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A narrative account of a teacher community

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This narrative account draws on dialogic approaches to education to critically reflect on teachers' expressed pedagogic thinking in community. The context for the study is a teacher community in Central Finland comprising teachers from pre-primary to upper secondary contexts. The shared interest of the community is in the foreign-language mediation of education. The data were collected over a period of one and a half years and primarily consisted of teacher-produced notes from community sessions. These data were thematically analysed using a theory-driven approach. The key findings underline the value of pedagogic relationships between teacher-colleagues to support enriched critical understanding of pedagogy. This research suggests the importance of mutual pedagogic relationships to support teacher development.

Keywords: narrative account; teacher development; dialogic theory; thematic analysis; pedagogic relationship between teachers

Introduction

This narrative account is based on a teacher community in Central Finland. The community comprises teachers from each level of pre-tertiary education and their shared interest is in the foreign language (FL) mediation of education. The 'story' of the community is presented here as a narrative to avoid the objectification of the participants (Bakhtin 1993). The teacher-colleagues involved in this research were – and continue to be – welcome, voluntary participants in the community. No compensation in the form of extra pay or study credits is offered. Indeed, the community would not exist without willing teacher participation, and willing was the only selection criteria for the teacher participants. A narrative approach has been adopted to retain the different voices of the participants and the developing voice of the community. It is also hoped that a narrative account evokes the nature of the community (Heikkinen, Huttunen, and Syrjälä 2007) and that the teacher-participants recognise themselves in the text. Nevertheless, it was through the writing up of this narrative that the theorisation of the teacher community took place (van Manen 1991).

The shared interest of the community is in FL-mediated education. This approach was introduced in Finland in the early 1990s, and is known as CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning. CLIL is a dual-focused approach that involves the teaching of a school subject, whether history, art or science, through an FL. The aim of this approach is to enrich FL learning without

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having to increase the number of hours exclusively assigned to FL in the school timetable. There has been interest in CLIL at a European level (EU 2005; Eurydice 2006) and at grassroots level (Nikula 2010, 105). In Finland as elsewhere, however, little support from the educational leadership since the mid-1990s has resulted in a gap between teacher efforts and the potential for coordinated growth (Lehti, Järvinen, and Suomela-Salmi 2006). The teacher community presented in this article is one attempt to bridge this gap.

Introducing the teacher community

The four community partners have worked with CLIL for a number of years and one partner recently celebrated 20 years of CLIL in their particular school. Two other partners have offered CLIL for just over 10 years and the fourth partner began offering FL courses in 2009. Despite this long history, however, until three years ago there was little collaboration between the teachers within individual schools and even less collaboration between the schools. A chance encounter between the research-author and two local teachers at a CLIL conference¹ prompted the idea that perhaps some form of coordinated activity could be developed. The two teachers expressed dismay at the discontinuity between the lower and upper comprehensive schools, and the teachers feared that their hard work in the lower comprehensive school was wasted. As the upper comprehensive school and the upper secondary school in the locality were familiar to the research-author through staff development courses, the idea of coordinating an initial meeting seemed reasonable. Immediately after the conference, the author sought permission from the head teachers, the head of the local authority and support from two locally based CLIL experts. The first meeting was called in March 2009.

Teacher community partners

The community partners include: a kindergarten/preschool (4–6 early education teachers, children ages 3–6), a lower comprehensive school (8–12 class teachers, pupils ages 7–13), an upper comprehensive school (3–6 subject teachers, pupils ages 13–16), an upper secondary school (1–4 subject teachers, pupils ages 16–19) and a university-based educational researcher. The number of participants per session varies between 14 and 30, but each partner was represented in each community meeting between March 2009 and October 2010. The data collection section below provides a more detailed overview of the community sessions.

It is interesting that within local educational contexts, although pupils commonly complete their education by progressively moving through the local schools, local teachers from different educational stages rarely meet. It is perhaps assumed that national curricula augment the different stages of pre-tertiary education together or that the range of difference between teachers within one school sufficiently challenges notions of teacher community (Grossman, Wineburg, and Woolworth 2001). The first meeting of the teacher community, in which each level of pre-tertiary education was represented, had no precedent within the locality.

Community activities

Since March 2009 the community has met twice a semester, rotating meetings between the premises of different partners. The meetings start with coffee, a formal

welcome and the session outline. Once the session aims are shared (see Table 1) and a short orientation to the session theme has been provided, the teacher-participants divide into small groups for discussion. These discussion groups include a mix of teachers from the different partners and generally during the discussions one teacher within each group notes down the main points that are raised. After the group discussions, one large group is again formed and key points from the discussion are brought to the attention of the whole community.

The pattern for the meetings was initiated in the first session when it was agreed that the notes from individual discussion groups would be collated in order to write

Table 1. Overview of sessions.

