques can have on teacher identity and on teacher communication in the classroom, as these factors directly affect students' motivation. Even though no specific connection is here made with CLIL, it is evident how, in bilingual contexts such as CLIL, the ability to convey meaning in an effective way (therefore including the manipulation of nonverbal codes, of body language and careful observation and interpretation of students' behaviours) is vital for new knowledge acquisition to occur.

Ortiz's contribution goes in the same direction. The author suggests adopting a special drama technique called *The Mantle of the Expert*, which is based on a conflict to be solved through debate and negotiation between the students acting as experts in different fields. Learner motivation and creativity are the key factors awakened by this approach, where the teacher guides the students to be more active in undertaking roles and responsibilities, to be more flexible (and flexibility is an essential feature to develop by CLIL students), to accept this technique as a learning game that will help integrate the different types of intelligences and understand content better. Since the Mantle is defined as an "enriching activity" that enables children "to grow as individuals", the association with Dörnyei (2005: 112)'s "L2 motivational self system" (cf. also Hillyard in this volume, 2) is soon made: role play helps students to promote personal development as "a new identity makes students feel more secure and thus more open to learning" (Larsen-Freeman 2000: 82).

The paper by Garipova reports on experiences of using theatre in a bilingual secondary school, in particular in her own language classrooms. Persuaded by the advantages that making up plays may bring to students – that is, improvement of a wide range of skills, both verbal (pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary, fluency) and nonverbal (body language, gestures, facial expression), as well as enhancement of specific competences like intercultural communication, use of digital and other codes to convey meaning, and so on – the author proposes the adaptation or creation of bilingual plays, given certain preconditions: plays must involve the whole class working in groups on the plot and script writing; as many students as possible will then act, while the others prepare the stage, help with extra-practice, record rehearsals and so on. Given that a wise choice of topics for a play is needed in order to stimulate the students' interest and engagement, in CLIL contexts

stories may originate from contemporary issues like the financial crisis, or the problem of unemployment, or the need to study abroad, etc. Garipova concludes her paper by remarking on the obstacles one can come up against when using theatre in CLIL classrooms: language problems (as the students normally have different levels and competences) and time (several weeks to be devoted to the preparation and rehearsal of the play).

The final theatre technique mentioned in this collection is Readers' Theatre. For Fernández, this is probably one of the most feasible varieties of drama to be used in class, since it does not require the use of specific and expensive materials. Readers' Theatre consists in orally interpreting a given or created script. Besides the learning advantages that all drama-based activities may generate, as abundantly described in each paper of the volume, Readers' Theatre also seems to help those students with disabilities: having the possibility to rely on a script that can be read and listened to several times, they can improve their reading comprehension and fluency, while gaining more confidence in their capacities. The application of Readers' Theatre to CLIL is concretely proposed by Fernández through two models: a teacher-guided model and a student-centred model, the first seen as a preparatory step in training the students in profitably implementing of this theatre technique. After citing some of the available digital resources, so as to encourage teachers to learn more on the topic and apply Readers' Theatre (given the lack of specific teaching materials in today's course books), the author concludes her contribution calling for further research on learning results deriving from using Readers' Theatre in different CLIL context and subject areas.

To conclude, the force of this volume consists in showing how drama, in all its varieties, may represent a valid way to modify traditional teacher-fronted teaching with the purpose of creating a more active, engaging, autonomous, creative learning environment. As in CLIL contexts students need to face meaningful learning experiences, which help them overcome obstacles due to the higher cognitive demands, theatre techniques can offer an option that CLIL teachers ought to realistically consider, beyond the usual concerns related to curricular rigidity (wide quantity of topics to be covered, fixed timeline to be respected, final examinations to be achieved etc.). In our opinion, after these thought-provoking contributions, all written (not by accident) by scholars working in the field of language education, the next move is up to the other side of the 'CLIL coin', that of content subject teaching, and therefore it is time to give the stage to CLIL content teachers, those who are formally in charge of CLIL teaching in most European countries.

## References

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