Teaching a foreign language in a foreign country:
The multidimensional class

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Abstract

Learning a language in a foreign country is not as easy as it is supposed to be. For most teachers and learners speaking is the main issue. There are arguable factors for not speaking such as age, cultural background, lack of language immersion, etc. Although children seem to learn at a different pace, the issue is the same for adults, young adults and children: fear of speaking.

All language learners face the same problems: they are unfamiliar not only with the words (expressions or grammar) but also with the sounds (phonology and phonetics) of the language.

The multidimensional class has integrated these elements into native and foreign language alike, as well as motor skills, brain gym and other elements. We developed this eclectic program for CEO's and firm executives to improve their verbal negotiating skills with excellent results. This program has been applied for over 10 years now at executive and business programs, and it has been integrated into adult education throughout college, improving language learning programs in Mexico and US since 2010.

This paper illustrates the progress achieved during application of the projects in a ten year lapse by EuroCsys. The project includes language learning-teaching processes as well as applied strategies based on cognitive processes, application of neuroscience to education, and principles of phonetics and phonology in learning by competencies.

Introduction

EuroCsys is a NPO that researches, innovates, adapts, and improves educational programs based on key competences. A central purpose of this international network is to guide institutions to develop different perspectives and value the diversity by offering cultural and intellectual experiences in a broad range of academic courses according to the European framework level of excellence within the local setting of sites around the world.

The Mission is to facilitate the acquisition of skills, competences, and abilities for communication, for creative and critical analysis, for independent thinking, and for team work in multicultural contexts in collaboration with the Digital Divide Initiative supported by New Technologies for Education.

EuroCsys supports educational development projects through new Technologies for Education, in order to promote quality in the teaching-learning process and accessibility, using strategies and alternatives to make education available and permanent for everyone.

This enhances the cognitive system in order to develop the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning.

EuroCsys, as member of the International Language Network works and researches along with other European institutions to improve the quality of language teaching and learning. This scheme is based on the European framework in language teaching to adults.

A key element in the delivery of quality language teaching is the qualification of teachers. EuroCsys recognizes that many teachers of languages engaged in the field of adult education look for opportunities to advance in their profession. They often do not have the possibility to gain certification for the tasks they are fulfilling. EuroCsys maintains a competence-based framework for language teaching, which allows teachers to plan and track their professional development in an international context. The framework also enables participating institutions to qualify and certify their teachers' proficiency using a common frame of reference, which cuts across educational sectors and national boundaries.

Training for language professors and instructors was carried out at universities and companies to implement the methodology and gather results to improve foreign language teachers in environments where their mother is not available. The methodology was adjusted according to international communicative requirements. The changes aided professors who also teach digital natives and immigrants by implementing elements to the original methodology that emphasise phonetics and phonology as well as educational neuroscience tools.

Objective

The commission for the educative European reform IP/12/1233 implemented the strategy of the new "**Rethinking Education"** under the following basis:

- Focus on developing transversal skills and basic skills at all levels. This applies especially to entrepreneurial and IT skills.
- A new benchmark on foreign language learning.
- World-class vocational education and training systems and increase levels of work-based learning.
- Technology, in particular, access to education via open educational resources.
- Reforms must be supported by well-trained, motivated and entrepreneurial teachers. e

Several projects around the world support this new strategy based on the "**eight key competences"**, in order to ensure education and training systems deliver the skills required in the modern workplace.

In the area of language teaching, the followed methodology of **"Integrated Learning"** for the projects is part of a larger policy initiative contributing to support the

Commission Communication on "Re-thinking Education". Each body (Members of the Advisory Board) adapts the methodology according to context needs.

The integrated learning policy aims to raise the language competences, to foster the mobility of workers and students, and to improve the employability of the worldwide workforce. The methodology must develop the following areas:

- Plurilingualism, pluriculturalism, and education for democratic citizenship
- Six content areas
- Individual and group reflection
- Action plans
- Self-assessment
- Autonomy and learning to learn
- Intercultural dimension
- Digital inclusion

The overall aim of a training program is to help teachers to become aware of the issues and processes involved in learning a foreign language in an adult education context and to gain confidence in their ability to contribute positively to these processes.

Methodology

The multidimensional class approach adopted in the training included:

- Learning by doing: Reflecting and sharing ideas.
- A cooperative learning style, involving trainees wherever possible in the planning and shaping of the program.
- Opportunities to extend theoretical knowledge of language, learning, and teaching as well as to evaluate and improve practical skills.
- Practical exercises and observation of teaching/learning (themselves, their own classes, others, other classes, video sequences) with subsequent analysis.
- Opportunities for self-evaluation, assessment by peers as well as offering opportunities for trainees to evaluate the training program.

Through awareness-raising tasks, experimentation, reflection, adaptation, and transfer of training contents to their teaching situations, the trainees developed their teaching competence as well as appropriate strategies to continue their development after the training period was over.

