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Research interests: integrated learning, ESP materials development,  
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## AVENUES FOR PEER DEVELOPMENT IN CROSS-SUBJECT TEAMS

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*The current tendency to promote university teacher's research capacities has long over-shadowed the demand for high-quality teaching and made educator's human capital and professional intellect look insignificant and not appreciated. Moreover, though it is commonly recognised that co-operative strategic intelligence creates most of the professional intellect of an organization, some are dubious about the value of collaborative educator work in a university for the benefit of students and the reputation of the institution itself.*

*The paper shares insights into how to boost the teacher's confidence in self and others, and what affects such cultivated self-esteem would have in modern needs-based cross-cultural training environments. The reflections are based on the experiences in the CLIL project implemented by the Institute of Foreign Languages of Vilnius University, and comparisons are made regarding the purposes and ways of collaboration between subject and language teachers in secondary schools and universities. In addition, an analysis of the most interesting accomplishments and an overview of key learning experiences are shared for a development of similar projects in future. To place the experience in a broader context, observations are causally linked with the overall situation in higher education where a gradual shift away from conventional teaching methods to more unstructured, learner-centred programmes is being made.*

**KEY WORDS:** *collaborative work, professional intellect, creativity, innovation, teaching culture*

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### Introduction

Paradoxically enough, professionals in higher education are very often put in most controversial situations. On the one hand, they are encouraged to be actively involved in scientific research in order to bring novelties into their classroom. On the other hand, they are the ones who are not necessarily most comfortable in front of a group of students (esp. in seminars,

workshops and tutorials where they work with small groups of people and have to demonstrate appropriate attention to an individual student's needs, etc.) because their teaching practices could be outdated to meet the changing needs of the modern teaching environment at a higher education institution. To make things worse, quite often students come from schools where they were taught to think and act critically, work

in very interactive settings, and which they naturally expect to be continued at university. The clash between a recognized scientific mind of a university teacher and their questionable training methodology not only de-motivates students but also challenges the teachers' professional self-esteem.

In the modern secondary school, conversely, in order to respond productively to diverse educational demands, foreign language professionals and subject teachers are encouraged to coexist closely together, i.e. schools introduce CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) at different stages of instruction. An observable CLIL property has favourably confirmed to date that a young and mature teacher, a scholar, and a practitioner can productively work together and benefit from being in one team, which can be applicable to different routine teaching environments. Since school communities are smaller and their members are more interdependent, they tend to allow their peers to see more often whatever they are engaged in and do not fear to look odd, thus overcoming the barrier to ask and get help. The nature of secondary school education suggests that CLIL fits better there than in the university setting.

Since the rapidly changing contemporary educational environments require flexible professionals with an abundant range of skills, this paper aims to challenge the institutionalized attitude to university educational professionals as individuals to whom teaching is a secondary nature and therefore professional development could be confined to scientific matters. To achieve this aim, 1) causes, means and positive effects of unthreatening and informal teacher development will be examined, and 2) stimulating ways of collaboration between

language and subject professionals will be explored as having long-term effects on the productivity and efficiency of teaching both subjects.

To address these objectives, the paper makes descriptive comparisons of secondary school and university teaching environments by reflecting on experiences in the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) teacher training project run by the Institute of Foreign Languages (IFL) of Vilnius University from 2011 to 2013. Trained by a group of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) professionals from IFL, more than 50 teachers from a wide spectrum of subject areas advanced their skills in the foreign language and CLIL methodology. In this paper, observable evidence illustrates how extensive collaboration not only built the teachers' confidence to take on a new professional challenge of teaching CLIL, but also confirmed their inner need of togetherness. Ultimately, discussions with the participants and peer university teachers render an outline of similar cross-subject collaboration instances feasible in the university setting at large.

So, due to the CLIL's still relative infancy and yet its growing demand at all levels of education and by reason of first-hand reflection on the teacher collaborative nature at different levels of schooling, this paper puts forward an idea of mutually beneficial internal collaboration across subjects and study fields.

### **How exactly would teacher peer working manifest itself?**

Due to their dual role in CLIL, teachers require considerable time before they realize that they teach the subject not *in* a different language but rather *through* another lan-

guage. This may seem obvious on the surface but deep down it takes significant effort and peer support before a CLIL subject teacher feels confident that he/she can give enough attention to both language and content in their lesson to help learners learn both as they learn a school subject.

