Introduction

The inherent complexities of learning and teaching and the role played by language(s) are well documented across an increasingly wide range of global contexts. Specific achievements, goals, challenges, and turns in plurilingual education transcend boundaries and resonate throughout this volume. While the evolution of content and language integrated learning (CLIL) over several decades has gone through distinct phases of development – enacting, experimenting, and responding to diverse pedagogical, socio-political, and economic exigencies, I wish to offer just two wicked learning provocations relating to CLIL, which may contribute to futures thinking for integrated, sustainable learning across a broad range of contexts. These provocations are built on the premise that legitimising practices that create inclusive learning spaces or learnscapes across ages, stages, and communities, is fundamental for CLIL to adapt to uncertainties on a global, national, and local basis. As seascapes and landscapes are dynamic and in a state of constant change, so too the concept of learning spaces or learnscapes. When educators promote principled adaptation and pedagogic reflexivity, they explore with learners the potential of plurilingual spaces for creating transformative experiences. Big rhetoric! And yet…

If plurilingual education is to become legitimised as inclusive learnscapes, it will require:

1. Investment in reconceptualising professional learning across curricula boundaries;
2. Radical rethink of internationalisation in tertiary education.

Learning provocation 1: focusing on reconceptualising professional learning

At a time of unprecedented social, technological, and ecological change, confronting global concerns through localised priorities has become a reality. We are familiar with reactive change; yet transforming change into responsible pedagogic activism presents familiar and unfamiliar challenges which break away from siloed thinking and embrace uncertainty.

Tauritz (2016) in her insightful and now lived-through model of Pedagogies of Uncertainty, redefines life skills in terms of learning to cherish, tolerate, and reduce uncertainty offering...
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a catalyst for creative action, risk taking, reflexivity, and connected, shared thinking. It is through connecting with and significantly contributing to holistic learning agendas, that CLIL becomes truly integrated. In other words, CLIL is not detached from any other context for learning – given that contextual variables such as linguistic status and language(s) medium are fundamental to any learning design.

Take, for example, diversity. Unravelling issues of accessibility, inclusion and social justice define how we might enable all students to experience learning relevant to and appropriate for our multicultural, multilingual world. The expediency of responsiveness brought about through ever-increasing mobility of peoples is not enough. So-called monolingual classrooms also require the careful inclusion of multilingual, multicultural experiences. Diversity is not a pedagogic inconvenience but a fundamental human condition that embraces multiple ethnicities, cultures, languages, abilities, sexuality, ages, and so on. This positioning defines integrated CLIL approaches to ‘curriculum’ as inclusive involving moves such as decolonising educational experiences, critically exploring phenomena from alternative perspectives, promoting sustainability and assuring health and wellbeing of all learners.

These principles require extensive pedagogic rethinking. Phipps (2021, p. 9) argues that the decolonisation agenda promotes:

principles for action and approaches, focuses on praxis, on the need to experiment, and try out approaches, not least to devise and improvise. It offers a prospect of enhanced creativity and a breadth of learning contexts outside traditional institutions in future, together with technological and community resourcing of languages.

Normalising the plurality of practices that inclusivity demands, however, disrupts mainstream educational thinking – CLIL is no exception. Morreira et al. (2020, p.2) describe the proliferation of theoretical debates that ‘cut across individual disciplines … taken up in multiple ways from varying contextual and disciplinary perspectives’. They also identify gaps in what is referred to as pluriversal implementation i.e., through practices that embrace many worlds, nurture respect and reciprocity, and value different ways of community building.