Session number, date & title	Session themes	Background literature
1: Launching the partnership	The fruits & benefits of CLIL, the interests & needs of CLIL teachers, building together – outlining future hopes	CLIL across Europe today presentation (guest presentation) An overview of CLIL research interests (guest presentation)
2: Formal presentations	Formal presentation of different partners as a number of international MEd students from the university were present	-
PR planning without teachers	Working with the Cascade metaphor	-
Working group, 4 November 2009	CLIL from the perspectives of different partners – working towards a joint vision	-
3: The Vision for our Educational Pathway, 24 November 2009	Opportunity for teachers to comment on the educational pathway over coffee Engagement with language over different stages, support required by teachers and pupils, how to maintain openness and continuity	Lehti, Järvinen, and Suomela-Salmi (2006) Eurydice (2006)
4: Classroom culture and interaction, pt 1, 16 March 2010	To begin to explore classroom cultures and interaction, to consider the wider school culture beyond what is said	Alexander (2001) Kinchin (2004, 2005)
5: Classroom culture and interaction, pt 2 and review, 5 May 2010	Review of sessions so far: what has been achieved? What has been the role of the community? Future hopes?	CLIL classroom interaction: guest professor's extracts
6: The nature of education, 6 October 2010	Orientation > purpose for meetings and community growth Reflective discussions: - How do we picture learning across the educational spectrum? - How do we picture learning in CLIL?	Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky 1970) Intermental Development Zone (Mercer 2000) Palmer (1993)

a report for the head of the local authority. The aim of the report was to share the benefits and challenges of CLIL as experienced by these teachers. This report was distributed first to the teachers for comment, before being sent on. Although a report was not produced after each meeting, the teacher-participants continued to keep notes and these were saved by the research-author. Through these activities, a record of community thinking and pedagogic relationships between the teachers in the community was created.

The research-author's role has been to choose the session themes, often following informal discussions with teachers as to what would be useful or interesting. It is always assumed that the teachers will be able to offer a broader understanding of the theme, and that the participants' pedagogic experience and understanding will add depth and concrete examples to discussions. The sessions also provide a forum for visiting teachers and students, a place for teachers to share school-based developments, to announce future plans and to share experiences from in-service education days and conference visits. Finding the right time for the meetings is never easy, nor can each teacher participate to the same degree each time. The following section outlines the theoretical framework used to conceptualise the teacher community. This is followed by the section outlining the data collection approach and thematic analysis of the data.

Theorising teacher community

The teacher-participants of this community represent a variety of pedagogic thinking and experience, in terms of the age of learners they teach, their institutional setting, the number of years of teaching experience and disciplinary orientations. The community, therefore, goes beyond the common 'boundaries' of teacher development communities, often comprising colleagues from one school, one curriculum area (e.g. language arts or science teachers) or a particular stage of professional development (e.g. novice teachers). Research into and on teacher communities often draws on Communities of Practice (CoP) (Lave and Wenger 1991) literature, emphasising legitimate peripheral participation as expertise develops. This approach is useful in that it legitimises the growth of expertise over time in conjunction with the expert community and recognises the situated nature of expertise (Borko 2004).

Development within a community of practice, however, usually entails growth into the existing structures of a specific community. Lave and Wenger (1991) stated that CoP are not only interested in maintaining established cultural practice; however, the main focus of this approach appears to be acculturation into recognised expertise. This is problematic as it implies that the transformative process from legitimate to full participation has a recognisable point of completion. This implies that once full participation is achieved, the pedagogic relationship between novice and expert ends. In effect, the existing expertise of the community is used as a finalising measure rather than the beginning of something new.

This sociocultural approach has supported the identification and validation of contextualised expertise; however, a sense of what *could be* is needed to keep communities alive (Bakhtin 1990). From an action research perspective, 'the development of ... a critical theory of education must be related intrinsically to ... professional development ... teachers themselves build educational theory through critical reflection on their own practice' (Carr and Kemmis 1986, 41). If the pedagogic relationship between teachers ends once expertise is achieved, the potential

for on-going professional development appears to be limited. This paper suggests that as these teacher-participants began to meet across their differences and similarities to critically reflect and discuss, the community's critical educational theory developed. As such, the relationships between the teachers took on a new pedagogical quality. The primary focus of this narrative is the way in which mutual pedagogic relationships between teachers enriched the teachers' educational theory.

Defining features of pedagogical relationships

Van Manen portrays the pedagogical relationship between teachers and pupils as a relationship premised on the simultaneous value of 'being and becoming' (1991, 67). This pedagogic relationship validates the learner in who s/he is now as well as being oriented towards who s/he will become. At the heart of this pedagogic relationship is the idea of growth; growth which can neither be determined nor denied by teachers. This growth, however, is fundamentally affected by teacher choices, decisions and actions whether in word or deed. Inherent within this pedagogic relationship therefore is a sense of responsibility for and vested interest in the other.

A similar notion exists within Bakhtinian dialogic theory. Bakhtin writes of the need to 'be open for myself', that who I am now is not the sum total of all I will be, I remain 'yet-to-be' (Bakhtin 1990, 13). This openness or potentiality is given special emphasis within dialogic theory. How we view one another and respond to one another is particularly important. If you decide that there is nothing more that I can contribute, then that is the end of life, there is nothing left to say (12–13). In this sense, we are morally responsible to each other and ourselves, we are called to acknowledge and validate the potential of others as well as ourselves (Bakhtin 1990, 37). Moreover, the perspective from which we view each other and the world is of great significance. As my view of me always comes from the inside of me, it is significantly different to the view you have of me from the outside. You can see me and the horizon behind me, just as I can see you from the outside and the horizon behind you (Hicks 2000; Sullivan and McCarthy 2004). From this standpoint we both have unique perspectives and something to share, to dialogically enrich our mutual understanding.

