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The plurilingual classroom and ELT: The challenge to overcome tensions between aboriginal languages and hegemonic languages

Adriana María Helver*

Instituto de Formación Docente y Técnica N° 24, Quilmes, Argentina

Abstract

This pedagogic proposal describes a CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) project for the secondary school English language classroom that integrates English, art and citizenship education with the aim to promote a hereglossic view of language practices in multicultural ELT classrooms and the development of intercultural competences in the framework of linguistic rights. The project is intended to be developed in twelve lessons with 15-16 year-olds. Students will read and research, through the use of different multimodal material, about the importance of preserving local aboriginal languages; they will also develop cooperative works (murals, bilingual version of English songs, timelines) that relate and integrate local languages with English.

Keywords: diversity; CLIL; intercultural competences; linguistic rights.

Resumen

Esta propuesta pedagógica describe un proyecto AICLE (Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lengua Extranjera) para el aula de Inglés en la escuela secundaria que integra contenidos de Inglés, Arte y Construcción de la Ciudadanía con el propósito de promover una visión heteroglósica de las prácticas del lenguaje en el aula multicultural de Inglés como lengua extranjera y el desarrollo de competencias interculturales en el marco de los derechos lingüísticos. El proyecto consiste de doce clases en las que los estudiantes de 15-16 años de edad leerán e investigarán, a través del uso de diferentes materiales multimodales, acerca de la importancia de preservar las lenguas originarias locales; también desarrollarán proyectos colaborativos (murales, representaciones de líneas de tiempos, versiones bilingües de canciones en inglés) que relacionan e integran las lenguas locales con el inglés.

Palabras clave: diversidad; AICLE; competencias interculturales; derechos lingüísticos.

Preview

Level: 4th year secondary school
Language competence: A2-B1 (Common European Framework of Reference)
Age of students: 15–16
Type of project: CLIL
Subjects involved: English, Art, Citizenship Education
Theme: Language diversity from a social rights perspective
Estimated time: 6 weeks (Twelve sixty-minute sessions)

Summary

Argentinian schools, as well as many classrooms worldwide, display a mixture of cultures and languages, including a diversity of aboriginal languages, dialects and varieties. The students in these classrooms have to adjust to the school language, which in this case is in general Spanish. This complex scenario, in which tensions between minorities' languages and the official language may generate the negative evocation of stereotypes, is a real challenge for the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom.

This pedagogic proposal describes a CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning; Dalton-Puffer, 2007; Heine, 2010) project for the secondary school English language classroom that integrates English, art and citizenship education with the aim to promote a hetereglossic view of language practices in ELT classrooms and the development of intercultural competences in the framework of linguistic rights. The project is intended to be developed in twelve lessons with 15-16 year-olds. Students will read and research, through the use of different multimodal material, about the importance of preserving local aboriginal languages; they will also develop cooperative works (murals, bilingual version of English songs, timelines) that relate and integrate local languages with English.

From Theory to Practice

One characteristic of Argentinian public schools is cultural diversity, an aspect that is considered in the Marco General de Política Curricular [General Framework of Curriculum Policies] of the province of Buenos Aires in the context of language teaching:

> Departing from an array of mother languages, dialects and varieties, the school has the challenge to form critical producers of texts or discourses in the official language Spanish and to teach English as a foreign language without blocking or underestimating the former; with the aim to prevent individuals from feeling humiliated, deprived, discriminated or excluded

from school, from the possibility to learn and teach, to acquire and develop scientific knowledge, to feel part of different groups, to be included within community and productive life, in other words to exercise their full citizenship.[1]

This challenge, framed by a complex scenario in which tensions between aboriginal languages, the official language, Spanish, and the foreign language, English, display different processes of identification that may generate the evocation of stereotypes, demands an intercultural approach to language teaching (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002) and a heteroglossic conceptualisation of bilingualism (García, 2009) in order to foster skills to participate in contexts of diversity and to develop the capacity to exercise citizenship locally and globally, in other words to develop skills related to cosmopolitanism (Osler, 2012). In fact, cosmopolitanism gives us the possibility to develop our full potential as members of a particular community which has an authentic role in the whole global community, as the *Marco Curricular* demands. As Canagarajah puts it, "cosmopolitanism refers to possibilities of being culturally and socially meshed with others, realizing the ways in which our fates are bound together as global citizens, and yet celebrating our differences" (Canagarajah, 2014, p. 1). Expressing this sense of being meshed with others through art reinforces healthy processes of identification, enabling the construction of different kinds of identities since art, as an inclusive strategic language, synthesises the common aesthetic necessity of expression that all cultures share (Chalmers, 2003).

