

*Post-method principles at work:
Evidence from lower primary integrated EFL education
classroom in Poland*

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Abstract

For hundreds of years scientists, philosophers and educators had been working to create the one ideal method of teaching and learning a foreign language. Disappointment with one construct fueled the motivation to search further until they came to a point of realization that there is no one perfect way of foreign language instruction, the point acclaimed by Kumaravadivelu (2001) as “death of a method.” Today it is universally accepted that teaching a foreign language should follow a set of principles, rather than one particular mode of instruction. Polish lower primary education is currently experiencing a major change in the system of foreign language instruction. In accordance with a recent legal regulation (Rozporządzenie MNiSW, 2019), soon the role of EFL instructors in lower primary education may be taken over by the general early years educators. As a result EFL will finally become a part of everyday teaching practice rather than a separate subject. Although the change has every potential of being beneficial for the learners, it seems essential to observe the linguistic behaviour of young learners and their teachers engaged in such mode of instruction to see how the principles work and what conditions need to be created for their optimal effectiveness. The present paper aims to present the application of Kumaravadivelu’s principles in real life classroom on the examples of students’ and their teacher’s interactions and their expected outcomes in a lower primary content and language integrated learning context.

Keywords: CLIL; postmethod pedagogy; macrostrategies; classroom discourse; lower primary

1. Introduction

After decades of psychological, sociological, linguistic, and philosophical developments that led to the emergence of multiple approaches towards learning and teaching reflected in numerous methods, it became evident that none of them is universally applicable to all learning contexts. Furthermore, although different methods may be based on different, sometimes opposite, principles, they are not as dissimilar in their basic practices as their proponents would wish. Since methods of formal instruction are based on the existing body of knowledge, they may be placed along the same continuum of particular principles underpinning their theoretical grounds. Thus, grammar-translation and communicative language teaching may be perceived as extremes on the line of focus on form and meaning with a number of less radical approaches to this issue in between. A good number of more modern methods of instruction that claim to be original are, in fact, clusters of existing approaches or well-known methods presented under a new name with few original elements. As Kumaravadivelu (2006, p. 161) states, "In all probability, the invention of a truly novel method that is fundamentally different from the [existing] ones is very slim, at least in the foreseeable future." In fact, it seems that everyday EFL teaching practice does not require any new methods as the reality of the classroom itself regulates the approach to language teaching accepting different bits and pieces of some methods and rejecting others that prove impractical or ineffective. However, classroom practice is not sheer chaos. It is, in fact, subject to number of principles (Kumaravadivelu, 2006) that are independent of any particular method by being more universal and, as such, applicable to a wider range of contexts. The present paper aims to present the results of a research study conducted in a lower-primary EFL classroom where the foreign language was taught as an element of integrated curriculum. The content and language integrated learning (CLIL) context was chosen as an optimal environment for the observation of natural language integration and the teaching principles in action. Since lower-primary education in Poland follows an integrated curriculum of all subject areas, the foreign language fits perfectly well into everyday classroom practice and allows for flexible code-switching. In view of the upcoming changes in the policy of assigning EFL teachers to lower primary grades, it seems important to identify the conditions under which learning of a foreign language can take place in the context of a cross-curricular instruction provided not by specialist English teachers but general early years educators. The paper presents examples of observed classroom interactions that reflect various principles followed by such teacher in a Polish lower primary CLIL classroom. Kumaravadivelu's model was chosen as it most closely reflects the dynamics of a lower primary educational context which

is familiar for the general early years educators and thus the proposed principles may easily be applied by the teachers in their new roles as language instructors.

2. Literature review

2.1. From methods to principles

Throughout decades classroom practice has seen a closed cycle of emergence, decline, and return of a variety of approaches. The cycle begins when a seemingly original method is conceived and implemented into classroom practice only to prove imperfect and be leveled with harsh criticism of the teachers, students, and researchers themselves. Then, it is typically replaced by another miraculous method of gaining linguistic competence, which with time, leads to disillusionment and another replacement. This cycle goes on until it returns to the original idea to rediscover its previously unseen potential and so on. Trapped within this vicious cycle, instructors and other specialists fail to adjust the pedagogical process to the existing local conditions. It seems unreasonable to expect that any given method will be fully functional and beneficial to all students in all circumstances.

