

Trabajo de Fin de Máster

# **Democratic classroom and CLIL**

# Máster Universitario en Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos en Lenguas Extranjeras

Autora: Carolina Rial Salmoiraghi

 $\underline{alu0101265025@ull.edu.es}$ 

Tutor: Plácido Bazo Martínez

pbazom@ull.edu.es

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Abstract

This Master's final paper aims to reflect on the advantages of stimulating a democratic classroom

environment in order to enhance the students' motivation to participate in the tasks provided. After

having reviewed several literacies about the topic, it is essential to state the term "democracy" in an

educational sense. This term inevitably includes the understanding of participation and the students'

interactions as well as the role of the teacher as a mediator. Undoubtedly, the transversal concept of

the democratic classroom is communication.

As part of a CLIL project, this type of democratic environment also helps amplify communication in

a second language (L2). By participating democratically, students are motivated to use the L2 in a

more natural way. Besides, it reinforces the social ties and the sense of belonging to the group.

**Key words:** democratic classroom, participation, interaction, CLIL, communication.

Resumen:

Este trabajo final de máster pretende reflexionar acerca de las ventajas de estimular un ambiente de

clase democrática para incrementar la motivación de los alumnos y alumnas a participar en las tareas

ofrecidas. Tras haber revisado varias bibliografías sobre el tema, es esencial determinar el término

"democracia" en un sentido educativo. Este término indefectiblemente incluye qué se entiende por

participación y la interacción de los estudiantes, así como el rol del profesor como un mediador.

Indudablemente, el concepto transversal de una clase democrática es la comunicación.

Como parte de un proyecto AICLE, este tipo de ambiente democrático también ayuda a amplificar la

comunicación en el segundo idioma. A través de la participación democrática, los estudiantes son

motivados a usar el segundo idioma de una forma más natural. Además, refuerza los lazos sociales y

el sentido de pertenencia al grupo.

Palabras clave: clase democrática, participación, interacción, AICLE, comunicación.

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## 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Democracy and participation in the classroom

There is plenty of literacy about how to determine what "democracy" means. But most of them are related to politics issues rather than education. An example of this is the definition of the term in the Cambridge dictionary:

the belief in the freedom and equally between people, or a system of government based on this belief, in which power is either held by elected representatives or directly by the people themselves. (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d., third definition).

As talking about an "education system", it is clear that this definition is not accurate with the intentions of this work. We cannot talk about democracy (as a system of government) in a classroom whose pupils are to do the bidding of somebody they have never voted to be their teacher. If we strictly refer to the political dimension of the term "democracy", we might state that the classroom is a dictatorial regime rather than a democratic one (which most of times this meaning could not be so incorrect).

Therefore, the theory that best suits the core of this essay is the idea of "deliberative democracy" developed by Habermas, in which communication is the key to achieve democratic agreements as a result of deliberating ways of finding shared solutions (Turid Skarre Aasebo, 2017).

According to Susen (2018), "from a Habermasian point of view, every time we engage in the coexistential exercise of seeking mutual understanding (Verständigung), we anticipate that we are capable of reaching agreements (Einverständnisse)". In other terms, language, as an interaction tool, has the power to enrich the "discursively motivated practices" which inevitably lead to the construction of democracy. Furthermore,

democratic decision-making processes can never be based solely on the self-referential motivations of isolated individuals; rather, they are founded on the mutually dependent wills of interconnected actors. One of the main objectives of deliberative forms of democracy is to give a rationally grounded voice to members of a particular community, whose capacity to develop a sense of solidarity constitutes a precondition for guaranteeing the relative stability of symbolically mediated and relationally constructed realities. (Susen, 2018).

Additionally, such individual voices must lead, unfailingly, to a reciprocity relationship in which each person, as a member of a society, contributes to the welfare of the whole group in order to achieve the state of a democratic society.

The whole point of democracy is to do justice to the fact that human existence is a condition of discursive reciprocity: not only do we need to reciprocate each other's socially embedded actions, but we also need to reciprocate each other's linguistically articulated reflections, in order to provide society with the solidity of a collectively sustained, communicatively structured and rationally justified background of normativity for the daily construction of reality. (Susen, 2018).

From the perspective of the Habermas' term of democracy as a construction of individuals who communicate reciprocally, we can move to a definition of democracy in the classroom as a methodology to motivate and enhance communication between students in collective deliberation in order to achieve agreements based on reciprocity.

It becomes implicit the need to talk about participation, the role of the teacher and the different ways of interaction between the students hereinafter.

