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ABSTRACT

This chapter will focus on debating as a teaching strategy adopted by Italian schools, using Italian or English as a vehicular language within a CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) methodology. Starting from a brief literature review, the paper will describe some initiatives carried out by Italian schools to promote debates. In particular the “Educational Avant-garde” movement promoted by INDIRE (National Institute for Documentation, Innovation, Educational Research) in cooperation with 22 schools will be described, focusing on debate as one of the “Ideas” of the Movement which can help innovate and reshape the traditional lecture-based bottom-up means of delivering lessons.

Keywords: negotiation debate CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) teaching strategies innovation CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning)

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1. Introduction on CLIL and Debate

The practice of debating dates back to the rhetoric from ancient Greece and refers to the ability of public speaking and persuading, using evidence and argumentation to foster the speaker's opinions. In the USA and UK debate has become a common practice since the end of 19th century, both as a transversal methodology and as a specific subject of the curriculum. In recent years it has become more and more popular in Italy as well, using both Italian and a foreign language (Krieger, 2005; Alasmari & Ahmed, 2013), the latter case being considered a way of implementing CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) methodology in class.

Debate is a formal argument, in which two opposing teams propose or attack a given proposition or motion in a series of speeches. It is governed by a set of rules, establishing timing and possible interruptions, defined as “points of information” by the opposition. Debates can be judged by a panel of judges (in this case a “competitive debate”) or by an audience (in the case of the “show debate”).

Competitive debating uses the skills of argument to discuss a large variety of issues, which could cover beliefs, government policies, or problems in society. Taking part in debates and discussions, students can develop a wide range of skills, the so-called 21st century skills, such as analyzing problems, thinking critically, synthesizing arguments, presenting one's own positions in a convincing manner, creativity and collaboration. Language skills in the mother tongue or in a foreign language are of course developed and fostered through debating (Rybold, 2006). It is a dynamic and interactive way to implement CLIL at school.

CLIL methodology has been spreading all over Europe in recent years, according to the latest Eurydice Report (European Commission, 2017). In Italy it has been

mandatory at upper secondary level since 2010 (Cinganotto, 2016); CLIL teachers must have a C1 level of competence according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and must have attended a 20-credit university course on CLIL methodology (Langé & Cinganotto, 2014).

CLIL is based on the integration of both subject and language objectives, which are to be reached simultaneously (Coonan, 2002; Mehisto et al. 2008; Coyle et al., 2010; Marsh, 2013). In particular as far as the language is concerned, the focus is on the well-known model by Cummins (1979), distinguishing BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills), which are the communicative skills used for daily, familiar and informal interaction and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency), referring to the language of schooling and the higher order language skills needed to interact in formal and academic contexts and fostered by CLIL methodology. Debate can develop higher order thinking skills and develop language competencies, progressing from BICS to CALP.

Recent research trends point at CLIL as a way to foster the development of cognitive intentions and processes through their relevant discourse functions (Dalton-Puffer, 2013, 2016). Coyle and Meyer, in collaboration with the Graz Group¹ of the ECML (European Centre of Modern Languages of the Council of Europe) have recently defined a framework describing CLIL as an effective way to develop “pluriliteracies”, interweaving communication skills and subject genres in order to reach deep learning (Meyer & Coyle, 2017).

CLIL is a student-centered methodology, taking advantage of a wide range of active and interactive teaching strategies and techniques, most of them borrowed from foreign language teaching, such as Task-Based Approach (Tardieu & Dolitsky, 2012), which puts the planning and performing of an authentic task at the centre of the learning/teaching agenda. A task is defined in the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR)

...as any purposeful action considered by an individual as necessary in order to achieve a given result in the context of a problem to be solved, an

¹ The author has been recently invited to join the Graz Group.

obligation to fulfill or an objective to be achieved. This definition would cover a wide range of actions such as moving a wardrobe, writing a book, obtaining certain conditions in the negotiation of a contract, playing a game of cards, ordering a meal in a restaurant, translating a foreign language text or preparing a class newspaper through group work (CEFR, 2001, p. 10).

Nunan (2004) distinguishes “target tasks”, which refer to the use of language beyond the class and “pedagogical tasks”, which take place in class. According to Ellis, “a task has a clearly defined communicative outcome” (Ellis, 2003, p. 9) and this is the case of debates, where students have a clear communicative aim to reach. Tasks can be divided into intermediary tasks and final tasks. For instance, if the final task is a debate in front of an audience, an intermediary task will consist of training the students to express their points of view through pair work or other similar activities. They may work on vocabulary in specially designed exercises, as vocabulary is a key issue in CLIL (Cardona, 2009). Prabhu (1987) distinguishes three main types of tasks, according to the cognitive ability involved:

- information gap activity, involving a transfer of given information from one person to another, for example, using information in a text to complete a chart or a table;
- reasoning-gap activity, involving processes of inference, deduction, practical reasoning;
- opinion-gap activity, involving a personal preference, feeling, or attitude in response to a given situation.