As we are well aware, professional expertise in language teacher education can be gained through 3 different models (Wallace 1991):

- The craft model when a novice or trainee learns from observation and talking with a more experienced teacher. In the CLIL project, we acknowledged that trainees mistakenly may trial the same techniques they observe with other classes obtaining unexpected results and sometimes transfer obsolete methods bearing no relation with a new set of goals. Thus, the model can not apply indisputably.
- The applied science model when teacher trainees are provided with prescribed exercises and know-how technicalities. Every trainee teacher was provided with CLIL resource books and trainers shared own activities. Yet as a top-down model, this view falls short in the sense that it tends to over-generalize principles of teaching and the foundational research behind them. As Hayes (2011) states, it is “by which trainees are transmitted expertise from western wisdom”. In the CLIL context, this method can be applied in follow-up courses or conferences.
- The reflective model. As D. Bane-gas (2011) suggests, the distinction should be made “between reflection in action, i.e. during the language

lesson, reflection on action based on a retrospective view of the lesson taught, and reflection for action, the undertaking of new courses of action for future lessons”. This type was underrated in the CLIL project probably because the stress on reflection is very much dependent on personal experience and readiness to risk and expose own deficit skills in reflection.

For CLIL purposes, therefore, variations and benefits of the above mentioned models can be sensibly and justifiably overviewed in a progressive order – from the ones that are more rigid and formal to the looser ones with a freer disposition to sustain productively.

### Critical Friends

The pool of educators in the CLIL project favourably mirrored general traits in different education settings where teachers are variably motivated to explore and flexibly apply different teaching methodologies. Some were young and had a burning ambition to realize their educator dreams, others had travelled and were ready to share their cross cultural educational experiences, and there were people who had invested much time and energy into studying particular subjects and methodologies. Doubtless, these different people can be an invaluable source of diverse expertise if they are appreciated as a precious resource.

Therefore, in the CLIL context, intensive informal collaboration between subject and language teachers is advocated to bring in different multiple intelligences into planning, delivery and evaluation of such teaching. Without any doubt, collaboration between a linguistic visual-spiritual professional and an expert with logical-mathe-

mathematical or musical intelligence encourages development and innovation and inevitably gives a powerful impulse for renewal and reflection in terms of learning, curriculum development and materials – something that is often undermined both at school and university levels.

Paradoxically, university teachers are expected to follow a well-trodden route since they are thought to have inborn abilities to teach and thus not to require peers or involvement in peer observation. Though such sweeping generalization could be both discouraging for the educator who full-heartedly engages in order to provide high-rate teaching and harmful to the university reputation in general, universities excuse themselves for having no adequate tools to evaluate the effectiveness of a teacher. S. Thornbury's (2009a) also recognizes that peer observation has to be perceived with care as a good teacher is not necessarily a good appraiser and unless there are very clear guidelines for the observations, observers "may record subjective and unsubstantiated judgments on their peers, and these judgments may unfairly influence the institution against the teacher and lead to a deterioration in peer relationships."

Our CLIL experience shared Thornbury's view that the informal peer observation model contributes to the professional development of the observing and observed teachers even more efficiently in such instances when the observer becomes a "critical friend" who acts as a catalyst to look at own teaching.

According to J. Harmer (2007), there are various ways of carrying our "critical friend" ideas:

- two teachers hold a dialogue / make a joint presentation and students gain

from hearing different views on the same topic, while the participating teachers learn through their public interaction with each other;

- teachers take different parts of the same lesson so that at one stage one acts as organizer and then observer, while the other plays the role of a prompter and resource;
- teachers plan a lesson which one of them then teaches and the other observes; after that they describe what happened to their joint plan and detail their experiences of the lesson; for the next class the position is reversed.

Yet judgments are to a large extent "intangible and unable to be addressed through a list of criteria, and giving a constructive feedback is a difficult skill where the observer risks giving offence" (Cosh & Woodward 2007). So in the CLIL project, peer observation was performed in home schools and participants ran internal peer observation and gave informal feedback. The teacher trainees quite engaged themselves in the experience and confirmed their understanding that they should not be making judgments about teaching of others because of the subjective perception of good teaching. Still, CLIL subject teachers with non-native-like language proficiency and little formal training in language teaching found themselves challenged in feedback situations.