The framework included all the aspects considered essential within the European standards for the development of teaching competence, recognizing that language education takes place in a variety of contexts. The framework focuses on the knowledge and skills necessary to plan, to teach, and to evaluate their language classes within their institutional context.

After completion of the basic teacher training programs trainees should have developed competencies in the following content areas:

1. Language awareness
Trainees have a well-grounded understanding of language; in particular, the behavioral model for defining communicative and linguistic competence as described in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Teaching, Learning, and Assessment (CEFR). They are able to draw general comparisons between language systems and to apply this knowledge in their teaching, in particular in the planning of lessons and in formulating language explanations for their learners. They are able to make use of reference materials to develop their own meta-linguistic competences and are aware of the phonetics as a basis of language usage.

2. Language and culture
Trainees have an understanding of how language and culture relate. They are aware of the socio-cultural and intercultural issues involved in language use and language learning. They can develop the learners' sensitivity towards cultural differences. They can foster communications strategies in intercultural interactions. A humanistic approach is used. This means that the trainees get in touch with the here and now, his or her subjective experiences and feelings, continually growing and changing.

3. Language learning processes
Trainees are aware of the motivations and needs of adult learners, and they use neuroscience for education tools in their teaching. They are familiar with the basic ideas in current theories of language learning and acquisition and with the phonetics principle. They can also recognize the learners' level of language competence and are able to structure and support the learning process accordingly.

4. Language teaching
Trainees are familiar with a minimum repertoire of teaching strategies and techniques and are able to make judgments as to when and how to use them. They are able to make judicious choices with regard to teaching/learning materials and to adapt or supplement them to cater for the specific needs of groups and individual adult learners. They are confident in their role as teachers, and they are able to create a stimulating learning atmosphere and to introduce and monitor a variety of learning tasks based on neuroscience activities.

5. Planning and evaluation
Teachers understand the institutional context of their teaching and have a clear view of what their responsibilities to the learners are. They are informed about the institution's offer of language courses and can place their activity within this context. They are familiar with the levels of competence defined by the Common European Framework of Reference and can place their courses within this framework. They are familiar with the European Language Portfolio. They are informed about the main examinations offered in the language(s) they teach and can situate them in the European Framework level system.

6. Self-assessment

Trainees are able to reflect on and evaluate their own performance in the classroom, to make use of feedback, and to draw conclusions for their teaching. They are able to identify resources to support them in their further professional development.

In summary, the trainees experienced the following benefits during their training process:

- Practical and flexible training related to the trainee´s own teaching context
- Portfolio-based assessment.
- Programs that are based on the principles of the Common European Framework of reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2014).
- A learner-centered methodology based on reflection on one´s own practice.
- An internationally recognized and monitored qualification.
- Training and a qualification for teachers of languages without any other locally available scheme.
- Internationally validated quality assurance with regard to teacher qualification.

Results

A diagnosis was applied to 430 university teachers and 255 language instructors for companies. These trainees teach English, French, and Spanish. The methodology applies to any language taught.

Chart 1 shows teachers' general results concerning their empirical practice in the six content areas before the training of the methodology. On average, teachers were implementing the content areas only at a level of 4.9.
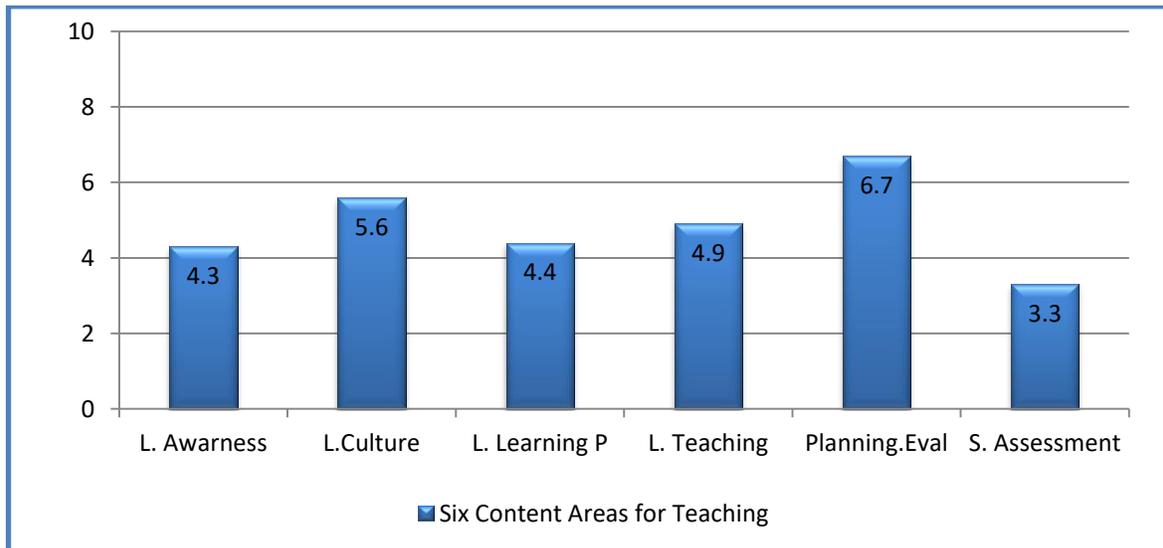

Chart 1: Use of content areas before the training.