#### 1.2 Participation

If democracy necessarily needs their citizens to be involved, it means that children must be given opportunities to develop the competence of being participative in order to gradually improve their skills to be involved in the community in which they live in. "An understanding of democratic participation and the confidence and competence to participate can only be acquired gradually through practice; it cannot be taught as an abstraction." (Hart, 1992, p.5).

According to Hart, children do not have the abilities to make decisions in the way adults do, although it does not mean that they cannot be involved in the process of reaching those decisions. Furthermore, it is not intended to compare a child's decision-making with an adult one, but to involve children into meaningful projects or situations in which adults also play an important role to empower the kids' democratic participation. (Hart, 1992, p.5-6).

So, the projects which require children's participation are mainly designed, organized and run by adults. Those projects also have the intention to state up to what extent children's participation is involved in them. Hart (1992) has designed "The ladder of participation diagram" in order to establish how involved children are in projects which call for their participation.

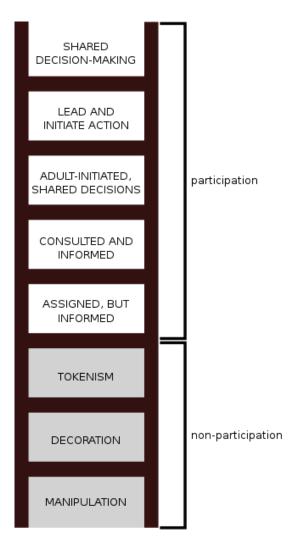


Image 1: Hart's ladder of participation

As can be seen in picture 1, Hart describes the first three steps as "non-participation". Many times, we see children, usually from kindergarten, carrying slogans about a school project such as "deforestation" but they have not even learned about it in the class, although they still have to participate in the school activity by making drawings (manipulation). Imagine that in that school demonstration, another class is singing a song about how we can save the trees. It can be thought that they are participating by doing it, although they have no role but singing (decoration). Now, suppose that two kids from an upper class are talking about what they think about the ways of recycling paper. It is something they have worked with their teacher and it looks like participation is arising. However, they only repeat what is written in their books and some kind of desirable opinion such as "please, recycle paper" (tokenism).

These three examples of involving children in the activities show that it does not mean that participation is guaranteed. Instead, the upper levels of Hart's ladder of participation, it is necessary to meet some requirements:

- 1. The children understand the intentions of the project;
- 2. They know who made the decisions concerning their involvement and why;
- 3. They have a meaningful (rather than 'decorative') role;
- 4. They volunteer for the project after the project was made clear to them. (Hart, 1992, p.11)

The aim of this work does not intend to categorize the activities into one of Hart's ladder steps, but to think about participation in terms of involving children into the real process of the project. Therefore, each step will depend on the project itself and the children's development or capacity to participate.

#### 1.3 The role of the teacher

To talk about the role of a teacher, we must think in terms of a democratic classroom leadership style. And the basis of this style has entirely to do with a student-centred method. According to Pejić and Čepić (2021), the role of a teacher who develops a democratic style refers to:

"how to achieve successful interaction, what forms and methods of work to apply in the teaching process, to harmonize them with curriculum outcomes and pupil needs, how to create a positive atmosphere but not neglect the establishment of discipline for harmonious work, respect the individuality of pupils and their different abilities, etc." (Pejić and Čepić, 2021, p. 7203).

So, the aim of a democratic method, according to these authors, has to do with the following four areas of leadership:

- Interactional relationship in the teaching process: the interactional communication prevails between pupils and the teacher according to the established rules. Students have an active role in which their voices are heard and respected. The teacher's speech is warm and smooth, showing accessibility rather than dictatory.
- Forms and methods aimed at pupils: being democratic does not mean that the kids have to be talking all the time. The teacher has to mix the different methods according to the moment and the aim of the activities, which involves frontal, individual and group learning. But the most important is to state clearly the goal of the task from the very beginning and make clear and approachable instructions so that the students succeed in making them.
- Activities of teaching individualization: Structuring different types of tasks according to complexity depending on students' abilities and pace is one of the aims of a democratic

- method. It is also important to give feedback to the students in order to make them aware of their effort as well as praising their work.
- Classroom atmosphere contributing to teaching effectiveness: collaborative learning is the most accurate method of the teaching process. Students are invited "invited to express opinions, make suggestions, present ideas, retell experiences, express feelings in the classroom. (...) Teachers are sensitive to pupils' demands, they are empathetic, enthusiastic in their work, have a pleasant interaction, and approach pupils with joy and gladness, smiling faces" (Pejić and Čepić, 2021, p. 7203-7206).

It means that the role of the teacher in a democratic classroom is related to encouraging students to be active in their learning process by creating an atmosphere in which they feel confident to express their ideas and feelings, work collaboratively and respect the established rules for the good of the classroom environment.

