Dear FACTors

I’m just back from the CLIL conference that took place in Prague on 15-16 November 2012. The conference was jointly organized by the Czech Ministry of Education, the Czech National Institute for Education, British Council and Goethe Institut. In two days over 100 participants from different European countries shared their experiencein the field of Content and Language Integrated Learning.

On the first day we saw the Czech educational authorities admitting that CLIL is already a pivoting tool in achieving the EU goal of multilingualism. Evidence was shown from several schools around the Czech Republic that implement CLIL in their teaching practice.

Tereza Smidova from the National Institute for Education showed the web based publication *Foreign Languages Across Curriculum* and methodology that were developed together with CLIL experts like Phil Ball and Keith Kelly, to support CLIL teachers around the country.

Nada Vojtkova from Masaryk university in Brno also contributed to the methodology discussion. Overall, to have a working integration between subject and language the methodology has to be supporting not only the development of the learners’ general language skills, but more important their cognitive academic language proficiency.

We were also told about the CLIL teacher competences and perspectives in the Czech Republic
by Gabriela Kleckova from the University of West Bohemia . Several examples of good CLIL practice from different parts of the country supported the impression that CLIL is gaining momentum and becomes more popular in the Czech society.

The crucial topic of assessment and testing was presented by FACT’s good friend Phil Ball, from
the Basque country, who reassured us that in CLIL the content and not the language has to be the focus of the assessment. To meet this aim the assessment tasks have to be designed very carefully so that the learners can clearly show their knowledge and skills without being hindered by the language.

In the afternoon five concurrent workshops took place, three in English, one in German and one in French. They showed how broad can be the implications of CLIL, namely team-teaching and CLIL in Music lesson; discussing China in German in Civics classes; scaffolding of History lesson in English; using film shots in teaching lower secondary Math in English. The good manners and etiquette within
cross-cultural subjects were delivered in French.

My overall impression from that day is that there’s a lot of research about CLIL in the academic
circles of the Czech universities and as the results from the pilot projects prove successful more and more schools and parent support the content and language integrated learning programmes.

On the second day, the conference participants were taken to a Prague school to observe CLIL in action. Two schools were visited – a state and a private one, both showing good implementation of the CLIL philosophy and practice. I observed a History lesson about the Great depression in 9 th grade delivered by Tomas Stehno in Angel school.

I wouldn’t want to be too critical, but my overall impression of the Czech practice is that CLIL teachers emphasize on the language, per se, a bit too much for my likes and thus waste precious time they could better spend on teaching or recycling the same vocabulary in context. Still, I believe the Czechs are on the right track and wish their CLIL programmes a blooming success.

Later we gathered together again in the Ministry of Education and the international participants, including myself, presented the CLIL practice and perspectives in their countries. We saw presentations from Germany , Bulgaria , Spain , Hungary ,Latvia , Portugal and France . We were pleased to hear about the Spanish success story and how Latvia is adding now more languages
to its CLIL programmes. France and Germany seems to have a lot in common as they recognize their bilingual diplomas for several decades. In Portugal CLIL is still little known, but hopefully the
officials will recognize it soon as useful tool in boosting education. The real disappointment came from Hungary where CLIL had become more and more popular and expertise among teachers and
trainers was achieved despite all difficulties in the post-communist era. All these efforts may now go in vain with the new political cabinet’s plan to impose on CLIL schools impossible to achieve criteria. What they want is 90% of school leavers to get excellent mark in the foreign language and almost
excellent mark in two other subjects taught in the foreign language, so that the school can continue its CLIL programme on the next year. We all agreed such high expectations are unrealistic and it seems only like an excuse to get rid of all bilingual schools. We wish the politicians reconsider because it will be shame on Hungary to make all the efforts made so far redundant.

In the afternoon we all joined in the round table, moderated by Zlatarski School friend Tim Chadwick, to discuss the future and plan for the incoming CLIL conference in 2013 that will take place in Rome. We hope politicians and decision makers from all over Europe will join us, researchers and practitioners, to decide on a common European plan for implementing CLIL.
There’s a lot to be discussed including assessment, criteria for teacher training and practice etc., but most of all we want them convinced that CLIL is the key factor in achieving European Union’s goal for learning new skills and continuous education as well as building united multilingual and multicultural Europe . Last, but not least I have to thank to the British Counsil for inviting me to this important European forum and all my colleagues in Bulgaria for all their support.

Lyubov Dombeva