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Teaching Physical Education in English using CLIL Methodology: a Critical Perspective

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Abstract

Relatively little research has been carried out in Europe on teaching Physical Education (PE) in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) using the CLIL method. Although CLIL is widely used throughout Europe, the PE content is often limited merely to technical-practical skills without any significant links to a socio-cultural context, critical thinking and/or knowledge acquisition. The aim of this study is to integrate CLIL with the epistemological perspective of critical pedagogy applied to physical education (Kirk, 2014). A theoretical "deconstructive" method will be used to provide guidelines for teaching physical education through CLIL. A cultural content based on language, culture and knowledge "in action" (Schön, 1987) will be proposed.

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1. Introduction

In Europe little research has been done on using a Content and Language Integrated Learning (from now on CLIL) method to teach Physical Education (from now on PE) in English. This is especially true in Italy where there are still few examples of good practices aimed at introducing this specific method for teaching languages and specific subject matter in order to develop communication skills in European students.

The reasons for this are various and can be traced back to a number of factors such as the lack of:

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- research and development of a CLIL methodology in the specific field of PE together with the limited number of researchers and educationists engaged in promoting this research field;
- consideration given to physical education and sport in the curriculum of many European countries;
- CLIL skills and specific training initiatives to develop them in European Physical Education teachers;
- a clear Language Awareness in Physical Education aimed at achieving greater language proficiency.

In this paper we intend to focus on a critical pedagogical approach applied to teaching English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in the specific context of PE by means of CLIL, and also on the role of language. Finally, we will outline a new approach to PE content.

2. The critical pedagogical perspective

An analysis of the scientific literature and specific cases of the use of CLIL with the English language to teach PE (e.g. the Spanish experience) indicates that the content of these cases seems to be very poor and centered on a purely practical rather than a deeper reflexive knowledge (Ruano, 2014). Moreover, this content seems to be selected in order to develop skills and abilities of a technical nature.

This is due to the widespread conception of PE as an area of study and research whose main goal is simply to develop practical skills. Consequently, this subject is taught through technified methods focused on achieving goals related to the technical-tactical or bio-physiological aspects of sports and physical activity (Fernandez-Balboa, 1997).

If PE is taught in this way, that is to say, with little emphasis on the more profound contents of the subject, the development of critical thinking and interconnections with other disciplines on the curriculum, CLIL is unlikely to generate rich and deep learning. In such cases, CLIL courses tend to consist merely in a simple juxtaposition of some thematic blocks based on general topics of disciplines like anatomy (e.g. the skeleton and muscles), biology (e.g. health education) or techniques, rules, and tactics related to team sports and physical exercises (Coyle, Hood, Marsh, 2010).

An analysis of these contents reveals a lack of interconnection between PE, social sciences and the humanities (mainly history, sociology, philosophy, literature). This interconnection is fundamental in achieving the main goals of physical and sport education. If this connection does not occur, CLIL applied to PE does not generate authentic language and cultural learning, thereby contradicting one of the fundamental principles of CLIL, namely enhanced language learning in the context of improved reflexivity and communication aimed at developing pupils' personality and their reflexive skills.

In brief, what is missing in CLIL applied to PE using the English language is a critical pedagogical perspective and a more critical approach with regard to its contents. An issue that should be analyzed critically for example is the one related to English as a lingua franca (ELF). That is to say, the one concerning the claim that English (as a lingua franca) acts as a means for promoting neo-capitalism in economic, cultural and globalized terms. In fact CLIL applied to PE will never become a critical pedagogical approach with regard to its relationship with its main learning language tool (Phillipson, 2008).

The main problem for CLIL applied to PE is that this methodology cannot be implemented if first we do not observe this field from the perspective of critical pedagogy. Such a critical perspective, however, is missing in both PE and CLIL as a methodology to teach language and culture (Marsh, 2013).

When we consider how CLIL is structured, we realize that by focusing only on the development of technical skills and competencies, this methodology cannot change our concept of PE towards a more social perspective, which is arguably one of the key objectives of CLIL since it aims at developing intercultural communication and mutual understanding among peoples and cultures.