A Human Rights perspective to frame this kind of work in the English classroom is essential to recognise the social value of language minorities and to embrace diversity as a characteristic that enhances learning in order to promote social justice.

Materials and Technology

- Copy of an extract of the letter written by Rigoberta Menchú on the occasion of the Proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights in Barcelona on June 6, 1996
- Video of Rigoberta Menchú's speech in the United Nations
- Copy of the General Principles of the *Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights* (from article 7 to article 11) in English and Spanish
- Video of Tekis' cover version in English and Quechua of the Beatles' song *Don't let me down*
- Copy of the lyrics of Tekis cover version
- Website of the National Geographic Enduring Voices Project
- Student's netbooks

- School projector
- Internet access

Students' Interactives
- Mural.ly: It is a tool for brainstorming and researching. It allows students to organize ideas visually and it promotes collaborative work since students can invite one another to participate.
- Dipity: It is a tool to create digital timelines. It organises the web's content by date and time. Students can create, share, embed and collaborate on interactive timelines that integrate video, audio, images, text, links, social media, location and timestamps.

Preparation
1. Gain access to and familiarise yourself with the interactive tools mentioned before.
2. Test the interactive tools on your computer and the students' netbooks and ensure you have the necessary plug-ins installed.
3. Familiarise yourself with the *Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights*, especially the General Principles.
4. Familiarise yourself with Rigoberta Menchú's work and its context.
5. Familiarise yourself with *The National Geographic's Enduring Voices project*.
6. Familiarise yourself with the rock group *Tekis* and their work.

Instructional Plan

Project timeline

As shown in Table 1, the project will take twelve sixty-minute sessions distributed in six weeks, integrating the contents of the subjects involved.

	Week 1	**Week 2**	**Week 3**	**Week 4**	**Week 5**	**Week 6**
English	Session 2	Session 3-4	Session 5-6	Session 7-8	Session 9	
Art					Session 10	Session 11-12
Citizenship Education	Session 1					

Table 1. Project timeline.

General objectives

Students will:
- become aware of their linguistic rights and responsibilities regarding

the preservation of their community's culture and tradition
- become aware of the importance to register the oral tradition of cultures
- perceive themselves as citizens of a world community based on respect for diversity
- become aware of the importance to participate in local institutions and international organisations in order to promote respect for human rights
- recognise the importance of cooperative work and participation
- recognise the value of popular local knowledge as a platform for the development of future competences
- value differences
- apply digital technologies for cooperative work and information searching
- become aware of the communicative value of an international language for the promotion of local cultures and the understanding of foreign communities

Specific objectives
In relation to English, students will:
- understand the dynamics of the coexistence of languages within and outside the classroom
- develop their intercultural competence
- use English as a language of communication for the promotion of local cultures and for the understanding of foreign communities

In relation to Art, students will:
- contextualise artistic productions
- become aware of the universality of the musical language
- identify and compare musical instruments from different parts of the world and their bond to the different communities' cultures

In relation to Citizenship Education, students will:
- identify international legislation regarding linguistic rights
- become aware of the importance of human rights for the development of local and global citizenship

Session 1
1. Ask students if they know what the United Nations is and what functions it has as an international organisation. Discuss and explain in case the students do not know the answer. Once everybody has understood the scope of the work the United Nations develop, ask students if they have ever seen a session or a speech performed in the

organisation. Discuss the importance of the issues introduced in the United Nations' sessions.

2. Introduce Rigoberta Menchú's speech in the United Nations using the school projector.

3. Send the link to the students' netbooks through the Internet connection so that they can see the video again on their own and ask them the following reflection questions to discuss in class:

> Who is Rigoberta Menchú representing in the assembly?
>
> What is the main objective of her presentation?
>
> How does she describe the present situation of the aboriginal communities in Latin America?