From a dialogic perspective, for teacher professionals it is often the communities within which we find ourselves that offer the 'pedagogically oriented' relationships to enrich our being and becoming. In other terms, 'meaningful engagements between individuals' (Hicks 2000, 230), the answerability of one individual to another (Bakhtin 1990, 1993), supports on-going development in collective and individual terms. Discussions with colleagues have the potential of 'enriching the other with an outside perspective' (Hicks 2000, 231). From this perspective, teachers of different subjects, working with pupils of different ages and drawing on different pedagogical beliefs, have a lot to offer one another. These differences suggest a rich dialogic space can exist between teachers. Dialogic space, created by the tension between different perspectives (Wegerif 2007, 4), offers an arena for encountering, exploring and even generating different understandings. This dialogic space can be understood as a positive opportunity to revisit and enrich the understanding of a teacher community collectively or for individual teachers.

The aim of this research was to explore whether the experiences of this teacher community supported the notion of being and becoming as an apt description of the

relationship between teachers and as a way to enrich critical theories of education as a form of teacher development. This exploration was framed by two key questions:

- (1) How is pedagogic thinking expressed within community discussions?
- (2) How does the notion of community develop across the sessions?

Data collection and analysis

The discussion notes combined with the session slides and planning notes provide a multi-voiced or polyphonic record of the community discussions. That is, whilst the community as a whole met around a question in each session, the notes indicate that individual voices were still heard and acknowledged. The session notes include comments that are sometimes relevant to only one partner, or one teacher's experience, and these comments are still included in the notes, within the community voice. Indeed, it is this layering of individual comments which creates the polyphonic voice (Bakhtin 1981; Hicks 2000, 236).

This data does not offer enough detailed information to map the micro-process of knowledge construction (Mercer 2004). However, the notes do provide a jointly constructed voice over a significant period of time (March 2009–October 2010). In addition, the teachers were happy to have their views presented in this format. The anonymity of individual voices within the public voice maintains an important ethical dimension of the community and sense of community. The analysis of the notes and the resulting narrative have been shared with the community to check the validity of what is said and to give the teachers the opportunity to comment. Permission has also been explicitly sought from the community to share this narrative.

Table 1 outlines the session timetables, themes and background literature which guided the planning of the sessions. The sessions 'Formal presentations' and 'PR planning without teachers' included as contextual information, but no analysis was carried out on these sessions.

The data comprised the chronologically ordered, typed-up session notes. The notes from groups within each session were coded with a session number and group number, for example 5:2 is session five, group two. The notes from whole-group discussions use only the session number. The complete dataset was carefully read through a number of times. The next step was to produce a table listing the date and title of each session, the themes and stated aims of each session and a collated summary of the notes for each session. Preparing the data in this way provided a map of the session topics both individually and collectively, making the relationships between the different sessions more easily traceable. The overall dataset was then re-read to ensure that the summaries were representative of the different groups. Throughout the analysis and during the writing-up of the narrative account, the researcher moved between the tabulated summaries and the original notes to ensure that all interpretations were supported by the participants' contributions.

The next step was to critically consider whether a theory-driven approach (Braun and Clarke 2006) to the dataset was appropriate. This involved systematically reviewing the dataset again and highlighting each occasion when the research question themes corresponded with the dataset. To support this process two more columns were added to the initial table: *Conceptualisations of learning/pedagogical thinking* and *Community growth: relationship to knowledge, others, expressions of identity*. It was important that each session contributed to each theme for the

questions to be deemed as valid. The references to pedagogic thinking or to the sense of community came in the form of both questions and statements. An edited version of this table is presented in the results section below.

The analysis until this point had been intended to identify what kind of pedagogic thinking was present in the notes and whether a sense of community, that is, belonging or identifying with other participants, was present within the notes. Once the relevant contributions within the dataset had been identified, this led to the further question as to whether the development of pedagogic thinking was reflected in and related to the growth of the community. This question is considered in the discussion section. As all data analysis is approached through a conceptual lens (Braun and Clarke 2006; Carr and Kemmis 1986), it is hoped that by making the approach to this thematic analysis clear, the integrity of this narrative account is maintained.

Throughout the analytical process, the research author was concerned that personal-professional involvement with the community might create a rose-tinted lens through which the data were viewed. This concern was then replaced by the concern that session themes would appear inadequate and indeed the amount of similarity between the written themes was a surprise, perhaps reflecting that the planning had primarily been session-by-session, rather than a long-term programme. However, whilst compiling the dataset, recorded notes from a planning session with a CLIL expert prior to the working-group meeting were found. In the plans forwarded to the teacher volunteers, the metaphor of water from the Cascade name of the community is used to construct possible identities for the different community partners. In the final descriptions, however, the water metaphor is nowhere to be seen. The published descriptions were rather born from the practice and pedagogic thinking of each representative, agreed with the individual partner-groups, checked within the whole community and finally published at http://www.peda.net/veraja/jyvaskyla/clil_teaching. This incident indicates the freedom of the teachers to contribute and create independently of any pre-planning.