Debating in CLIL can be considered an example of opinion-gap and reasoning gap activity, as students are guided to express their opinions on particular topics, also providing evidence for what they state. Therefore they are led to convey their personal preferences and feelings as a reaction to a particular situation, but at the same time, this activity involves processes of inference, deduction and practical reasoning as they are supposed to find relevant sources, statistics or other data to support their reasoning and their beliefs. This work on resources can be organized at home with the use of the technologies, in a “flipped learning” framework.

2. An International Overview on Debate

As already mentioned, debates are becoming more and more popular among American and European schools, especially British. The report published in 2011 by the English Speaking Union (ESU), in cooperation with “CfBT Education Trust” titled “Debating the evidence: an international review of current situation and perceptions” (Akerman & Neale, 2011) shows the potential of debating in education in order to improve academic attainment, develop critical thinking, foster cultural awareness and improve learning outcomes. In Canada there has been a growing interest among Canadian educators in promoting debate, especially to provide a pedagogical structure for the oral component of curricula; there are two main associations: the Newfoundland Federated League of Debaters (NFLD) and the Newfoundland and Labrador Speech and Debate Union (SDU).

Much of the literature (Elliot, 1993; Goodwin, 2003; Jensen, 2008; Rao, 2010) highlights the benefits of active and deep learning debate implies, fostering both collaborative and individual dimensions of learning. Table 1 shows a general overview of the structure of a debate. There may be different formats of debating, according to the context and the target. Two main categories may be singled out: competitive and non-competitive debates.

Table 1. The Structure of the Debate²

Generic Debate Overview (Does not show breaks, cross-examination, and discussion.)					
1 st Affirmative	1 st Negative	2 nd Affirmative	2 nd Negative	Neg Rebuttal	Aff Rebuttal
Introduction	Introduction	Introduction	Introduction	No new arguments can be introduced . Explain why your team should win and the other team should lose Remind the judges of your arguments. Tell the judges why they should believe your arguments even after the other team's attack Explain why the judges should not listen to the other team Review critical evidence.	
Definitions	If necessary, attack definitions	Clash with points made by Negative and rebuild Affirmative case (proof)	Continue attack on Affirmative (proof)		
Explain why present system is bad and needs change (proof)	Clash with needs for change (proof)	Present plan, if not already presented (proof)			
At least introduce the plan or present all of plan (policy debate)	If necessary, present counterplan (policy debate)				
Present reasons why	Clash with reasons Present counter-reasons				

Competitive debates usually take place in two main formats: the “policy debate”,

² From: http://csdf-fcde.ca/UserFiles/File/resources/teacher_debate_guide.pdf

focused on a particular issue during a certain timeframe, for example the whole school year and the “parliamentary debate”, in which a different topic is debated every time by two opposing teams. As far as non-competitive debates, the most popular formats mentioned in the literature are the “constructive controversy” (Johnson et al. 2000), and the “deliberative debate” (Jerome & Algarra, 2005): students just discuss but do not compete with each other.

Every year the World Schools Debating Championships (WSDC) a global competition for high school debaters takes place, hosted each year in a different country. The language for debating is English and teams of students coming from different parts of the world can discuss social, moral and political issues. The championship consists of preliminary rounds with “prepared debates” (motions are known in advance) and “impromptu debates” where motions are known only one hour before the debate begins. The 2017 edition took place in Bali in August.

3. The Italian Perspective on Debate

In recent years the Italian Ministry of Education has been fostering the spread of debate as a teaching practice all over Italian schools, also in cooperation with INDIRE (the National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research). A specific project was activated in 2014, titled “Avanguardie Educative” (“Educational Avant-garde”), aimed at finding and enhancing some innovative ideas that schools have implemented in recent years. It is defined as a real “movement” that tries to bring out hidden good practices that a lot of schools have been carrying out, reaching rewarding and encouraging results in terms of students’ learning outcomes and in terms of quality of curricula and learning pathways. Therefore the movement is aimed at spreading and mainstreaming innovation from a holistic perspective, which takes into account a series of innovative ideas that all together can make up the maze of innovation.

“Avanguardie Educative” is a network of innovative schools with the aim of studying how teaching and organizational changes may be implemented within a school and mainstreamed to other schools. The movement, now involving more than 700 schools, is aimed at finding out and enhancing the innovative ideas schools have been implementing in recent years, considering different dimensions, such as time, organization and teaching strategies. It is a bottom-up process aiming at changing the

traditional paradigm of lesson delivery, in order to introduce new learner-centered models, taking advantage of interactive, dynamic, multimodal teaching strategies. The following are the main goals of the movement:

1. changing the “lecture-based” top-down school model;
2. taking advantage of the ICT potential;
3. changing the traditional learning environment;
4. changing the school timetable and making it flexible;
5. aligning the school to the challenges of the “knowledge society”;
6. investing in human capital;
7. making innovation sustainable and systematic.