Therefore, it could be predicated that in the university setting "critical friend" ideas could work only when we are comfortable with our teaching and are willing to recognize that the great development potential of peer observation is for the observer, not the person being observed. To do that, it

is absolutely vital to train to speak to each other non-judgmentally.

### **Accept that our trainees are our peers as well**

The scholars B. Kumaravadivelu (2006), A. Pennycook (1989), S. Thornbury (2009b) reject “top-down, one-size-fits-all solutions” in teaching and they argue for “a more socially responsible, even transformative, pedagogy.” Pennycook (1989, p. 612) urges that “teachers start to oppose those forms of knowledge that are being thrust upon them under the guise of scientific objectivity.”

Pennycook (1989, p. 122) also suggests that local teachers should “adopt creative and critical instructional practices in order to develop pedagogies suitable for their communities” and stand for more contextually sensitive and hence more appropriate methodologies which are locally generated and validated. Freire (1973, p. 46) also proposes that the educational process should be grounded in the local needs and concerns of the participants: “Whoever enters into dialogue does so with someone about something; and that something ought to constitute the new content of our proposed education.”

For that reason, P. Freire (1970, p. 61) advocates a “dialogic” pedagogy, in which learners become not simply objects of the teaching process, but agents in their own education: “through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers.”

Without a doubt, such attitudes are an imperative survival need in the CLIL environment, which is about advancing subject knowledge through a foreign language medium. Thus, Lesson Observation and

Critical Incident Technique (LOCIT) process offered by D. Coyle (2005) can be used to provide a framework for professional collaboration, confidence-building and theory development from a “bottom-up” or practical perspective.

As L. Dale and R. Tanner (2012, p. 70–72) describe it, in LOCIT colleagues are “buddies,” i.e. professionals who support and trust other professionals and who engage in supportive yet analytical dialogue. LOCIT typically involves filming a whole lesson or series of lessons, editing key “learning moments” using the Critical Incident Technique, comparing edited clips with learners and colleagues, and running in-depth discussion. The objective of the analysis is to capture moments in a lesson when teachers, colleagues and learners consider that learning has taken place, i.e. “learning moments” in the lesson. In so doing, learners engage in shared reflection on what enables them to learn while among colleagues it acts as a catalyst for deep discussions on different aspects of teaching practice.

Since LOCIT involves listening to and working with learners and aims to give them a “voice” to articulate their own learning, it would constructively embrace a variety of mutual gains in CLIL. Moreover, this technique could be truly valuable in a university setting, esp. while piloting CLIL-like modules.

### **T-Teams**

Subject teachers go through different stages of development before they become proficient and confident CLIL teachers. This process may be longer or shorter for different people but in each case much depends on professional development practices in a given school. J. R. Katzenbach and

D. K. Smith (2010) define a team as a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose and performance goals, and who take a mutually accountable approach.

Reference to L. Dale and R. Tanner (2012, p. 21–23) reveals that collaboration is a continuous process which can take place before, during, and after the lesson to identify specific language needs and learning strategies, to support and give feedback on learners' language production and content, and do remedial work on language issues which need attention.

Therefore, if schools are proactive and attentive to the needs of their team members and they ensure that subject and language professionals work together, such cross-subject team practices could serve as the initial step for further cooperation and assistance; and language teachers gradually become more aware of the possibility of integrating language and subjects and the need to support subject learning in language lessons.

For the reasons described above, such intensive and sincere integration could be viewed more favourably in schools than universities, where educators feel less part of an organic team. Unfortunately, in a university setting one of the main inhibitors of a team obtaining its goal optimally is knowledge hoarding rather than knowledge sharing. Among cultural factors that inhibit knowledge transfer and mutual accountability, T. H. Davenport and L. Prusak (1997) pinpoint the lack of trust and time and meeting places, narrow ideas, the status of knowledge owners, and belief that knowledge is a prerogative of particular groups. S. Lucietto (2008) perceptively states that while T-team's responsibility is shared, roles are complementary, professional viewpoints

are often worlds apart; hence teachers find it challenging to Talk To Each Other (TATEO).