Results

To maintain the sense of historical continuity (Heikkinen, Huttunen, and Syrjälä 2007) and cumulation, the results are presented in chronological order. For each session the key characteristics of the notes are outlined, before the particular ways in which 1) pedagogic thinking is conceptualised and 2) the growth of community is present. Table 2 presents an overview of the results.

Session 1: March 2009

In the first session the teachers shared CLIL experiences in mixed groups with detailed notes made by one or more group members. The first discussions focused on the benefits of CLIL and the teachers' investment in this innovation. The teachers then shared the challenges they had experienced and their hopes for the future. These notes are characterised by a series of dichotomies or apparent contradictions. For example, whilst CLIL offered something novel, it 'can feel isolating' (1:1). The notes reveal confidence in understanding and fear of inadequacy: 'Are my language skills good enough?' (1:4). CLIL is 'rewarding' (1:2), stimulating (1:3), 'challenging' (1:1) and 'hard work' (1:2). CLIL is seen to offer a form of professional development 'using your own competence and imagination' (1:3), yet lacking recognition

Table 2. Results overview.

Session	How is pedagogic thinking expressed?	How is the notion of community understood?
1	In immediate practical-material concerns: course arrangements, resource provision and methodological training. Problematic learner characterisations expressed as shared questions.	Desire to learn from each other and to network within immediate community and beyond. Context for recognition and validation. General hopes seemingly contradict concerns of particular partners. Availability of resources.
Working group	Aims and activities at different points along a united educational pathway: 'playing', 'being', 'learning' and 'studying' through English. Shared features (e.g. confidence-building) provide continuity. Transitional links between stages adds purpose.	Shared expertise, purposeful and resourceful. Anticipates positive accumulation of investments. Benefits of CLIL with regard to learning recognised across community. Future questions recognise the potential of shared resources, shared stories and further growth. Community neither limited to time or place.
3	Engagement with FL learning increasingly conscious, requires encouragement and resources, benefits from collaborative endeavours, rewarding.	Community continuity includes external and internal support, crossing boundaries to invite pupils and parents inside, engaging with others with an open attitude.
4	Teacher perceptions of pupil perspective: learning external to pupils, directed activity with assigned tasks requiring assessment. School work is teacher led, completed in silence. Completion of a task = learning.	The relationship between educational partners and institutional culture is complex. Even when institutional divisions of schools are overcome, institutional culture mediates shared perceptions of pupil experiences.
5	Pedagogic thinking in addition to methodological-practical concern is goal-oriented activity requiring ideological and pedagogical understanding.	Gaining understanding through networking and discussion increases motivation, visibility and awareness of potential growth. Community is belonging and valued relations.
6	Learning is relational and involves inherent risks. Education is more than the continuity of discrete stages, rather an integrated whole with an internal transitional dynamic. Significant questions need to be raised to further pedagogic activity.	Questions affirm the open-endedness of the community and future possibility. Critical understanding develops in discussions across respective differences. Essential questions around what, why and how form the collective heart of the community.

'support from the city – realise that this is worth investing in' (1:1). Resources as a need to be met by educational authorities are repeatedly emphasised, e.g. 'training costs' (1:4), but there is also awareness that existing resources are not fully used: 'we spend surplus or too much energy doing the same things every spring' (1:4).

Session 1: Pedagogic thinking

The notes from session 1 emphasise immediate practical and material concerns: the arrangement of courses, 'How to "integrate" CLIL in the curriculum (to find a set place)?' (1:2), how to find 'time for material delivery sharing and updating it' (1:3) and where to find resources and methodological training. Whilst CLIL is seen to add an international dimension to the curriculum providing a deeper view on

subjects ‘blending the different borders’ (1:4), this does not compensate all the concerns of the teachers. Questions and conundrums remain: ‘if the students know you know Finnish, they will reply in Finnish not in English’ (1:1), ‘where to begin if they don’t know Finnish?’ (1:1) and how to ‘support the children’s motivation even over puberty?’ (1:3).

These practical-material expressions of pedagogic thinking perhaps underline the practical nature of teaching regardless of the age of learners or subject. Sharing these concerns during this first session appears to establish ‘safe’ common ground, with no challenges to what is done or why. The references to the educational authorities are interesting as the participants look to the authorities for resources as well as for affirmation of the ideological value of their work. This perhaps reflects the institutional framing of teaching and the implicit limitations on teachers if innovation is not sanctioned from ‘above’. Nevertheless, the questions in the notes suggest an open-ended orientation to the future.

Session 1: Sense of community

In terms of community development, the desire to learn from each other is clearly stated: ‘Getting to know each other → learning from each other → concrete things like listening to each other’s lessons’ (1:3). The possibility of networking in different directions is highlighted (1:1, 1:2, 1:4, 1:5), informing and including parents (1:1, 1:3), getting recognition from officials (1:2, 1:4, 1:5) and engaging with CLIL activities beyond the local community (1:1, 1:4). Alongside these general hopes are comments concerning the particular circumstances of individual partner schools, e.g. the development of a recognised curriculum in one school (1:3) or a native speaker position in the pre-primary partner (1:4). As the partners voice these hopes to one another, they begin to acknowledge each other, perhaps providing some of the recognition they seek. Overall, however, these comments emphasise the preliminary nature of the community in this first session particularly reflected in the emphasis of material need. Nevertheless, potential areas for development are also included in the notes, such as capitalising on the international classes as a resource to support CLIL (1:4) and inviting parents to participate (1:3).

