

## **PRESENTATION OF EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND INNOVATIONS**

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*"Man can learn nothing except by going from the known to the unknown"* Claude Bernard. SLIDE

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Taking as my starting point this intriguing and possibly daunting notion from Claude Bernard, I wish to share with you some key aspects of how Liverpool Hope University undergraduates develop their professional experience as primary school practitioners, moving from the known to the unknown, and facing the challenges this brings.

My presentation is intended to give you an insight into selected assessed elements in the primary teacher training course at Liverpool Hope, with some audiovisual support to illustrate student's work.

I will outline three pivotal moments of undergraduate coursework assessment experience in Year One, Year Two and the Final Year of the undergraduate Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) element of the degree, to show how our undergraduates go from the known to the unknown. And in MFL, I will also suggest that CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) plays a key role.

We identify a special focus for each year of our Teacher Training Programme  
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Year One is the BEGINNING Teacher  
Year Two is the EMERGING Teacher  
Year Three is the DEVELOPING Teacher  
Year Four is the LEADING teacher

Each year students build on their subject knowledge, professional knowledge, pedagogy and research skills and ultimately develop a philosophy of teaching which is their own.

The students with whom I work most closely are those who are studying Primary Teaching with Modern Foreign Languages. Their interest is in teaching all subjects, with in addition their specialist subject of languages to the 5-11 age range. They are therefore building up their experience and learning to be leaders in MFL in the primary setting.

The students usually come to the course with between 2-4 years school experience of language learning. They normally have one main or preferred language from French,

Spanish, German, but we design our course so that they learn everything in relation to Primary MFL, across languages, they work together to become practitioners with a range of transferable skills. Peer learning is a crucial element.

The teaching of modern foreign languages is not statutory in the primary setting, but is expected to be so from September 2014. This is a significant step forward and, may I say, in some ways for all of us an exciting leap into the unknown, in which we as a university are expected to take a significant role.

In fact in their 2011 report "Languages Matter More and More" the British Academy called on our universities to contribute to a national recovery programme in Languages stating :

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"In our view, university vice-chancellors are well placed to take action to encourage language learning both at school and at university, and should strive to ensure that universities fulfil their obligations not only in the long term interests of their students, but also with an eye to the nation's needs. (2011, p5 ).

Arguably, what our nation needs, our university needs and our language programme needs is to develop trainee teachers able to help lead the recovery programme in languages primary schools.

Therefore, at a time when nationally in England there is a movement towards an enhanced language learning culture, our work with MFL students has become particularly vital.

## **2. EXPERIENCE DEVELOPED THROUGH COLLABORATION**

So how does the university-based training contribute to this process and develop experience trainees can use in the primary classroom? The key to our provision lies in collaboration, collaborative approaches and pedagogic tasks which help scaffold learning.

An essential element of this is to use peer teaching in Year One and Year Two. In Year Two with a particular focus on CLIL. I am going to explain how from the students perspective experience is built up by these peer teaching assessments and summarise how students respond.

### **YEAR ONE PEER TEACHING**

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So allow me to outline the assessment provision in Year One of the MFL programme. Year One is the Developing Teacher.

Students complete a presentation in the first semester on a language learning theory and how they would apply this to the classroom. Then in the second semester they

prepare a peer teaching assignment in which they teach their peers part of a lesson in either French, German or Spanish.

Dramatic though it sounds, in some ways, it would be unthinkable to use CLIL in YEAR ONE. As our students come to us from school with between two and four years modern foreign language experience at this point their focus is very much on their own language teacher identity and learning to learn. Also they have not had a great deal of classroom experience.

Nevertheless, they must plan and pitch their lesson according to the known abilities of the group and simulate a classroom situation.

At this point it would be useful to share with you an extract from an example filmed in class.

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At the end of this process students wrote an impact statement about the experience.

One student commented:

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"I found this activity extremely useful and beneficial as it gave me the chance to put all of the theory I had learned into practice. It allowed me to think about the sequence of a lesson, and about issues such as differentiation. It also really increased my confidence in teaching enthusiastically (particularly singing).

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Another said: "The Peer teaching is great for giving you an "authentic" opportunity to try out methods of teaching/learning and I found the activity invaluable. I now know what parts worked well and what I could change to improve it for future lessons".

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However for some students peer teaching can be challenging. So in contrast to the student who thinks peer teaching can simulate an authentic experience, is the student for who Peer Teaching is seen as making the trainee teacher vulnerable.

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"I have found the Peer Teaching really hard as I am not confident in front of people my own age and therefore my level of language and teaching skills has been lower than what I know I can do. I have been more confident on placement teaching French..."

What is perhaps significant in these comments is that although trainees are interested in the role of the learner and the process of language learning they are more concentrated on their own role as teacher. Assessment of learning is also not at this stage a natural part of their classroom practice. But how it feels to be a teacher and teach new language is key. The focus is in teacher-led presentation, production and practice.

In relation to such pedagogic tasks, we may recognise what Samuda (2001) has suggested about presentation of new language in MFL.

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"Within a standard pedagogical framework such as the Presentation, Practice and Production sequence, the teacher operates as a provider of bite-sized input, supplier of feedback and engineer of controlled progressions of classroom activity" (2001, p120)

This element of control, teacher as conductor, appears to be central in the Year One experience.