I. Fleming (2004) puts forward four main causes for team work: when you are attempting to deal with genuine problems where nobody knows the answer; when there is some uncertainty about the task; when you are experiencing a rapid change; and when there is a need for people to work closely together on real tasks. These causes accurately illustrate the current CLIL situation both in schools and universities. Nonetheless, schools are considered to be more willing to support their professionals while the organizational culture of higher education institutions does not necessarily encourage alliances.

### **Mutual supervision?**

Another critical factor for the growth of collaboration is the expanding range of our responsibilities as we are expected to function efficiently in such cross-sector, cross-border, and even pan-European projects. In such demanding circumstances, many teachers feel tense and run the risk of burn-out. J. Harmer (2007) emphasizes that in order to release anxieties and refresh themselves, teachers need chances to examine their beliefs and question assumptions and feelings.

J. Edge (1992) coins the term "cooperative development" and M. Rinvolucris (2006) offers "mutual supervision" (MS) or "co-counseling" as a name to the approach where, according to J. Edge, in a trustworthy atmosphere a teacher talks to an empathetic colleague who makes every effort to understand the speaker without interpretation or judgment. As proposed by M. Rinvolucris, it is peer co-counseling in an inter-dependent, confidential and non-judgmental way when turns are taken equally between the



supervisor and the supervisee to reflect on classroom practices and where the prime role of the supervisor is to listen with full attention and empathy. M. Rinvoluceri recognizes that mutual supervision can beat the loneliness at work and help to see own work through the new prism of the supervisor's mirroring back.

According to M. Rinvoluceri, mutual supervision takes six main steps, including: choosing a colleague; deciding where and when to meet; agreeing on 100% confidentiality and the supervisor role to reflect back in an open and non-judgmental way with unconditional regard for the narrative. In addition, agreeing that the time given to the supervisee is entirely their time and they may use it as they wish, and that the supervisor will never observe any of lessons or teach the students discussed about during the supervision is essential.

M. Rinvoluceri recognises differences from peer observation where the observed class is analyzed and where two different maps of the same territory can be miles apart. In the supervision model, the focus is uniquely on the supervisee's mapping of the lesson as the supervisor has no contradictory map of their own.

In informal discussions CLIL trainee teachers asserted that mutual supervision could be a useful and non-threatening tool if well promoted among subject and language teachers.

## Conclusions

Even though current changes in education require changing attitudes to teaching, all too often creativity gets stifled as much reservation and reluctance can be observed to move away from conventional (and thus comfortable and seemingly safe) practices

into modern theories and areas. In order to even pilot such methodologies as CLIL, universities should first promote more innovative teaching strategies.

CLIL is being more enthusiastically introduced in schools and yet fragmentarily offered in universities probably because CLIL is too often considered an internal matter of language teaching and a private choice of the language teacher, whether or not aided by a compliant subject colleague. To be true to its nature, however, and to be effectively pursued, CLIL needs to be seen as a whole-school project. This is especially crucial in rather conservative university settings.

Undoubtedly, universities can become more competitive once CLIL-like modules are introduced. To do so, the fundamentals of teamwork must be revisited with more care and precision and teacher participation in Erasmus exchange and similar programmes should be encouraged, which eventually considerably impacts the speed and scope at which university teachers apprehend the added value of professional collaboration.

To promote consistent collaboration and innovation in scientific and teaching fields, university teachers' contribution and performance should be also evaluated in terms of their effectiveness in class and participation in integrated modules with foreign language professionals.

Due to its complexity and still relative infancy, CLIL-like programmes are very time-consuming and pose challenges. They entail long planning sessions, continuous reflection and feedback, and careful evaluation involving all stakeholders. Therefore, various informal professional development initiatives should be endorsed by the management.

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### Summary

Competitive university environments require teaching professionals to perform a dual role of educators and scientists equally effectively. While recognized scientific minds are openly appreciated, their training practices may remain questionable, which eventually not only demotivates students or challenges the teachers' professional self-esteem but also fails to respond to the growing demands of multi-cultural training. Moreover, subject teachers are directed to revisit own programmes and venture forth into methodologies promoting integrated content and language learning. To accomplish the CLIL task, such educators require mastering foreign language teaching methodologies and applying them appropriately in their subject classes. In both provinces, content professionals are presupposed to have internal willingness to collaborate with foreign language specialists since the latter have traditionally been at the forefront of methodological innovation.