Chart 2 shows students' competencies according to the CEFR before the introduction of the multidimensional class methodology into their curriculum. (Six content areas

methodology). The diagnostic results reveal that the students did not meet the average of 8.5 required by the schools.
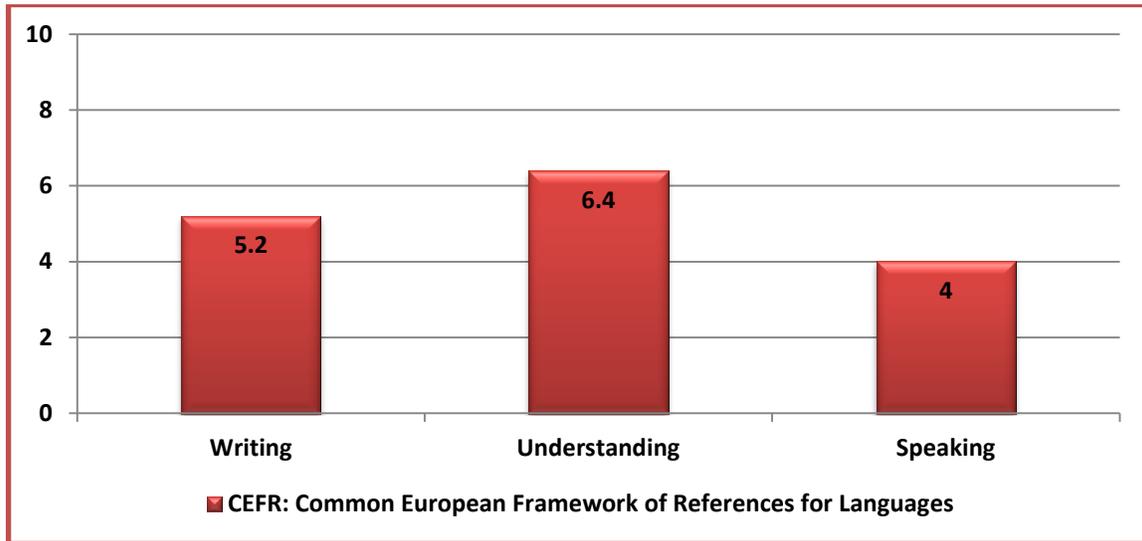

Chart 2: Students' competencies before the introduction of the multidimensional class methodology.