However, we can help CLIL develop into a methodology for promoting change and social inclusion (by enhancing communication and language skills that help people become more aware of the world they live in) by means of physical education and sport. The concept of sport, when interpreted in a pedagogical perspective, that is as sport pedagogy, can sum up the concept of physical education (Haag, 1992). It is a universal concept that involves the body, the play/game duality, and movement. Both physical education and sport can contribute in a

remarkable way to the richness and variety of using languages to promote knowledge, intercultural communication and mutual understanding.

3. The Role of Language in CLIL for PE: from Language Awareness to Language Proficiency

In this section we intend to shift our attention to the role of language within a CLIL approach applied to the specific field of physical education. We will provide a theoretical linguistic background to how language use is formed/built-up and how language itself constructs knowledge.

Generally speaking, and as mentioned previously, we agree with Marsh's words that "the assimilation of knowledge by students through the use of a different form to transmit and process content [...] can boost risk-taking, problem-solving, vocabulary learning skills, grammatical awareness, and also attitudes, linguistic spontaneity and motivation" (2008).

Schön (1983, 1987) points out that cultural content and /or knowledge have to be strictly linked to the real language, culture and knowledge of the subject field considered "in action", i.e. in real life situations. Considering that CLIL teachers are non-native speakers of the language, English is used as a medium for instruction (Graddol, 2006) or *lingua franca* (ELF).

On the basis of these introductory considerations, we believe three basic aspects must be taken into consideration with regard to the role of language and the degree of language competence to be achieved in CLIL for PE: Language Awareness, functional competence and cognition, and language proficiency.

3.1. Language Awareness in CLIL

"Language Awareness" (Hawkins, 1984) is currently defined by the Association for Language Awareness (ALA) as "explicit knowledge about language, conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use" (ALA, 2012). Language Awareness is a crucial approach aimed at changing language learners' perspectives towards explicit understanding of how language is used in a variety of contexts. In Marsh's words (2012), Language Awareness "[...] is directly linked to the shift from focus on 'form' to 'meaning' and links to how people best learn languages, and how they can achieve deeper understanding of how to use languages in communication. By giving attention to language patterns found in usage, critical thinking skills can also be developed thus enabling a student to develop knowledge"

This field of study is strictly linked to current theories and practices in language teaching such as code-switching using English as a *Lingua Franca* (Cogo, 2009) and conceptual vocabulary (Thordarottir, 2011). Language Awareness also plays a significant role in investigating communicative awareness (Garret and James, 2000), critical language awareness (Fairclough, 1992), corpus linguistics for exploring connections between language patterns and language use in context (Sinclair 2004, O'Keefe, McCarthy and Walsh 2007) and pragmatics (Ishihara, 2007).

Thus Language Awareness covers a wide spectrum of fields and a broad range of issues related to language learning and can be considered as an approach that stimulates reflexivity and sensitivity in language/language learning but that also gives learners the ability to explore language and/or the language learning process and to appreciate it.

3.2. Functional competence and cognition

In this section, we will consider two theoretical positions in linguistics: functional competence in Halliday's theory of functional linguistics and Talmy's view of the lexicalization process in cognitive linguistics.

Llinares, Morton and Whittaker (2012) claim that the main aim of language in CLIL is functional competence. In other words, they refer to the essential meanings of any specific subject.

In order to understand this dimension, it is important to briefly describe the theoretical background and current trends in the field of functional competence and cognition. To do this we must mention Halliday's functional linguistics framework (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004) and Talmy's cognitive linguistics theory in an attempt to bridge the gap between meaning and experience.

Halliday's systemic functional linguistics (SFL) is a linguistic theory based on meaning, where "all choices speakers or writers make from the lexical or grammatical systems of a language are shaped by the socio-cultural content in which they are involved" (Llinares, Morton and Whittaker, 2012) - in our case physical education.