By reflecting on the experiences of the CLIL project implemented in Vilnius University, the paper examines ways how CLIL subject professionals can productively collaborate in informal settings. Since the circumstances in which CLIL subject teachers work in schools and in universities provide many parallels, observations are

WALLACE, M. J., 1991. *Training Foreign Language Teachers: A Reflective Approach*. In: *Teacher Training and Teacher Development: A Useful Dichotomy?* Cambridge: CUP. Available from: [http://jalt-publications.org/old\\_tlt/files/97/oct/ur.html](http://jalt-publications.org/old_tlt/files/97/oct/ur.html) (accessed on October 6, 2013).

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## LYGIAVERTĖS PROFESINIO TOBULĖJIMO GALIMYBĖS DIRBANT TARPDA- LYKINĖSE KOMANDOSE

### Santrauka

Konkurencinga universiteto aplinka reikalauja, kad mokymo specialistai veiksmingai atliktų savo dvejopą vaidmenį kaip pedagogai ir kaip mokslininkai. Nors pripažinti mokslo protai yra atvirai ir plačiai vertinami, jų mokymo metodika gali būti abejotina, o tai ilgainiui ne tik susilpnina studentų motyvaciją ir mažina dėstytojo profesinę savigarbą, bet ir trukdo vykdyti augančius tinkamos tarpkultūrinės mokymosi aplinkos kūrimo reikalavimus. Be to, dalykų specialistams siūloma peržiūrėti savo mokymo programas ir imtis dirbti pagal metodiką, skatinančią integruotą dalyko ir užsienio kalbų mokymąsi (IDKM). Jie turi visapusiškai įsisavinti užsienio kalbų mokymo metodus, kad galėtų juos tinkamai taikyti. Abiejose mokymo situacijose iš dalykų specialistų tikimasi, kad jie jaus vidinį poreikį bendradarbiauti su užsienio kalbų specialistais, kurie tradiciškai labiau domisi pažangiomis metodinėmis naujovėmis.

Šiame straipsnyje aptariama IDKM projekto, įgyvendinto Vilniaus universitete, patirtis ir analizuojami būdai, kaip IDKM dalykų specialistai galėtų produktyviai bendradarbiauti neoficialioje aplinkoje. Kadangi IDKM aplinkybės, kuriose dalykų profesionalai dirba mokyklose ar

made regarding applicability of each collaboration mechanism in both. It is ascertained that mutually beneficial practices can be applied with fewer obstacles in secondary schools (e.g. dialogic peer observation, the Critical Incident Technique, T-teams or Mutual Supervision) due to the fact that teachers are more interdependent there and they tend to assist peers internally. In the university context, however, much reservation and reluctance can be observed to move away from conventional solo practices, which suggest that external pressure should be exerted in order to stimulate more productive teamwork.

**KEY WORDS:** collaborative work, professional intellect, creativity, innovation, teaching culture

universitetuose, turi daug paralelių, todėl šiame straipsnyje yra apibendrinti stebėjimo, kaip bendradarbiavimo mechanizmą būtų galima taikyti įvairiose situacijose, rezultatai.

Stebėjimo ir diskusijų rezultatai rodo, kad abipusiškai naudingai bendradarbiavimo praktikai mažiau kliūčių būtų vidurinėse mokyklose. Ten dialoginė tarpusavio stebėsena, kritinių epizodų analizės metodas, T-komandos arba abipusės kontrolės formos yra priimtinesnės, nes mokytojų bendruomenės nariai labiau susiję tarpusavyje ir linkę padėti vieni kitiems. O aukštesiose mokyklose pastebimas nenoras nutolti nuo tradicinės praktikos dirbti individualiai, tai leidžia manyti, jog turėtų būti taikomas išorinis spaudimas siekiant paskatinti našiai dirbti komandoje.

**REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI:** darbas komandoje, kūrybiškumas, mokymo kultūra

Įteikta 2013 liepos 15 d.