Session 2: October 2009

On the day of the second session, the host school was visited by a cohort of international MEd students. To accommodate the visitors, all the partner schools introduced themselves and the role of CLIL within their context. This session was less interactive and no notes were taken. In retrospect this was a useful session for more formally presenting the partners to each other once initial contact had been made. An important outcome from this session was to agree who would represent each partner in a working group to produce the webpages of the community. The idea of the working group built on a suggestion from the first session to increase the visibility of CLIL within the locality and between the partners (1:4, 1:5).

Working-group meeting

The working-group meeting was a definitive step in the development of the community. The group members were volunteers representing each partner and the

research-author. The resulting educational pathway (Figure 1) was published on the community website providing a public ‘face’ for the community. During this discussion, the research-author wrote notes on the chalkboard, adding to them throughout the meeting. The notes were photographed and typed up immediately following the meeting. The meeting itself lasted from 9 am until 2.30 pm. The working-group discussion focused around *how*, *what* and *why* CLIL was implemented in the different classroom contexts and provided a basis for the teacher community.

Working group: pedagogic thinking

Discussing *how* was implemented provided an alternative perspective on the conceptualisation of pedagogic thinking within and between the partners. The discussion first focused on the aims and activities of each partner. The pre-primary stage was described as ‘playing’ in English. This description recognises ‘playing’ as a key feature in child development supported through, for example, songs, rhymes, stories and games. Furthermore, using the FL when carrying out routine activities should create a non-threatening, natural environment for learning. This play-oriented, gentle approach to the FL is intended to make it easier for children to encounter an FL, to build on children’s natural enthusiasm and to make an accessible ‘FL place’ for children to enter physically, socially and cognitively. In the lower comprehensive school, CLIL was designated as ‘being’ in English with a similar use of school routines and curricular topics as natural contexts for encounters with English as a learning tool. The regular engagement with the FL is hoped to build confidence, learner identity and to expand the ‘range and depth of exposure’ (working-group notes). In this way CLIL is a naturalised and consistent ‘way of being’ within the school between teachers and pupils.

In the upper comprehensive school, CLIL focuses more specifically on ‘learning’ through English. At this stage, the use of the FL is more intentional and focused to support the formal learning of subjects through an FL. As the move from lower to upper comprehensive school is demanding, a transition within the school is included in the description. When pupils begin subject studies it is suggested that only the practical side of subjects is handled through English, however by grade 9 (age 15) the aim is to also include the theory side of subjects as well. Whilst vocabulary development and confidence-building are still listed as key features of CLIL in upper comprehensive school, the sense of purposeful, intentional activity through the FL is far greater at this stage. The educational pathway culminates with

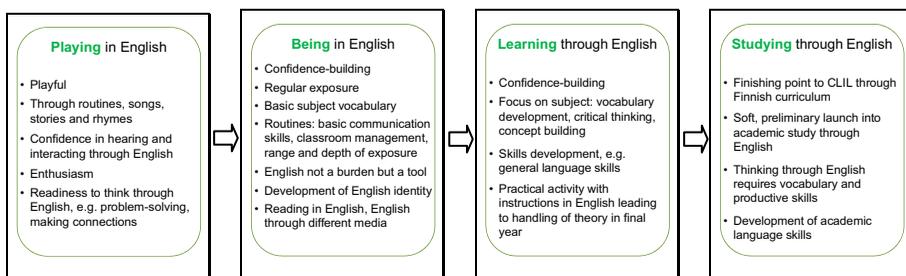


Figure 1. A CLIL-based educational pathway.

‘Studying’ through English in the upper secondary school (16–19 years). At this point the emphasis on intentional, participatory activity is even greater with pupils expected to be able to think critically and engage in independent study tasks through English. To study through English as an FL not only requires confidence and a broad vocabulary, but also academic study and language skills.

These designated stages of the educational pathway recognise the different approaches of the partners and provide insight into the teachers’ pedagogic thinking. The shared features – confidence-building, thinking through English, vocabulary development and fostering a positive relationship with English (working-group notes) – provide continuity complementing the overall notion of an educational pathway. As the vocabulary development changes from basic terms to academic terms, or the pupils’ relationship with English becomes increasingly active, a sense of development is conveyed. Sequencing these four along a pathway validates each stage and creates a sense of cumulation from one stage to the next, reflecting the notion of being and becoming in the shared pathway of the partners.

Working group: sense of community

Whereas the educational pathway allows for different orientations to learning, the discussions around what and why did not emphasise difference. ‘What is the community?’ was described as ‘shared expertise’, ‘sense of purpose’ and ‘building on local resources’ (working-group notes). These ideals reflect the optimistic beginning of the community and these teachers were perhaps the most committed community members. The notes from *why* a CLIL continuum provide further insight into the teachers’ perceptions. The group suggested that this builds on early skills, ‘building on innate capacity and confidence, attitude of young children, strengthening ... seeds sown early on’ (working-group notes). The positive attitude towards FL learning and different cultures encouraged in CLIL was felt to positively contribute across the whole educational community as ‘open-mindedness to difference and diversity’ (working-group notes). The cross-community learning benefits included pupils having to focus, needing to ask questions and the creation of a different learning atmosphere.