While at its core, teaching is a moral profession (Fullan, 1993, p. 1), familiarisation with discourses that value diversity and inclusion and their transformation into pedagogical practices relies on transformative modes of teacher cognition and professional learning that build professional confidence, criticality, and agentic opportunities to do some things differently. Notwithstanding increasing awareness by CLIL teachers of the classroom implications and potential of working in plurilingual and pluricultural domains, some underlying principled and practice-led issues remain unresolved. Take, for example, repositioning language in the CLIL classroom – the ‘elephant in the room’. The need to redefine the roles of language and languages as tools not only for communication but essentially as resources for deepening learning through developing interculturality and criticality in CLIL classrooms, is a priority. Over a decade ago, Dalton-Puffer’s plea to ‘transcend such an understanding that conceptualizes language and curricular content as separate reified entities and instead think of them as one process’ (Dalton-Puffer, 2011, p. 196) has not transparently impacted professional learning in ways that significantly challenge teacher cognition, identities, responsibilities and power struggles. Wicked questions about bounded subject teaching or language competences and practices sustain binary thinking and remain unanswered. The gap between dynamic theoretical thinking and critical pedagogic action is increasing as the ‘busyness’ of teaching and learning intensifies.
Consider the more recent literacies turn in plurilingual education, described by Morton in Chapter 35 of this volume. Another opportunity opens for CLIL teachers to find their voice in exploring and being supported in shifting from the legacy of siloed monolingual education and language learning to fit-for-purpose pedagogies; to find their voice in a radical rethink of teacher education; to build spaces that legitimise uncertainties; and to experiment and apply shifting theoretical models and frameworks. The bottom-up voice predicated on practitioner-researcher alliance is critical. Developing CLIL teacher-learner shared understanding of language(s) as a means to embedding content-related critical literacies and pluriversal competences is evolving as a means of opening dialogue beyond CLIL-specific learning communities and connecting with mainstream educational agendas. More recent plur iliteracies moves (Coyle & Meyer, 2021) suggest that bringing learner competencies such as textual fluency and translanguaging into the mix can align and connect with first language education to support refocusing both teacher and student linguistic competences and subject discipline advancement.

While a call for greater investment in professional learning across curricula boundaries may seem at odds in current global economies, educational institutions are expected to engage in continuous renewal, and change expectations are constantly swirling around them … the way teachers are trained, the way schools are organized, the way the educational hierarchy operates, and the way political decision makers treat educators, results in a system that is more likely to retain the status quo.

Fullan, 1993, p. 3

However, when investment in reconceptualising professional learning for CLIL teachers at both pre- and in-service levels, promotes disruptive thinking and experiments what transformative plurilingual and pluricultural pedagogies might look like, then ‘society’s (and teaching’s) great untapped resources for radical and continuous improvement’ (Fullan, 1993, p.11) are brought into the frame. These spaces provide a platform for CLIL teachers to be supported in engaging in necessary adjustments to learning-design thinking and engaging in collaborative classroom research.

In a similar vein, Molla and Nolan (2020, p. 83) emphasise the need for professional learning spaces that value bottom-up thinking and encourage teachers to be agents of change:

Transformative professional learning experiences that support teacher agency capitalise on dialectical interactions of subjective conditions of teachers and objective contexts of teaching … Transformative professional learning is not a detached pedagogic event. It is situated within the context of practice.

This provocation calls for CLIL teachers to connect with other educators and researchers to build respectful, reciprocal, active learning spaces which position global challenges in the here-and-now and merge pedagogical uncertainties with classroom realities.

**Learning provocation 2: focusing on internationalisation in higher education revisited**

The second provocation turns attention to the role of plurilingual integrated learning in tertiary education. In so doing, it challenges the enactment of internationalisation and opens
up disruptive questions which until recently have remained invisible. As the neoliberal marketisation of higher education on a global scale has led to increasing international student populations, the quality of plurilingual learning experiences is brought into question. A recent OECD study conducted by van Damme and Zahner (2022) reports a paucity of students in higher education proficient in critical thinking with limited learning gains between the start and end of their studies. Addressing such issues, hinges on the concept of quality teaching in higher education. Yet, achieving equal status between teaching and research excellence in universities is embedded in what might be called epistemological deficiencies using metrics-driven frameworks. Promoting teaching excellence through appropriate high status professional learning is secondary to foregrounding research capacity and impact.