The new perspective on formal language instruction has evolved from the postmodern philosophy. Postmodernism sees the notions of truth and preference as social constructs to be eliminated. As proponents of relativism, postmodernists perceive knowledge as dynamic and theories as canceling and distorting reality that can only be approached pragmatically. They question the authority of experts as the only creators of knowledge and the universal nature of their findings. Instead, postmodernism values subjectivism and diversity (Pishghadam & Mirzaee, 2008, p. 95). By accepting the postmodern perspective, education has shifted from a more authoritarian and prescriptive, towards a more liberal and descriptive approach to language pedagogy. As a result, the notion of method has been devalued as a theoretical model based on abstract assumptions and disregarding the diversity of unique instructional environments.

Allwright (1991, as cited in Kumaravadelu, 2006, p. 170) comes up with six reasons why a method is an unhelpful concept to build a pedagogical practice upon. Firstly, its main focus is the differences between the proposed approach and all other methods while even the concepts that differ significantly in theory are not that dissimilar in a real classroom practice. Secondly, it has a tendency to overgeneralize and fail to cater for individual differences between the students and even between various educational contexts. Thirdly, Allwright (1991) points out that learning how to implement a given method into the classroom is time consuming and takes the teachers' attention away from the far more important planning of actual activities. What is more, extensive training may lead

to a blind loyalty towards a given method and focus on proving its superiority over others, thus fostering unnecessary competition. Another risk involved in following a given method is the false impression that all issues considering the nature of learning have been understood and the solution to them is the method in use. Finally, the notion of a method provides an externally created impression of coherence imposed on the teachers. They are forced to believe in the effectiveness of the method, without a critical analysis of the applicability of its principles to the particular educational context they operate in. Instead of reaching the sense of coherence of educational practice from the actual application of a variety of approaches in a classroom, teachers are expected to apply a set of practices whether or not they perceive them as beneficial for the students and the learning process in their particular case.

It appears that formal instruction has reached a moment of raised awareness of the situation in which the fact that continuous recycling of the existing methods does not lead to improved practice or enriched theoretical background of this field should clearly be acknowledged. This conscious agreement to break the vicious cycle and readiness to venture beyond the limits of a single method is what Kumaravadivelu (2006, p. 171) calls the *postmethod condition*. It rests upon the acknowledgement of method as an artificial construct limiting the opportunity for the teacher and for the students to reach their full potentials by enforcing a rigid set of practices within which they have to operate. Having reached this point, language pedagogy shifts from method to a broader understanding of learning and teaching procedures. This *postmethod pedagogy* is a three-dimensional system governed by three pedagogic parameters: particularity, practicality, and possibility.

Particularity is considered by Kumaravadivelu to be the central aspect of postmethod pedagogy. He claims that it must be "sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu" (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 538). Since there is an abundance of factors influencing any learning situation, it seems unreasonable to expect any single approach to be applicable to all formal instructors, learners, educational contexts, classroom environments, etc.

The second parameter of *practicality* relates to the transferability of theory into practice. It empowers the teacher to take the responsibility for monitoring and constant assessment of his own pedagogical actions. Instead of implementing a ready-made theoretical approach into the classroom practice, the teacher creates optimal conditions for learning, through active research and experimentation, trying out different techniques and methods to establish a coherent pattern of operations that really work for this particular context. This bottom-up

view of good practices being created by in-service teachers allows them to adjust all available resources to best fit the context in which they work. On the other hand, it assumes that educators are willing to actively shape their practice and take responsibility for any possible failure instead of blaming it on a method imposed on them. In line with this approach Edge (2001, p. 6) points out that “the thinking teacher is no longer perceived as someone who applies theories, but someone who theorizes practice.” By giving formal instructors the power of shaping educational process, the practicality parameter acknowledges the importance of their insights gained through experience and intuition, the awareness, often unaccountable for by any theory, of what works best in a particular context.

The parameter of *possibility* reflects the understanding that any pedagogy is related to power and dominance. In the process of education, it is essential to emphasize teachers’ and students’ individual identities. In a traditional teacher-dominated classroom the unequal distribution of power is evident and may lead to tensions. The possibility parameter advocates the explicit acknowledgment and use of students’ experiences and knowledge which they bring into the classroom. Thus, the instructor is not the only expert and new knowledge is constructed by means of interaction between all participants of the process and built upon the pre-existing experiences of the students.