Chart 3 represents the differences in teachers' teaching practice before the training and one year after the training, i.e. after implementing the methodology of the six content areas of the multidimensional class methodology into their curriculum. The results reflect the improvements made by the teachers in respect to the incorporation of the new methodology in all content areas within a year. They now reach an average level of 8.5 on the scale.
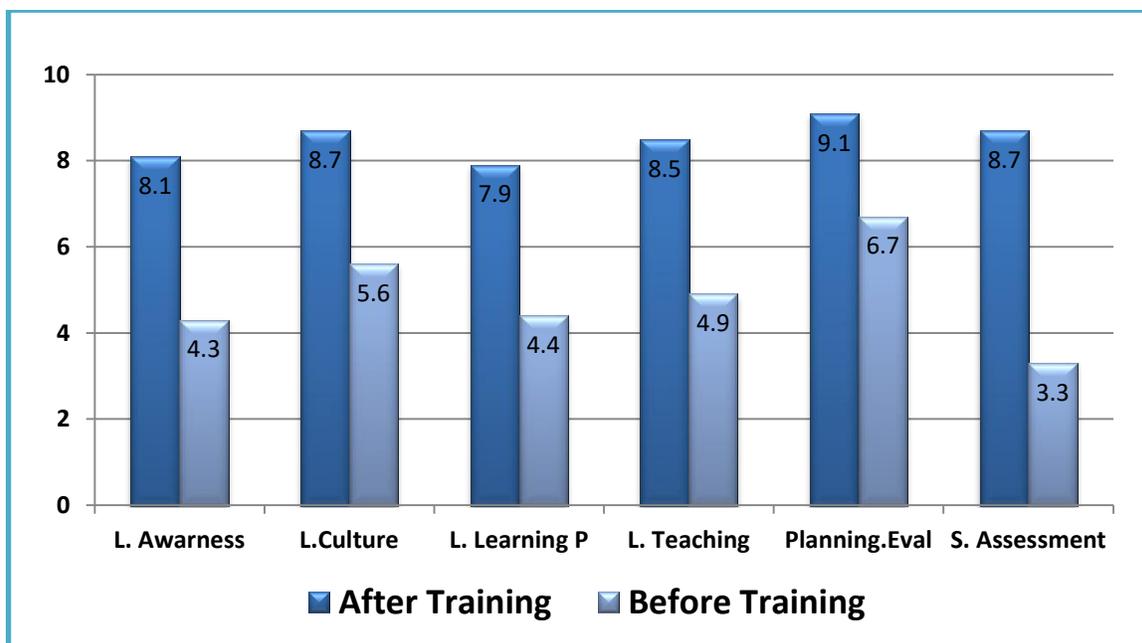
Chart 3: Comparative results for implementation of content area before and one year after training
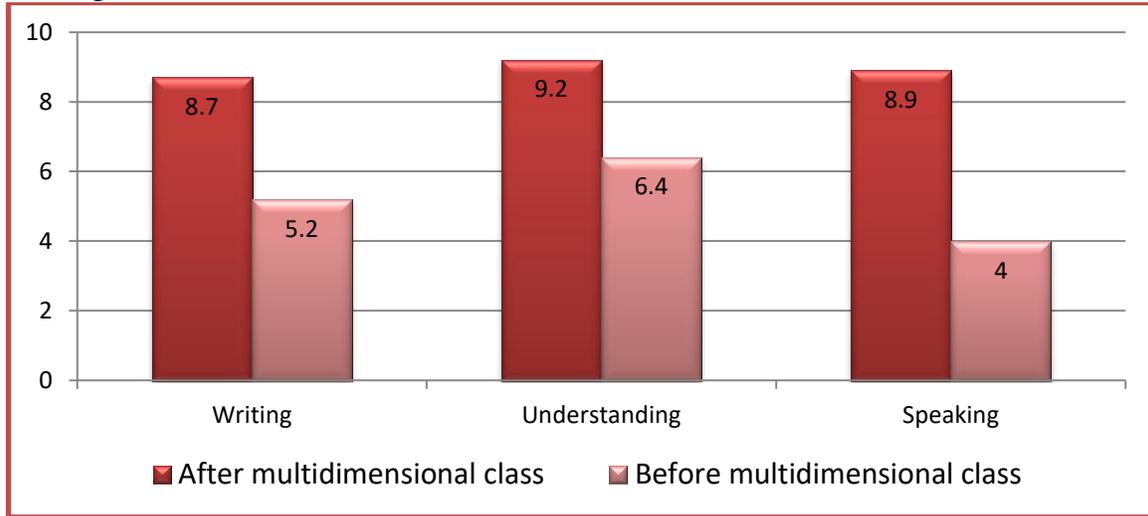

Chart 4: Comparative results for students' competencies before and one year after introduction of the multidimensional class methodology.

The results of students' competencies after the introduction of the multidimensional class methodology (Chart 4) also reflect the improvements made by the students on the CEFR one year after the incorporation of the new methodology of multidimensional class into the curriculum. They now meet the requirements of their respective schools in all areas of competency, i.e. writing, comprehension, and speaking.

In the following the most relevant comments and observations from the teacher trainers are given:

- There was a general motivation among teachers who have heard about this methodology.
- Teachers generally thought they knew more about the six content areas.
- Teachers seldom take part in continuing education trainings that last more than a week.
- Only very few teachers knew how to handle neuroscience activities and work with them.
- The CEF is not known as generally assumed by the teachers.
- Apart from the existence of the 3 levels of competencies for learners, the teachers did not know a lot about methodology in content areas.
- Many teachers were not able to work with the 3 levels of competencies, because they were not able to assess their own course or their course participants.
- The concept of self-assessment is difficult to handle.

- We have found that it is difficult for teachers to accept the implications of learners' autonomy, which is essential when working with certain parts of the ELP (European Language Portfolio).
- We have found that many teachers know little about how to implement different learning strategies in their own course work in order to accommodate their course participants accordingly.

Recommendations

After a year of training and the application of the methodology, the academy gave the following recommendations:

- Teachers need to know in very practical terms what they can do to implement the multidimensional class methodology in their course work.
- They need to get guidance in when and how they can do it. "Practical exercises" means that the teachers develop something or get something in hand that they can use in their courses more or less right away.
- That means that all your "sessions" – apart from an introduction – have to be structured in such a way that they can stand alone or can be used in any combination.
- That will allow for using your newly developed training also by others after the end of the project and in different settings with different specifications (e.g. target group, time available, ELP available, etc.).
- It is recommended to create a data bank with exercises based on neuroeducation to improve students' cognitive process.
- Teachers (Trainees) should collaborate as an academy and revise the material developed during training and update this material.

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