The session ended with ‘interesting’ questions:

How many students come though the system? What stories can we collect from the students (positive and negative)? How can students be supported as they progress through and enter into the system? Is the development of a [local] curriculum possible? Ideals and guidelines useful. Curriculum would support the development of materials and resources, e.g. handbook for students, parents and teachers. (Working-group notes)

These questions recognise the value of shared resources, shared stories and growth.

Session 3

The third session, ‘Vision for our Educational Pathway’, was held in autumn 2009. Over coffee the printed pathway and pencils were placed on tables for comments. The individual descriptions had previously been shared with the respective partners. Two comments were added: ‘Not forgetting playing’ was added to the lower comprehensive level as a direct link from the pre-primary partner, and ‘Not forgetting

playing and being' was added to the upper comprehensive level. These two additions are interesting as they widen the scope of the individual partners and simultaneously strengthen the continuity between the partners. What is more, these additions imply an enriched understanding of the pedagogical basis for the overall pathway and overstep institutional boundaries between partners.

Session 3: Pedagogic thinking

The main discussion of Session 3 focused on the ways in which learners engaged with FL learning at different stages, the kind of support teachers and learners require and how to maintain openness and continuity across the pathway. Three mixed groups depicted engagement with FL learning in similar ways: 'increasingly conscious engagement with and use of language with age' (3:1), 'need for encouragement, possibility to resource each other' (3:2) and 'tolerance →rewarding →challenge → success →liberation' (3:3). Each depiction complements the notion of an educational pathway, in terms of increasingly active involvement for learning to take place and maintaining a sense of commonality between learners. The sequential experience of FL learning perhaps also reflects the teachers' relationship with English as an FL (Moate 2011).

Session 3: Sense of community

The support required for teachers reflects the developing notion of community within the group. Whilst further education (language and methodology) and material support are still noted, peer feedback and encouragement are more prominent: 'enhanced cooperation ... teams, new teachers are first integrated with the more experienced' (3:1) and 'contact between subject and language teachers [as well as] contact with other schools' (3:2). These notes indicate the value recognised within the community partnerships and suggest concrete ways to realise teacher support. 'Peer support' (3:3) and 'emphasised support for weaker students' (3:1) also feature in the support pupils require. This possibly suggests that as the community bonds between the teachers strengthen, so this becomes part of the lens through which teachers view pupils.

The notes on maintaining openness and continuity link with both pedagogic thinking and community. One group suggested CLIL groupings not based on ability, rather 'based on motivation and willingness' (3:1), which in some ways acknowledges and validates difference in the attitudes of learners. Perhaps more significant is the suggestion of 'meta-conversations' (3:1) with teachers inviting pupils into the discussion as to why CLIL is part of their school life and welcoming parents to observe CLIL lessons (3:2). These notes both indicate an explicit desire to cross boundaries and an increasingly open attitude to engage with others, suggesting a more active role being taken by the teachers.

Session 4

Session 4 took a different approach with general classroom interaction and culture framing the discussions and particular attention being paid to pupil experiences. The physical layout of classrooms opened the discussions, but the small-group notes record teacher perceptions of pupil understandings of work, teaching, learning,

homework and revision. The picture from these discussions is very different from the earlier conceptualisations of learning.

Session 4: Pedagogic thinking

Work is defined as teacher-led activity, the completion of assigned tasks often in silence. The notes suggest pupils disassociate work from fun, work is ‘bothersome’ (4:3). Learning similarly defined as something external to pupils, rather than belonging to pupils: ‘memorising’ (4:3), ‘searching for the right answers’ (4:2) and expecting assessment to measure learning (4:1, 4:3). One note draws attention to special educational needs pupils – for these pupils ‘learning’ is ‘appearing to participate’, ‘not being different’ (4:1) although school tasks are difficult. Teaching in the notes was often equated with talk from the pupil perspective: ‘Blah, blah, blah’ (4:1), ‘a lot of talking’ (4:4). Similarly, homework and revision were described as regularly assigned activities that require a lot of reading and the completion of such tasks understood as ‘learning’ (4:3). One note (4:4) mentions how in the first grade pupils are eager for homework, whereas sixth-grade pupils are less enthusiastic, even challenging the teachers as to ‘why?’ (4:2) homework is given.

These notes capture a significantly different view of learning than in the previous discussions. From the teacher’s view of the pupil perspective, learning is directed activity. The perceived lack of agency on the part of the pupils perhaps indicates how significant meta-conversations (see Session 3) with pupils might be. Of course, these were teacher impressions’ of pupil views, but the gap between the increased agency of the teacher community and the passive framing of pupils is striking.

Session 4: Sense of community

As in the earlier session, the teachers were in mixed groups, however there is little sense of difference between subjects or pupil age. What is significant here, perhaps, is that whilst the community discussions are providing the teachers with an opportunity to step beyond their usually institutionally framed roles, the pupils are being ‘held’ within institutionally framed roles. The pupils go through the motions of schooling, as this is what is expected of them. This perhaps provides a broader picture of the institutional culture within which the teachers themselves are placed, with teachers’ pedagogic agency all too easily being overwritten by institutional norms. It was on this occasion that a head teacher remarked that this is the kind of discussion that should take place between teachers.