The movement draws from the idea that the process of innovation can take time, as there are different steps it will naturally have to follow before becoming radical, as the diagram (Figure 1) below clearly shows:

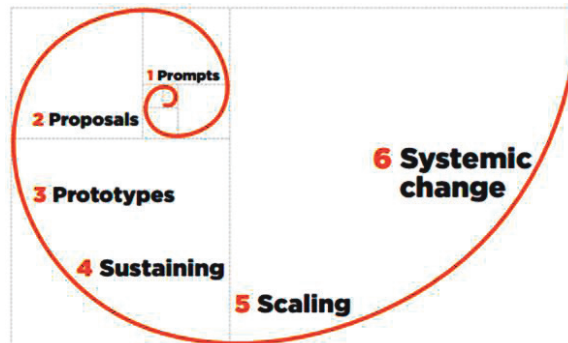


Figure 1. The Spiral of innovation (Murray, et al., 2010)

Flexible and diversified learning paths, new designs for school settings and learning environments, technologies integrated into the school curricula are just some of the “ideas” the “movement” consists of. Debate is one of the ideas of the gallery: there are five schools acting as “leaders” for this idea as they are experts in this field. Schools are implementing it as a curricular subject (as in the Anglo-Saxon world), or as a transversal methodology, in the general perspective of school innovation; in fact debates activate cooperative learning and peer education not only among students, but also among teachers.

4. Teachers' Beliefs about Debate for CLIL

The research project on Italian schools working with debate is ongoing. The research aims at collecting quantitative and qualitative data from the performances with the students, through questionnaires, observations of the sessions and interviews.

From the interviews carried out with some teachers, it is easy to understand the strong belief in the power of debate especially for the enhancement of language competences, with particular reference to the communicative functions relevant for reaching agreement in a team, connecting phrases and sentences through logical connectors, supporting someone's point of view with evidence.

Vocabulary enrichment and fluency are two other dimensions highlighted by the teachers: students are encouraged to speak in a natural way, trying to defend their positions with all their enthusiasm and strength. In some cases the students' good results in the Cambridge exams were interpreted as linked to the practice of debating. The students' fluency has dramatically improved thanks to their commitment in the contest and the linguistic scaffolding realized with the help of web tools, videos, and "realia" taken from the web.

The phase of the activity in which students have to look for authentic resources as evidence for their positions is another interesting aspect described by the teachers: the use of technologies can be very attractive for the students as they are close to their daily communicative and interactive habits.

The game-based dimension is an important aspect highlighted by the teachers: through the competition activated during a debate, the student is involved and engaged as a person, from a holistic perspective, activating all his/her energies, skills, emotions. Therefore, not only the language and communicative dimension is considered and fostered, but also a wide range of pragmatic, extralinguistic, paralinguistic and multimodal aspects.

Teams of debaters are usually arranged as mixed abilities groups, in order to facilitate peer learning: more skillful students can tutor and coach the weaker ones, helping them to learn and improve their skills to make the team get a good result. Apart from the positive impact on students' language skills, the teachers mentioned

the impact on critical thinking, creativity, collaboraton, the so called 21st century skills.

Another interesting aspect of debate is assessment, which is often done in the form of peer-assessment and can focus on a wide range of dimensions, such as the content of the speeches, the language (grammar, vocabulary as much as fluency), as well as on non-verbal aspects (volume of the voice, movements, self-confidence, kinesics, proxemics, as well as the ability to speak in public).

Thanks to the use of assessment rubric, such the example in Figure 2, a certain number of descriptors can be taken into account, referring to the use of facts or statistics to support the students’ positions, to the organization of the speech and to the presentation style. With particular reference to oral presentations, some of the following descriptors can be considered, such as staying on topic, speaking clearly, using complete sentences and moreover, vocabulary.

Class debate 1st, 2nd grades

Criteria	Levels of Performance			
	1	2	3	4
Organization and Clarity Viewpoints and responses are outlined and expressed correctly, clearly and orderly. 3	Unclear and incorrect in most parts	Clear and quite correct in some parts but not over all	Most clear, quite correct and orderly in all parts	Completely clear, correct and orderly presentation
Use of Arguments Reasons are with examples and facts are given to support viewpoints. 3	Few or no relevant reasons given. No examples/facts are given either.	Some relevant reasons supported by few examples/facts given	Most reasons supported by some examples/facts given: most relevant	Most relevant reasons are with examples/facts given in support
Use of Rebuttal Arguments made by the other teams are responded to and dealt with effectively. 2	No effective counter-arguments made	Few effective counter-arguments made	Some effective counter-arguments made	Many effective counter-arguments made
Presentation Style Tone of voice, use of gestures, and level of enthusiasm are convincing to the audience. 2	Few style features were used; not convincingly	Few style features were used convincingly	All style features were used, most convincingly	All style features were used convincingly

TOTAL SCORE /40

Figure 2. Example of assessment grid

5. Conclusions

“Avanguardie Educative” is an opportunity to support and mainstream innovation through a “bottom-up” process. It can be meant as a research laboratory that will be

further investigated and analyzed in order to find the sustainability conditions, which will make it radical and systemic. The idea of innovation is holistic, referring to the general impact on the school system, through a series of ideas that can really change the school vision. New technologies and 21st century skills are among the milestones of innovation and “Avanguardie Educative” draws from them.

This paper was aimed at describing one particular idea belonging to the movement, which is debate, starting from some brief inputs on the international and national background. In particular, debate as an effective teaching and learning strategy for implementing CLIL has been discussed.

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