In Halliday's theory and model of language, three types of meaning or basic functions are taken into consideration:

- the ideational, which allows us to convey our experience;
- the interpersonal, which allows us to enact our social relationships;
- the textual, which allows us to construct sequences of discourse with cohesion and continuity (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 29–30).

According to Talmy (2000), from a cognitive point of view, the strategies of lexicalization highlight "the way experience is rendered into languages via the semantic content of lexical items that are used to express experiential categories". Therefore, a study of different lexical encoding strategies and related lexical patterns sheds light on the way in which speakers of different languages organize and represent empirical and experiential data related to specific events across cultures.

The challenge in the CLIL approach applied to PE is to bridge the gap between the two theories and integrate them.

3.3. Language Proficiency

The third dimension to be considered is Language proficiency. Although we agree with Barbero's (2011) idea about the extreme diversity between languages and disciplines and that such diversity has a strong impact on the application of the CLIL method, we strongly disagree with her definition of the language of PE. In fact in her definition she reduces and simplifies the language of PE to a context limited to practical functions/structures such as understanding and giving orders and instructions and this is the reason why she classifies the language of PE at an elementary level (as mentioned in Section1).

However, as will be further demonstrated in section 4 through a "deconstructive" methodology centered on a critical analysis of the literature in the specific field of PE, the framework generally theorised by Barbero for CLIL methodology illustrated below in Fig. 1 can be applied to the field of PE.

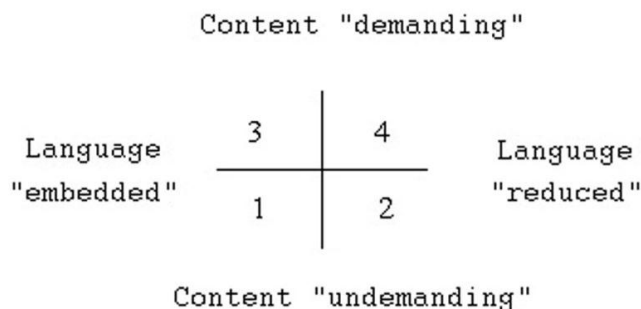


Fig. 1. Ratio between Language and Content in CLIL (adapted from Cummins, 2000 and Barbero 2011)

The framework in the figure above, adapted from Cummins (2000), represents the ratio of Language to Content in CLIL in an "analytic scheme for mapping in a general way how the construct of language proficiency can be

conceptualized in terms of the intersections of cognitive (information-processing) demand and context” (Cummins, 2000).

According to Barbero (2011), the amount of language needed to communicate a given content is inversely proportional to the context. Consequently, greater proficiency is needed when communication is not related to a concrete situation and there are no additional indications other than those provided by the language itself. In this case, “Context-reduced communication [...] relies primarily (or at the extreme of the continuum, exclusively) on linguistic cues to meaning, and thus successful interpretation of the message depends heavily on knowledge of the language itself (Cummins, 2000)”. The quantity of cognitive demand depends on both the cognitive content and the complexity of elaboration through mental processes.

Considering the quadrants of the diagram above, CLIL activities can be classified (2011) “in four categories resulting from the combination of their different language and content: 1) low-demand of cognitive involvement that requires very limited use of the language; 2) activities with low cognitive demand, focused on language; 3) high-demand cognitive tasks that require limited use of the language; 4) high-demand activity and cognitive linguistics” (Barbero, 2011).

Thus according to Cummins “Mastery of “academic” function in Quadrant 4 (academic register) is a more formidable task because such uses require a high level of cognitive involvement and are only minimally supported by interpersonal and contextual cues. Under conditions of high cognitive demand, it is necessary for students to stretch their linguistic resources to the limit to function successfully. In short “the essential aspect of language proficiency is the ability to make complex meaning explicit in either oral or written modality by means of language itself rather than by means of contextual or paralinguistic cues (gesture, intonation etc.)” (Cummins, 2000: 69).

The CLIL challenge applied to PE consists in being able to follow the 4 quadrants in Barbero’s diagram (2011) as contextualised in the proposal in the next section and summarised in Table 1. In this way it would be possible to achieve a higher level of language proficiency when dealing with abstract concepts related to the lexicalization of movement not only in relationship to space and time, but also to body-part and to play/game duality.