#### 1.4 Students' interaction

According to social constructivism, students construct their own learning process in collaboration with the others by associating their interests and previous knowledge with the information to learn. It means that every student is an individual with their own network of knowledge form which they contribute to that collaborative construction of the new information to study. (Jacobs, 2015)

Teachers can facilitate this construction work, but the key is what happens in each individual's mind, which, in turn, is affected by what other people (peers and teachers) are thinking, doing, and saying. (...) From this perspective, group activities provide a venue for peer interaction, which in turn provides opportunities for students to build and try out their developing knowledge. (Jacobs, 2015, p.37)

We cannot talk about group interaction without mentioning the difference between collaborative and cooperative work. There's plenty of literacy about this topic available, and the aim of this work is not making a distinction, but stating the basis of a democratic classroom. To do that, the definition that best suits our purpose is related to what McCafferty et all (2005) describes as cooperative learning, which has to do with "how to maximize the benefits of student-student interaction" (p. 4).

As specified by McCafferty et all (2005), when talking about cooperative groups, there is the need to mention two main concepts:

- *Positive interdependence*: it is the idea that what happens to one member affects the other, no matter if it is good or bad. "It encourages cooperation and a feeling of support." (McCafferty et all, 2005, p.4-5)
- *Individual accountability*: "groups encourage their members to participate and to meaningfully demonstrate their knowledge and skills." (McCafferty et all, 2005, p.5) It means that every member contributes to the group goals and through feedback and collaboration, the group can overall their weak skills.

## Davidson (2014) explains:

The main idea in all the cooperative learning approaches is that students work and learn together actively in small groups to accomplish a common goal in a mutually helpful manner. Cooperative learning combines active learning and social learning via peer interaction in small groups on academic tasks. We argue that this also holds true for collaborative learning and problem-based learning. (Davidson, 2014, p. 14-15)

On the other hand, in a collaborative approach, the main focus is on working together which not necessarily involves working on the same task. For example, the members of the group can divide the whole task into small ones and work independently, but always caring about the final goal.

Unlike in cooperative learning, where the focus is on working together, or interdependence, in collaborative learning, the focus is on working with each other (but not necessarily interdependently) toward the same goal, as the root word suggests—in this case toward the discovering, understanding, or production of knowledge. (Davidson, 2014, p.21)

Having stated both approaches, it does not mean that we have to choose one over the other. They both have their advantages and drawbacks and they have been widely studied. It is not the intention of this work to determine which is better to carry out in a democratic classroom. Instead, McCafferty et all (2005) explain that working with cooperative groups also means that they have to be, somehow, collaborative. In other words, working in a cooperative way involves working interdependently (positive interdependence) to reach a common goal and, once they have agreed about how to achieve it, they can go on working collaboratively, but still thinking about the common goal (individual accountability).

#### 1.5 Democratic classroom and CLII

One of the most disclosed definitions of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) comes from Marsh (2002), although, through experience, it cannot be said that CLIL has not been being practiced long time ago. According to this author:

CLIL (...) refers to any dual-focussed educational context in which an additional language, thus not usually the first language of learners involved, is used as a medium in the teaching and learning of non-language content. (Marsh, 2002, p. 15)

Having widely investigated about the CLIL practice, Costa and D'Angelo (2011) state several hints to bear in mind when talking about CLIL:

- the need for strong competence by the teacher in both language and content;
- the difference between the use of content to learn an additional language and the true integration between the two disciplinary fields, achieved impart through the support and collaboration of the L2 teacher;
- a minimum percentage of foreign language use; a minimum length in order to make a CLIL course effective; the strongly democratic nature of CLIL (open to all);
- and, finally, the need for an assessment that takes both factors (language and content) into account. (Costa and D'Angelo, 2011, p.11)

CLIL's definition would be incomplete if the four Cs are not mentioned: Cognition, Content, Culture and Communication. For the purpose of this paper, it will be focussed on Communication in terms of the democratic interaction and the advantages of the CLIL approach.

As stated before, participation is the key of a democratic classroom, which implies the students talking among each other and with the teacher. It also implies using the L2 to communicate as far as possible. But it also represents an opportunity for the CLIL teacher to introduce, widen or beef up the structures the students need in order to achieve an effective communication.