4. Ask students to find out which important international prize Rigobertta Menchú has won and why she has received such recognition.

Language focus

- Vocabulary related to international organisations and its functions (assembly, speech, issues, governments, co-operation, peace, security, human rights, etc.).
- Simple present tense.

Session 2

1. Stick Rigoberta Menchú's photograph on the board and ask students what they remember about her. Write their ideas on the board.

2. Divide the class in groups and deliver copies of the extract of the letter written by Rigoberta Menchú on the occasion of the Proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights and ask them the following questions to explore in the text and discuss in groups:

> How does she describe the importance of language? What functions has language got?
>
> Why is the oral tradition of native languages so important according to her ideas?

3. Once discussion has been developed and the content of the letter has been understood, ask students if they are in contact with any other language apart from Spanish and English within their family context or surroundings.

4. Ask for examples of these communicative situations from each group and propose a research in which students have to find out within their families or in their neighbourhoods if this native language is usually used either orally, in writing or both and if they can get any samples to bring to school and share with their classmates.

Language focus
- Biographic discourse and simple past tense with regular and irregular verbs (she was born..., she studied..., she won ...).
- Simple present and present perfect tense ("In language lies the main weapon of resistance of those cultures which for centuries have suffered the imposition of alien cultural values", "language is the vehicle that permits thought to be in accordance with the knowledge and the world vision of a given culture, of a given people, who have inherited this from their ancestors"[2]).

Session 3

1. Ask students to share their discoveries and discuss their findings. Design a chart on the board in which the name of each language and its oral/written use are identified. Use the samples brought by the students as illustration.
2. Use the school projector to introduce the interactive website *mural.ly* and show its different tools.
3. Ask students to turn on their netbooks and invite them to make a mural together about the different languages they have researched, including all kinds of data. These murals can be shared online and can be presented at the school annual exhibition, too.

Language focus
- Vocabulary related to the use of interactive websites (upload, files, browse, etc.).
- Comparison between English grammatical structures and other languages' structures ("rucamalen"[3], "girl's house", "casa de niña", etc.).

Session 4

1. Deliver copies of the Principles of the *Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights* and ask students to find an article that:
    - Defines what a language is.
    - Defends the equality of languages.
    - Guarantees the necessary tools to turn texts from one language into another.
    - Defends the freedom to teach and promote local languages.
    - Guarantees the freedom that languages have to register their evolution and development through time.
2. Once this activity is discussed with the whole class ask students why this Declaration

is important and why some languages need to be protected.

Language focus

- Present passive voice ("All language communities are entitled …", "All languages are collectively constituted and are made…", "other languages are needed to guarantee the exercise…"[4]).

Session 5

1. Ask students to turn their netbooks on and connect to the Internet. Share with them the National Geographic Enduring Voices Project website. Ask them to explore the site.
2. Ask students about the aim and dimensions of the project to encourage class discussion in groups.
3. Ask students the following questions:

    What is the role of technology in this important issue?
    Can technology help to keep and register the essence of languages and cultures?

4. Ask each group to research about the different languages they are in contact with at school and outside school, asking the following questions to different kinds of informants according to the language assigned (English teachers, Spanish teachers, family, friends, neighbours, etc.):

    Has the language changed in the last years in your community? Give examples.
    Has it changed in your parents' lifetime? Give examples.
    Has English affected our local languages? How?
    Do you think that the fact that English is a dominant global language affects other languages? Why or why not?

Language focus

- Passive voice (languages are endangered).
- Present perfect tense (Has your language changed in the last years?, Has English affected our local languages?).

Session 6

1. Ask students about the data they have collected in groups and encourage them to share their findings with the other groups in the class. Make a chart to tabulate data on the board (similar to the previous one).
2. With the school projector, introduce an example of an interactive timeline made with the interactive website *dipity* that shows the evolution of an aboriginal language not included in their research. Show them the different tools this resource has to make

timelines and encourage them to make a similar design per group, using the data collected during the week and any other data the students can find on the Internet about the evolution of the language each group has chosen.