Session 5

This session, concluding a school year, continued the theme of classroom interaction and included a review of community activities. A locally based CLIL researcher shared some data on CLIL classroom recordings and the teachers responded with their own observations. The group notes, however, come from the review.

Session 5: Pedagogic thinking

In mixed groups the partners shared what had been achieved so far and what hopes remained. The notes list different types of achievements. Practical achievements

include the start of curriculum planning (5:1), permission for a permanent English native-speaker post (5:2), the launch of new CLIL courses (5:4) and the involvement of head teachers (5:4). Theoretically, the teachers noted a better understanding of the pedagogic basis of CLIL (5:1) and a sense of the bigger picture (5:3). In these notes the pedagogic thinking is far greater than methodological-practical concerns. The webpage provided a description and the participants felt that ‘through discussion [we have] better understanding of the pedagogical basis’ but still ‘common goals could be formulated for the continuum of CLIL teaching’ (5:1). Ideological and pedagogic understanding is now used with reference to the teachers themselves, rather than outside authorities.

Session 5: Sense of community

With regard to the community, the notes include ‘better understanding of the different “agents”’ (5:1) through ‘networking’ (5:1), ‘we’re able to discuss the different ... perspectives’ (5:2), ‘we’ve proved that cooperation is possible and needed’ (5:3) leading to increased motivation (5:2) and the desire to expand (5:1, 5:4) and deepen (5:2, 5:4) the community. The activities were felt to have increased visibility (5:2), acknowledged problems and provided possible solutions (5:4).

Having a bigger picture of classroom practice and valuing engagement with others go to the heart of community. These comments contain a sense of belonging and confident relations with different partners. The hopes for the future included a coordinator of the community (5:1), purposeful development of CLIL teaching with possibilities to expand (5:1, 5:4), the formulation of common goals (5:1), deepening cooperation and developing methodology together (5:3), as well as receiving more financial resources (5:3). These comments are positive acknowledgements of potential growth and whilst resources are still desired, there is no longer the sense that the partners are beholden to the educational authorities.

Session 6

Session 6 in October 2010 concentrated on how learning is pictured across the educational spectrum, particularly in CLIL. The orientation task was sharing personal metaphors for teaching and the research-author shared why she had become a teacher. The mixed-group discussions then involved the teachers sharing from their own classroom contexts what learning means. This task potentially divided the participants along institutional lines – education for young pupils versus education for older students. It is perhaps a sign of how the community had grown that this was not the outcome of the discussions. These discussions took place in a very pleasant, old wooden building on the university campus and instead of group notes, a flipchart was used to record comments when the whole group reconvened with the research author acting as scribe.

Session 6: Pedagogic thinking

On this occasion, learning was explicitly defined as ‘human contact, a safe environment, no fear of mistakes, the courage to take risks, meaningful communication and authenticity’ (6). These were voiced as the cornerstones of teaching and learning encounters. The groups also discussed how learning within pre-primary/lower

comprehensive school contexts related to learning in the upper years. In the whole-group discussion the following diagram (Figure 2) was shared with the wider group.

The lower triangle represents education in the early years of schooling when the focus is on introducing and familiarising children to the school environment. Here children are ‘raised’, taught how to behave, what to expect, what is expected of them, how to learn and to participate in school. Whilst different subjects are part of the early years curriculum, it is only a minor part of the overall education process. The emphasis on subject learning increases over time, however, which is what the upper triangle is intended to represent and at a certain point – usually the start of upper comprehensive school – the balance shifts from socialisation into general educational culture to socialisation into school subjects. In Finland it is common for subject teachers to teach from the start of the upper comprehensive school at age 13, whereas class teachers are present in the lower comprehensive school. This visualisation implies, however, that the socialisation into educational culture does not disappear, although the balance changes. The visualisation aims to imply that even learners in upper secondary school (16–19 years) still need support with study skills and academic learning.

The resulting picture goes beyond discrete stages of the educational pathway to an integrated whole. This overview validates and enriches the different perspectives. The picture addresses both the balance between socialisation into educational culture and socialisation into school subjects, but also maintains the sense of a transition (indicated by the arrow) from one to the other. In this visualisation the ‘being and becoming’ characterisation of education is present. The visual did not conclude the session, however, but led to a number of significant questions: ‘What is the role of the mother tongue in CLIL?’, ‘Is the mother tongue a help, hindrance or safety net?’, ‘How can participation be shared and enhanced for pupils?’ and ‘how can pupil thinking be enhanced through an FL?’ (6). These questions are significant for a number of reasons and relevant to the whole CLIL community. As an expanding innovation, CLIL needs to address questions that lie at the heart of pedagogic activity (Coyle 2008).

