Chapter 19
Performance-Based Assessment in CLIL: Competences at the Core of Learning

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ABSTRACT

Assessment is probably one of the most controversial aspects of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) mainly due to the balance between content and language, the role of language in the assessment process, and the lack of guidelines and appropriate assessment tools for the specific contexts. This chapter highlights performance-based assessment in CLIL as a powerful strategy to assess students’ knowledge effectively by means of measuring competences or skills. The chapter starts with an overview on the impact of assessment in education, and conditions for performance-based assessment. After analyzing the necessary competences to express content knowledge in CLIL subjects, attention will focus on the best assessment tools in line with formative assessment, and the need to scaffold tasks and exam questions.

INTRODUCTION: THE IMPACT OF ASSESSMENT IN EDUCATION

One of the biggest challenges of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) lies on assessment, in which teachers commonly deal with the balance between content and language issues, whether to assess the latter, and finding the most appropriate assessment tools (Raitbauer, Fürstenberg, Kletzenbauer, & Marko, 2018; Lo & Fung, 2018; Morton, 2018; Aiello, Di Martino, & Di Sabato, 2017; Llinares, Morton, & Whittaker, 2012; Massler, 2011; Kiely, 2009, 2011; Serragiotto, 2007). The present chapter sets out to validate performance-based assessment in CLIL to accommodate the duality between the content and the language, and assess students’ knowledge effectively by means of measuring competences or skills rather than traditional subject knowledge. Therefore, by placing competences at the core of the

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-2588-3.ch019
learning process, it can be ensured that students’ performance is not contingent upon the mastery of the foreign language which is the means of instruction. The main aim of this chapter is twofold. First, to provide a theoretical framework for the research, we will reflect on the impact that assessment can have on educational practice, and analyse performance-based assessment as part of innovative and formative assessment, and in relation with CLIL competences. Second, after having identified the necessary competences to express content knowledge in CLIL subjects, attention will be also drawn onto the best assessment tools and techniques, and the scaffolding of tasks and exam questions. It is hoped that the suggestions in this chapter are useful in bilingual education contexts so that assessment is conceived as embedded in instruction, part of effective learning, central to classroom practice, and focused on the way students learn and what they can do.

Assessment is never neutral, but it can affect and shape what and how students learn as well as it also has a direct impact on the curriculum (Gardner, Harlen, Hayward & Stobart, 2008, p. 13). This impact is known as washback or backwash effect (Hughes, 1989). According to Alderson & Wall (1993, p. 120-121) tests having important consequences usually influence teaching and learning regarding the following: What and how teachers teach, what and how students learn, the rate and sequence of teaching and learning, the degree and depth of teaching and learning, and attitudes referring to content, methodologies, etc. For example, traditional instruction focusing on content knowledge transmission and thus, undervaluing student interactions and promoting a testing culture which favours scores over feedback, is thought to have a negative impact on teaching and learning (Harlen, 2006, p. 67).

Conversely, assessment which does not have important consequences will have no washback at all. There is extensive research about the impact and effects of standardized testing on students’ outcomes and motivation among other factors (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Alderson & Wall, 1996; Cheng, 1997; Bailey, 1996; Chapelle & Douglas, 1993; Cheng, Watanabe & Curtis, 2004; Shohamy, 1993). However, more research is still needed, especially in CLIL, into the topic to ascertain the ways assessment issues in general, and not solely testing, might be influencing the teaching and learning process, and how to prevent the sometimes, inevitable process of narrowing, simplifying or adapting the curriculum or “teaching to the test” (Rea-Dickins, 2001).

Although in the assessment literature there has been a tradition to refer explicitly to the power or influence of tests on the teaching/learning process, a broader scope will be adopted here to refer to all types of assessment tools since in assessment washback, the participants, the process(es) and the product(s) are closely linked and relate to each other in a variety of ways (Hughes, 1993; Bailey, 1996). As pointed out by Hughes, the nature of assessment can affect the participants’ perception and attitudes towards their teaching and learning tasks. In turn, these perceptions and attitudes can also affect participants’ actions in the process of carrying out their work, which includes the practice of those items which are likely to be assessed, thus affecting their outcomes and the product of that work (Hughes, 1993, p. 2). In CLIL, for instance, measuring the language aspects from a discrete viewpoint is observed in some contexts, which forces students to focus on traditional grammatical aspects and vocabulary as separated from content aspects (Otto, 2018).

PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT

Attempts to change current assessment practice have become widespread in recent years. Studies and volumes such as the recent La Constante Macabre (2009) and the Diploma Disease (2007) criticizing the