4. A new Approach to Physical Education

In this section we focus on a critical pedagogical approach to put forward a hypothetical CLIL content (based on cooperative learning, verbal interaction and socialization) for PE. As CLIL method is based on the reconstruction of the subject according to four basic aspects which facilitate the work and development of linguistic competence (“content”, “communication”, “culture” and “cognition”, the so-called “4Cs”), in PE, these four points can be used to enhance the critical aspect of the teaching-learning process.

“Content” refers to the selection and handling of the subject content. In accordance with Fernández-Balboa and Sicilia (2005), for PE we suggest the selection of contents that highlight social and intellectual aspects. This would replace the too technical Anglo-Saxon approach which has gradually been implemented in PE.

As regards “communication”, we suggest increasing STT (Student Talking Time) at the expense of TTT (Teacher Talking Time). This measure, applied to the “language of learning”, the “language for learning” and the “learning through language” contributes positively to the successful implementation of CLIL (Coral, 2012: 30). It also helps optimize learning in an active and participatory way.

The “culture” aspect provides an excellent opportunity for discussing the practical content of the subject, especially when it comes to ideological preconceptions and myths related to PE and sport. Thus, through a rational process of deconstruction of contents that have been accepted in an uncritical way, students will be ready to form their own independent opinions about each content. In this way they will be able to integrate and connect their acquired knowledge with the real world.

Finally, we must consider the aspect of “cognition”, rooted in the cognitive domain of Bloom’s taxonomy (1956), or even more specifically in the review published by Anderson & Krathwohl (2000), which proposes the following continuum of skills and thought processes involved in learning tasks: remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate and create. CLIL methodology requires high levels of cognitive involvement in which cognitive activities of analysis, evaluation and creation are put into practice.

Four steps should be clearly held in mind when redesigning the teaching-learning process, as can be seen in the following concept of CLIL based on Critical Pedagogy:

- "What": selection of content and objectives.
- "When": sequencing the contents.
- "How": choice of methodological strategies and teaching styles.
- "What, how and when to assess".

The 4Cs framework fits perfectly with the objectives, content and evaluation criteria for a PE model based on critical pedagogy. Below, we suggest how these elements can be used to integrate CLIL and Critical Pedagogy.

4.1. Learning objectives and assessment criteria

The definition of educational objectives is one of the most difficult tasks for teachers. Rather than teaching by objectives so that PE becomes a mere tool, the correct approach according to López-Pastor (2002) and Rodríguez-Rojo (1997) should concentrate on purpose, values and actions.

As seen in the previous sections, Critical Pedagogy focuses on the emancipatory interests of knowledge from a critical point of view (Habermas, 1982). Here we focus on clarifying the specific teaching/learning objectives that teachers must take into account when designing their CLIL syllabus based on critical pedagogy.

Many taxonomies have been applied to PE objectives (Simpson, 1966; Harrow, 1972; Castañer & Camerino, 1991). To achieve the requirements of CLIL using a critical pedagogy approach, we suggest organising learning objectives that take into account both the cognitive domain and psychomotor skills. In both cases they should follow an ordered sequence in terms of complexity and increased autonomy in the implementation of the tasks. Therefore, we opt for a number of objectives that, in relation to each of the selected contents, takes into account the following phases: perceiving and becoming familiar with the content, creating basic patterns, adapting and modifying the patterns to contextual needs, optimizing the decision-making-process and finally creating new responses on the basis of a critical and independent analysis of the acquired knowledge.

Given the open and flexible nature of the learning goals, the assessment criteria must be carefully correlated. Furthermore, the emancipatory approach should be followed, since in most PE tasks there can be several valid ways of achieving the same goal.

4.2. Review of contents

Educational contents are defined as the set of cultural forms and knowledge selected to make up a subject. In PE, cultural manifestations evolve over time, so a new analysis of contents must be made periodically (Contreras, 1998).