Session 6: Sense of community

With regard to the sense of community, however, the questions affirm the openness of the community and the possibility of future growth. This visualisation

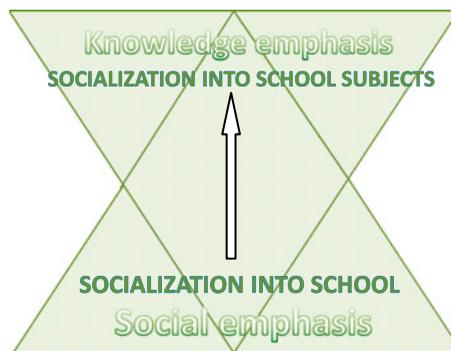


Figure 2. The relationship between early years and later years education.

and the questions – that is, critical understanding – are born from the shared discussions between the different partners. In these discussions, the community members appeared to meet each other across their respective differences. The interests and concerns go far beyond material questions, to fundamental questions about what they are doing, why and how.

Discussion

In this narrative account the community's pedagogic thinking appears as layers. The different discussions enrich the initial expressions as defined in immediate practical-material concerns to the development of a shared educational pathway. As the community strove to validate difference between partners, the shared educational pathway became an integrated whole, fundamentally bound together yet still with space for different interests and priorities. The development of the community itself is intrinsically rooted in these layers. Whilst the material needs and challenges allowed initial contact to be made between the partners, it was only as the key features of the different partners were validated that a deeper sense of community developed. Within the community, differences were not removed or bypassed but they were acknowledged and became resources for enriched, shared understanding.

During the analysis of the data, separating pedagogic thinking from the sense of community became increasingly artificial. Emerson commented on Bakhtin's perception of the world: 'Each of us is incomplete alone, but we should rejoice in the incompleteness. It makes others more necessary to us, and it makes our tolerance of them more attractive' (1996, 109). It appears that in the discussions, as the teachers shared more of their own personal-professional pedagogic thinking, the more integral the sense of community became and the more the pedagogic thinking within the community became enriched.

Mapping the activities of the teacher community in this way appears to provide a window into the dialogic space (Wegerif 2007, 4) the community created. Voicing, hearing and validating the differences between the partners through the community sessions widened and deepened the dialogic space between partners, allowing critical educational theory relevant to the participants to arise. The differences between the teacher-partners, rather like the dichotomies present in the notes from Session 1, were not contradictions but different dimensions of a complex whole.

Chronologically mapping the themes revealed the 'spiral staircase' or cumulative nature of the sessions. Whilst the discussions aimed to move forward in understanding, this did not mean that previous topics could not be revisited. Returning to similar concerns from different positions or perspectives and drawing on different resources appeared to uncover understanding in a new way, enriching established views. This approach was perhaps supported by the gaps between meetings, but it also suggests that an educational dynamic does not always need to be towards something entirely new. If we return to the idea of education as both 'being and becoming', then whilst on the one hand having an idea of where we are heading towards is important and useful, also having the time to appreciate where we are now and who we are with now is also valuable. It is in the present moment that we can appreciate the past, and it is the present moment which contains the seeds for the future (Bakhtin 1981, 37).

The notion of being and becoming emphasises the open-endedness of education pushing past the boundaries of material need and even methodology, pointing to the human encounter involved in education. It is this sense of human encounter that this

narrative report hopes to preserve. The initial starting point for community activity was to draw on the resources available within the immediate environment. Whilst CLIL experts were invited in to contribute to the community, the heart of the community itself was – is – the teachers. Initially the community was built around the teachers' experiences of CLIL. Increasingly, over time their pedagogic know-how came to the fore, simultaneously increasing and reducing the distance between the participant members. The 'soul' (Bakhtin 1990; Sullivan 2007) of the community, however, was the development of a pedagogic relationship between colleagues. That is, the teachers were able to hear, acknowledge and positively respond to differences between community members. It was this dimension of an answerable (Bakhtin 1990) collegial relationship validating being and becoming within the community that allowed an enriched understanding to grow.

This is not to suggest that the growth of a pedagogic relationship between colleagues is without limitations or challenges. Within this community some teachers attended more regularly, more actively, whilst other teachers maintained a more peripheral membership. These differences in levels of participation, however, were also viewed as valid and appreciated within the community. The future also remains somewhat open-ended as the career paths of different community members take them in new directions. For these teachers it is hoped that the positive experience of this teacher community would provide seeds for the development of pedagogic relationships with new colleagues in new communities. With regard to the teacher community in this narrative, the future steps hopefully include the development of the community's 'critical theory of education' into 'critically informed practice' (Carr and Kemmis 1986, 44). This would mean taking the educational pathway that has been defined and producing coherent, concrete programmes of study and lesson plans reflecting these values. Finally, truly critically informed practice would include widening the community to include other educational stakeholders, especially pupils. The teacher perceptions of pupil views indicate a significant area for growth between teachers and pupils. As the community's critical theory becomes critically informed practice, it will be interesting to see whether the teacher community's new lens through which pupils are viewed could enrich the lens through which pupils themselves view education, in effect learning to develop a new form of pedagogic relationship.

The sharing of this narrative has been intended to reveal the value of mutual pedagogic relationships between teachers to support and enrich professional development. From a dialogic perspective, the unique positions of teachers, whether as pre-primary teachers or upper secondary subject specialists, means that each community member has something to contribute and something to gain. Encounters across differences can both validate the present being and future becoming of teachers, suggesting developmental potentialities beyond the currently defined boundaries of institutional education.

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Note

1. This was the CLIL Fusion Conference held in Tallinn, October 2008.

Notes on contributor

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