Meyer describes Coyle's Communication concept in the CLIL theory as:

Language needs to be learned which is related to the learning context, learning through that language, reconstructing the content and its related cognitive processes. This language needs to be transparent and accessible; interaction in the learning context is fundamental to learning. This has implications when the learning context operates through the medium of a foreign language. (Meyer, 2010, p. 296)

Urmeneta and Evnitskaya (2013) resume the CIC (Classroom Interactional Competence) in a CLIL class by categorizing some teaching strategies:

- The use of **learner-convergent language**, which is both appropriate to teaching goals and adjusted in relation to the co-construction of meaning and the unfolding agenda of a lesson.
- The **facilitation of interactional space** so that learners are given the opportunity to contribute to the class conversation and to receive feedback on their contributions. (...)
- The 'shaping' of learner contributions by seeking clarification, modelling, paraphrasing, reiterating or repairing the learners' productions. Through shaping the discourse, the teacher helps learners to say what they mean by using the most appropriate language to do so. (Urmeneta and Evnitskaya, 2013, p. 115)

It does not mean that we are not going to take the other Cs into account when programming CLIL, but the aim of this paper is to focus on how important a democratic classroom could be for reinforcing the CLIL environment and boost the communication in L2.

## 2. CLIL didactic proposal

This didactic proposal will be led at Rodriguez Alberto School, a private school in the outskirts of Santa Cruz de Tenerife. Specifically, in arts of the first year of primary school.

The content will be about the use of colours:

- The recognition of primary colours and the creation of secondary ones
- The expressive use of colours according to the feelings and the seasons of the year
- The use of different materials to create artworks

#### 2.1 Contextualization

Rodriguez Alberto is a small private school in the neighbourhood of La Salud, in Santa Cruz de Tenerife. The average students per class is around eleven. Students attend English classes since kindergarten, with extra "speaking" classes and CLIL classes in arts. Besides, the school prepares candidates for Cambridge English Qualifications.

First year of primary school is composed by a group of ten children: five girls and five boys. All of them have already acquired literacy although there is one girl who comes from Russia and needs more attention, but her progress is adequate.

In reference to the group interaction, they are not used to working in groups and they are still struggling with frustration with their classmates' behaviours and the classroom rules. But in general, they are willing to work alongside and they show interest in being part of interactive situations.

The topic chosen is about the art expression through the use of colours. The common thread is the relationship between colour, feelings and the weather seasons. The final task will be a mural about the coming of Spring in which colour will be protagonist of the mural along with the use of recycled materials.

## 2.2 Objectives

The main objective is to prove how a democratic classroom can improve the students' communicative skills in L2 and how it can affect their motivation in participating in spoken interaction situations.

## Didactic objectives:

- To interiorize the importance of the colour in its expressive dimension
- To create secondary colours from the primary ones
- To create a mural using recycled materials

#### 2.3 The four Cs

### **Content:**

- Primary and secondary colours
- The weather seasons
- Feelings through colours

## **Cognition:**

- To analyse the use of colours to express different feelings and emotions
- To use the colours as a means of expression
- To create out of some recycled materials
- To be aware of the others' feelings when interpreting an artwork

#### **Culture:**

- The use of colour in arts

- The importance of seasons in The Canary Islands (the eternal Spring)

#### **Communication:**

Communicative function: To describe artworks

Vocabulary and structures:

Recycled	New
Vocabulary:	Vocabulary:
Colours: red, blue, pink, yellow, etc.	Seasons: Spring, Autumn, Winter, Sumer
Feelings: happy, sad, angry, surprised, scared,	Weather: windy, sunny, cloudy, stormy, rainy.
wonderful, etc.	
Exponents:	Exponents:
What colour is it?	What's the weather like? What's the weather like in
It's red.	Summer?
Is it red? Yes/no	It's rainy.
	How do you feel with the painting (artwork)?

## 2.4 Methodology

Through the different sessions, the importance of methodology is directed towards the building of a democratic environment in which students are expected to increase their participation in decision making and to reinforce the idea of respecting the others' interventions.

So, every session starts with a dynamic by following the instructions of the song "follow me" (<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hW2DDGX7Tcc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hW2DDGX7Tcc</a>). Then, each session goes on with the review of the previous lesson and a part of the time is dedicated to a game or a song. Games are introduced in order to enhance the students' social ties and the sense of belonging to the group rather than a resource of competition.

As there are ten students, all the activities are led in whole group at the beginning of the sessions. Then, they are asked to do some activity individually or in pairs. At the end there is a time in whole group to reflect on what they have learnt. During the final task the dynamic changes. There is a time to discuss and decide what to do and then the whole class is divided in different working groups that are decided at the same day, with no more intention than organizing the work to do.

During the first session there is a diagnostic assessment to find out about their previous knowledge. It is done orally and the aim is to analyse which aspects to work for the success of the project. The whole learning situation is assessed by formative assessment which includes observation and spontaneous questions in order to get more information for the learning process evaluation.