We must not forget that PE is made up of both scientific and social elements that should be given equal importance. As the desire to turn PE into a scientific discipline has prevailed, its humanistic contents have been left aside in order to promote a more scientific and technical profile.

It is our belief that the social and humanistic aspects of PE need to be reestablished by means of Critical Pedagogy. Some examples of how this can be achieved are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Content for Critical Pedagogy in Physical Education

Movement as a human dimension	What is movement? Why is it a necessary feature of our nature? Different examples of motor skills that enrich our lives: sport, healthy physical activity, recreation, movement and dance, outdoor activities...
Physical activity throughout history	Early civilizations. The Middle Ages. The Renaissance. The Modern Era. Contemporary Times. The beginning of PE. Current Trends.
Introduction to the Olympics	Values. Different Eras. Other competitions.

High-level sport and health	Professionalism. Risks of high level training. Adaptation of the body to stress. Centers of technology and High Performance Sports
Ethics and sport	Core values of sport. Ethics in all sporting events. When sport loses its values and ethos
Sports Marketing	Sports equipment. Influence on results. Sport and safety. Sports facilities, etc.
Professional Sport	Sport and sports entertainment. Social role of the elite athlete. Sport and politics. Sport and economics.
Doping	Concept. Doping Control. Incidence of doping on results. Effect of doping on health. Causes that may induce the athlete to dope.
Sports journalism	Media and Sport Advertising (profit). Sports information.
Women and Sport	History of participation. Sports performance in women. Social impact.
Art and physical activity	Human movement as art: dance, mime, drama, theater, etc. Art as a way of life.
Sports Medicine	Care of the athlete. Tests: Who, how, when and why? Medical Review. Basic interpretation of results.
Sports Psychology	Relationship between psychology and sports. The sports psychologist.
Sports associations	Sports associations: clubs, associations, etc.
Physical-sport and healthy lifestyles	What habits are associated with physical activities? What kind of practice has more to do with other healthy habits? Why?
Career opportunities for physical education and sport	Monitors and coaches. Sports Journalism. Sports Management. Teaching. Research.

4.3. Methodological Approach

The methodology we propose for implementing CLIL in conjunction with critical pedagogy in PE must incorporate a teaching style that encourages student participation and, above all, develops the 4Cs framework. Among the numerous trends and methodologies for teaching PE, Mosston & Ashworth (1999) have to be mentioned. Their book 'Teaching Physical Education' suggest a number of teaching styles that represent a continuum in the evolutionary process of teaching guiding students towards autonomy and creativity. Out of the eight styles they propose, those that best fit CLIL and Critical Pedagogy are those that elicit a state of cognitive dissonance in students:

- Guided Discovery
- Troubleshooting
- Creativity and autonomy.

All these styles provide a methodological option that establishes a clear relationship between PE and cognitive processes, favoring the emancipation of students and the development of their decision-making capacity.

All of them, in accordance with the requirements of both CLIL and Critical Pedagogy make use of processes and tasks such as: comparing, contrasting, planning, developing, classifying, hypothesizing, summarising, exploring, creating, inventing, reflecting etc.

5. Conclusions

Summing up, if CLIL is to be an effective learning method and achieve the main goals and purposes which are designed to promote learning from contents related to school subjects, the nature of physical education as a school

subject must be reviewed in the light of a new critical pedagogical perspective (Kirk 1986). We must develop a new way of conceiving physical education as a discipline so that it is linked to humanities and critical thinking (Kirk, 2014). If this interconnection is established, PE will expand its horizons and contents as a school subject and fulfill CLIL's purpose and objectives.

This approach is particularly relevant in Italy (and Europe in general) where more critical and humanistic initiatives for promoting the use of CLIL as a method for teaching physical education in a given foreign language - be it English or any other language - need to be implemented. These initiatives will be useful not only in training and helping PE teachers to adopt a more critical, humanistic and inclusive approach to the subject they teach at school, but also in helping their pupils, who belong to a new generation, to become aware of the importance of learning a second language in our globalized world.

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