## **YEAR TWO: A CLIL PEER TEACHING ASSIGNMENT**

In Year 2, the Year of the Developing Teacher students do another peer presentation, but this time with a focus on CLIL.

Moving into CLIL is a key transitional step. But definitely a move from the known into the unknown. Students research and learn about the principles of CLIL, which is a very new concept to the majority. They are unlikely even in their personal language learning journey, to have experienced anything like this.

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In relation to the English school experience Coffey (2006) has suggested that:

"One of the main obstacles to implementing content-based learning in its "strong" form"...

(by that he means where communicative outcomes are closely tied to immediate learning needs)

"is, of course, the lack of truly effective bilinguals (or native speakers) working in our schools, yet these are not necessarily the best language teachers in any case" He also notes that using CLIL may be seen as obstructing delivery of the National Curriculum.

Hence, students previous experience is of a language learning culture where content and language are less likely to be integrated, although there are of course exceptions to this.

So, following their CLIL presentation what do students say about CLIL? Let me share some selected comments:

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"It helped me to realise how easy it could be to implement languages into the curriculum and timetable, and increased my confidence that this technique could work"

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"CLIL encouraged me to focus on key language and use actions to help children understand. Repetition is essential when using CLIL which can help make the lesson more creative and enjoyable"

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"clearer understanding of how to make any lesson cross-curricular...children will understand even if they do not know the language - body language is also important. At this point allow me to show you an extract of a student doing her CLIL presentation.

This is a Year 2 student and you will see her introduction to teaching a lesson about  
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A key aspect here I believe is that, already through experience, but also through CLIL students bring an energy to the language-learning process, an understanding of the language and a willingness to experiment, teaching elements of the curriculum in the foreign language.

They become strong advocates of CLIL. They are discovering what Coffey again refers to as

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" Instead of focusing on foreign language competence as a discrete skill, the most effective way of cultivating this skill is recognised as using a foreign language as a means of developing (i.e extending) content learning of different subjects. In this light the focus shifts from the means to the end and foreign language becomes a vehicle for learning about the world".

The use of CLIL in Year Two in our setting, encourages students to become adventurous.

#### **FINAL YEAR : DRAWING ON PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE - RESEARCH.**

How then can all this experience impact on the Final Year, which is the Year of the Leading Teacher.

Students are required to do more in Research terms. They plan a unit of work which builds on their CLIL lesson and they also do a Research project. Having developed their subject knowledge in Year One, and their teacher role, and then devised and implemented a short CLIL lesson, adventuring into combining content and language in a meaningful way, students are ready to prepare a research project.

However essentially we come back the notion of the unknown in terms of experience the research project is a unknown quantity for the group.

In order to gauge students' attitudes to research, as well as the experience of students to date, which will lead them into their choice of Research subject, I ask students to present their feelings about research not in discussion or even in a written statement but in artistic form using collage.

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The use of this more unusual form of reflection and lead into investigation has been used before. Poldma and Butler-Kisber (2011) have used collage as part of Arts-informed inquiry and discuss the significance of such approaches in experiential research.

In the first session, students are given paper, glue, and other materials and asked to create a collage which represents their feeling towards research. Students work on tables together and can freely discuss, interact and create. This unusual approach produces some interesting results.

Allow me to share some examples.

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In a sense, Art and life experience come together in this. They are ready to face a similar challenge.

Having accumulated experience in teaching terms, means that many students choose school based projects and conduct their research in school.

Moreover several students combine subjects in their research, using CLIL approaches in their assignment. (Teaching Music or Drama for example). They also integrate MFL and CLIL into their other Primary Teaching assignments and we see this emerge in their philosophy of teaching statement.

A further interesting aspect is that in line with the Poldma research students find themselves discovering that their common experience of CLIL in MFL produces a sense of camaraderie, energy, and challenge. They are now ready to use their extensive experience.

### **3. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In the UK we are an important juncture in MFL, and I would argue CLIL could be really important in a new National Curriculum which will include languages as a statutory element and which will bring new ways of learning about the world. I would also add, by the end of the MFL course students are well prepared to be leaders in MFL.

And what of the future use of this accumulated experience as teachers?

I believe three conditions will really help to capitalise on all this experience, in order for it to become a reality :

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Firstly, Leadership which recognises the importance of languages and the enrichment which comes from bold approaches, such as for the UK, using CLIL.

Secondly, Partnership, particularly international partnership which allows teachers to interact and share their practice and visions.

Thirdly, Teachers who respond to leadership and involve themselves in partnership, but who think of themselves as unbound, unrestricted by their UK classroom.

The government is now placing the emphasis on teacher training in school with a School Direct model in which students train in school, on the job. This will require immense adaptability from teacher trainees to build and reflect on their experiences in an autonomous manner. It will also change the way universities interact with schools in teacher training.

This week our focus is on re-conceptualising the role of the European Teacher. I am thinking of my students in that light, because now, more than ever, we need teachers who are not bound by the walls of the classroom, or even those of the school, in their approach to their work. We need teachers who think beyond their classroom walls and are ready, able, trained, and prepared to go from the known to the unknown.

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