The products to evaluate are the individual artworks made through the project and the final task made in whole group. They are also the instruments of the assessment which includes systematic observation technique by using a rubric as a tool.

#### 2.5 Final task

The final task is the making of a mural which is displayed on one of the classroom walls. We started with a  $1,5m \times 1,5m$  white paper. The idea is to represent the coming of Spring time. To do that, the students have the freedom to propose how they want to make it.

During the first session, we made a brainstorming dynamic about what we would draw and how. So, we started making the sketch and we decided which materials to use to colour the mural. Once we have agreed on the main drawing, the following four sessions would have the same structure:

- Starting with the "follow me" song
- Providing recycled materials
- Brainstorming about how to use the recycled materials
- Deciding which proposals to make
- Dividing the class in different working sectors
- Making working groups
- Rotating the working groups through the different working sectors every ten minutes
- Making a whole group reflection on how the mural is turning out and what can be improved during the following sessions

Once the mural was finished, the students invited the rest of the classes to show them what they have done and explain how and why they have decided to make it.

# 3. Data analysis and discussion

The aim of this paper is to analyse how a democratic environment can influence the students' motivation when learning a CLIL project. To do that, they were asked to answer to an anonymous

satisfaction questionnaire. As the students are around six years old, the questions are in their mother tongue (Spanish) and most of them are yes/no answers.

The general idea is to find out about how they felt when participating and taking decisions. So, each question's intention is to show their emotions when working rather what they have learnt.

#### Question 1:

¿Te ha gustado trabajar en el proyecto del mural?

SI	NO
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Ten out of ten students have answer to this question with a YES answer. Its aim was to have a general idea of their acceptance of the project.

## Question 2:

Marca la actividad que más te ha gustado:

Decidir qué hacer con los materiales reciclados	
Mezclar colores y pintar con témperas en el mural	
Recortar y pegar papeles para hacer las abejas, flores y gusanos	
Mezclar colores y pintar con temperas las manzanas y las abejas	
Armar el mural	

In this question they had to mark only one box. While they were doing it, most of them showed some reticence because they wanted to mark more than one option. At last, eight out of ten students marked the second box "to mix colours and paint with temperas on the mural". One student marked the box "to mix colours and paint the apples and bees with temperas" and another student marked the box "to make the mural". In general, these answers show that the students prefer the hands-on activities, especially the ones referred to painting. Nine out of ten marked an option which included the mural on the description.

## Question 3:

¿Te ha gustado trabajar en pequeños grupos?

SI	NO

This question had to be explained a bit more because they did not feel that they were working in small groups when they were making the mural. Finally, ten out of ten marked the YES box. Although it can be thought that the question would not be useful because the students had not understood the idea at first, my personal opinion is that they were working so centred on the product in a whole group dynamic, that they did not take into account that sometimes they were doing things in small groups.

#### Question 4:

¿Crees que has colaborado en todas las tareas para elaborar el mural?

SI	NO
1	

Ten out of ten marked the Yes box. It shows that all of the students feel that they contributed actively in the making of the mural. It also enhances their sense of belonging to the class.

## Question 5:

¿Qué cambiarías o mejorarías?

As it is an open question, ten different answers were obtained:

- "I did not paint the sun"
- "I wish the mural were bigger"
- "nothing"
- "I did not like cutting flowers"
- "To make another mural"
- "To make some butterflies"
- "I don't know"
- "To make the summer"
- "A bigger mural"

#### - "I don't know"

In general, we can see that they did not complain about the task. Instead, they wanted to keep on working on it and try to improve it. Although the answers are quite different, there are two of them that wish the mural were bigger and another answer showing interest in making another mural.

#### Question 6:

The idea of this question is to make a connection with the content of the subject and English, as it is a CLIL project. So, the students were asked to reflect on what they have learned. Seven out of ten marked the YES box, while the other three marked the YES, BUT NOT ALL OF THEM box.

## 4. Conclusion

The objective of this paper is to analyse how a democratic classroom can improve the motivation to learn and enhance the social ties of a class.

By making a mural in a democratic way in which all of the students participated proposing and making decisions, a democratic environment was created. That environment was shown in the answers to the questionnaire in which the general idea was of motivation and the perception of a whole group effort rather than individual or group work.

Besides, it contributed to the sense of belonging to the class group. Once they had finished the mural, they asked if they could keep it on the wall because they did not want to remove it. And they did not recognise who made what because all of them were implied in every aspect of the mural. Furthermore, when they were introduced the new topic to come, they assumed that they were going to make another mural and they started suggesting ideas of what to do and where to display it because there was no way they could think about removing the Spring mural to make another one.

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