3. Each group shares their design with the rest of the class, using the school projector, explaining the different milestones in the timeline. This presentation can be shared with the whole school community in the annual school exhibition.

Language focus

- Present perfect tense for indefinite time reference and simple past tense for definite time reference (How Spanish has changed..., at the beginning of the twentieth century Spanish imported a lot of Italian words...).

Session 7

1. Using the school projector, introduce the video of the cover version of the Beatles' song Don't let me down in English and Quechua made by the Argentinian rock group Tekis.

2. Ask students what the Quechua word tekis means and propose a web search with their netbooks to answer the following questions:

    Where are the Tekis from? Do you know anything about them?

    Who are the authors of the original song? What do you know about them?

    Find the original version and compare. Can you identify any difference in the musical instruments used in both versions? Give examples.

3. Once the answers are discussed, ask students to reflect on the following questions:

    What do you think about the combination of Quechua and English in a song?

    Do you like it? Why or why not?

    What other local languages would you combine with English in a song or a poem?

Language focus

- Conditional tense (What other local languages would you combine with English in a song or a poem?, I would combine...., I would like....).
- Registers (difference between *she has done.../she does...* and *she done.../she do...*).

Sessions 8-9

1. Divide the class into groups. Tell students that they will translate one stanza of their

favourite English song into a local language (Spanish, Guaraní, Quechua, Mapuche, etc.) and that they will then combine it with the original lyrics, as the rock group Tekis have done with *Don't let me down*.

2. Help each group choose a song using the students' notebooks.
3. Once each group has chosen the English song, discuss with them the content of the lyrics. Students use a dictionary to work out meanings.
4. Ask them to choose one of the stanzas and translate it into the local language selected by the group.
5. Supervise the translation; students will use their local knowledge. In case there are doubts they can use the Internet in class or ask their families for the missing expressions as homework.

Language focus
*   Use of bilingual dictionaries and electronic translators (identification of abbreviations such as *v.*, *n.*, etc.).
*   Vocabulary work related with the topics of the selected songs.

Sessions 10-12

1. Distribute roles within each group to perform the song with local instruments. Help the students that will sing with English pronunciation. Encourage parents and other members of the school community to help with the pronunciation of the other languages involved.
2. Ask students to invite their families to participate in the performance of the song, singing or playing a musical instrument. Students prepare the performance and act it out.
3. Preparations will take at least two weeks. The results of this project work can be presented in the annual school exhibition together with the timelines of the evolution of the different languages and the murals showing the coexistence of those different languages.

Language focus
*   Phonological aspects: articulation of English sounds and pronunciation patterns.

Related Websites

*   The complete Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights with the support of international personalities
*   Collaborative publications about different aboriginal languages
*   UNESCO Atlas of the world's languages in danger

Conclusion

The proposal described here fosters work linked to democratic discourses in order to develop the skills that students will need to exercise their citizenship on a daily basis not only in a global perspective but also within their local realities in different multicultural contexts where migration movements have increased a lot in the last decades and linguistic minorities have a clear necessity to make their own voices heard. The topic of linguistic diversity contributes to widening the students' views about languages in their path to their full exercise of rights, increasing their possibilities of engaging in authentic reading and rewriting of their own worlds (Freire, 1991). This development of intercultural skills is directly related to the multiple identities adolescents display and to the construction of their citizenship skills in their full potential and from different perspectives.

Notes

1. My translation of the original in Spanish: "La escuela tiene el desafío de formar –a partir de las lenguas/dialectos/variaciones de origen- productores críticos de textos o discursos en lengua oficial (español) y de enseñar una lengua extranjera (inglés) sin anular ni desestimar las primeras; de manera tal que ningún sujeto se sienta humillado, privado, discriminado o excluido de la escuela, de la posibilidad de aprender y de enseñar, de apropiarse y producir conocimientos científicos, de sentirse integrante en distintos grupos, de insertarse comunitaria y productivamente, es decir, del ejercicio pleno de la ciudadanía" (Marco General de Política Curricular, 2007, p. 48).
2. Extracts from Rigoberta Menchú's letter.
3. Mapuche language.
4. Extracts from the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights.

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