As more universities publish their EDI (equality, diversity, and inclusion) policies, they appear to neither address nor build on opportunities offered by a plurilingual and pluricultural paradigm in ways that open genuine dialogic activism with students and educators alike. Despite the increase in universities that offer courses in multiple languages to attract a wider range of students, the hegemony of English(es) in academia persists. Consequently, the learning potential of connecting students from different parts of the world through space- and place-based education is not being realised in terms of promoting interculturality, pedagogic futures-thinking and plurilingualism. Abrar-ul-Hassan (2021, p. 9) notes:

plurilingualism affords both a theoretical lens for language use and policy as well as a pedagogical approach to teaching practices. From this perspective, multiple linguistic resources in educational settings are viewed as a strength … [but] considerable work is needed to re-envision linguistic capital in the university through curricular innovations as well as pedagogical frameworks.

More recently, there has been increasing attention paid to unravelling what quality CLIL means in tertiary contexts (for example, Martínez Agudo, 2020; Rubio-Alcalá & Coyle, 2021). Volumes highlight complex linguistic and pedagogic issues associated with subject experts being faced with educating students whose first language is not the vehicular language or who themselves are required to teach through the medium of a language which is less familiar in terms of academic discourse. The focus on changing attitudes towards student learning that is fit-for-purpose alongside the digitisation of student experience, brings professional learning by educators increasingly under the microscope. Lam (2022, p. 51) reports on the urgent need to foster learning communities amongst university staff to create ‘abundant opportunities for open and professional dialogue which are precursors to continuous pedagogical experimentation and innovation’. Similarly, Middleton’s (2018) volume Reimagining Spaces for Learning in Higher Education confronts the hybridity of learning places and spaces. Mindful of how the Covid-19 pandemic brought about unprecedented rapid responses to the familiar, especially in educational settings, has opened up a Pandora’s box. Student experiences during the pandemic have unleashed debate critiquing teaching and learning practices and now focus on the potential of more holistic, technology-enabled, equitable interpretations of learning spaces. These cut across linguistic, cultural, physical, and accessible boundaries which lead the way to rethinking plurilingual and pluricultural learning spaces. Such changes signify not only sharing and using physical, social, digital, and virtual spaces more appropriately but more crucially rethinking what happens in them from more ecological and inclusive perspectives (i.e., as students and educators enter into genuine learning partnerships and EDI principles are brought into being and doing.)
So where lies CLIL in these debates? The second provocation notes that educators involved in plurilingual integrated learning in tertiary education are already familiar with the complexities, challenges and opportunities afforded by the internationalisation agenda particularly in terms of plurilingual, pluricultural learning spaces. However, the question remains as to how far this potential can be and is being realised. Where does student voice impact in terms of pluricultural learning expectations, plurilingual experiences, and life skills? How can educators as experts in their field faced with unprecedented plurilingual demands, make explicit the challenges faced and pedagogic realities shared? This provocation suggests an imperative in bringing together those voices, to join forces in making quality teaching and learning visible. The focus lies in those spaces where ethnicity and social justice interconnect with policies of equality, diversity, and inclusion; and where deeper understanding within and across subject disciplines develops critical thinking informed by plurilingual and pluricultural dialogue. Growing dynamic student–educator partnerships across higher education contexts offers CLIL communities a voice in unravelling pedagogic power dynamics and sharing unfathomable practices.

Final words

Both provocations are based on a vision underpinned by experimenting ways of legitimising ecological, shared learning spaces. Both provocations position CLIL students and teachers as change agents and designers of learning. Both provocations are based on the premise that exercising values-driven pedagogic power lies in genuine learner–teacher plurilingual and pluricultural ‘disruptive’ partnerships where students, educators, academics, and researchers work together. In working towards these educational goals, embracing uncertainty and diversity – anyone, anytime, anywhere – through actively building plurilingual, pluricultural learnscapes, CLIL communities will be participating in and actioning ‘the future-to-come and thus realizing it in the here and now. This is the process of inventing the future, rather than merely expecting or anticipating its “automatic arrival”’ (Stetsensko, 2019, p. 10).

References


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