2.2. Macrostrategies of postmethod pedagogy

Postmethod pedagogy operates beyond the constraints of any single method. Nonetheless, it does propose solutions encompassing certain strategies and techniques to be implemented into a classroom by a reflexive educator basing on his prior and ongoing experience of effective practices. Their common feature is a definitive rejection of any existing methods of formal instruction and flexibility in approach that allows for its application in a multitude of pedagogic contexts.

Kumaravadivelu’s model is based on the understanding of the inability to predict all possible educational contexts in order to prepare practitioners to cope with all situations they may potentially generate. The author believes that the only reasonable solution is to help teachers develop a capacity to come up with “varied and situation-specific ideas within a general framework that makes sense in terms of current pedagogical and theoretical knowledge” (Kumaravadivelu, 1992, p. 41).

In the same author’s view, teacher education should, therefore, focus on equipping the prospective teachers with a set of general skills that could be easily modified and adjusted to any pedagogic situation they may encounter in their profession. Kumaravadivelu saw the following abilities and *macrostrategies*:

Macrostrategies are general plans derived from currently available theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical knowledge related to L2 learning and teaching. A macrostrategy is a broad guideline based on which teachers can generate their own location-specific, need-based microstrategies or classroom procedures. In other words, macrostrategies are made operational in the classroom through microstrategies. (2006, p. 201)

These strategies are not based on any particular theory of teaching, nor are they conditioned by any of the existing methods. They are a set of principles reflecting the postmethod pedagogy that goes beyond any prescriptive rules and focuses on a holistic approach to formal instruction. Kumaravadivelu's (2003, p. 41) model comprises ten macrostrategies that include:

- 1) maximizing learning opportunities;
- 2) facilitating negotiated interaction;
- 3) minimizing perceptual mismatches;
- 4) activating intuitive heuristics;
- 5) fostering language awareness;
- 6) contextualizing linguistic input;
- 7) integrating language skills;
- 8) promoting learner autonomy;
- 9) ensuring social relevance;
- 10) raising cultural consciousness.

It seems that introducing all these rules into a traditional lower-primary EFL context, though undoubtedly beneficial, is hardly feasible due to systemic limitations.

2.3. A CLIL classroom as a context for post-method pedagogy

The understanding of the fact that language is an essential element in all subject teaching led to creating educational contexts where it is used as a vehicle for content delivery. The main emphasis is on building subject knowledge, and language development is a side effect. From this perspective language elements are not the main concern of the educational process but rather a natural by-product of content mastery. This approach seems very well suited for lower primary contexts where using the target language as the only means of instruction is most challenging. As Wolff (2005, p. 558) puts it, "the CLIL classroom should not be characterised by monolingualism but by functional bilingualism." Therefore, emphasis shifts from the form of the foreign language to its applications in meaningful subject-related context. This approach seems highly beneficial on a number of different levels. Research results into the effects of CLIL instruction prove it to have beneficial effects on, among others, cognitive development

(Jäppinen, 2005), conversational and academic competence (Várkuti, 2010), and language control (Pessoa, Hendry, Donato, Tucker, & Lee, 2007).

It is to be regretted that despite its advantages, content and language integrated teaching is not very popular. Although CLIL instruction is present in all European countries, it is not common practice and it is nearly exclusively limited to the secondary education context (Eurydice, 2012), although it is the lower primary sector that offers optimal conditions for its introduction. Since young children in many educational systems in Europe follow an integrated teaching curriculum in the first years of formal instruction where learning is organized in topical units with elements of various subjects intertwining, there seems to be no reason why foreign language teaching should be excluded from this format. Language is the natural medium of expression in teaching all other subjects. If students use their mother tongue in the classroom, they could also be encouraged to use elements of an additional language to perform the same tasks involving non-linguistic subject knowledge

3. The research project

3.1. Aims and methodology

The aim of the present research project was to determine whether Kumaravadivelu's (2003) macrostrategies can be observed in a lower primary EFL content and language integrated environment. The data subject for analysis in this paper come from a corpus created as a result of a longitudinal ethnographic research study conducted in a public lower primary classroom in an industrial area of a big city in Poland. Data were collected in a non-participant observation of students and their teacher, recorded, and transcribed. The observed teacher was the main instructor in the classroom providing for most subject areas (except for RE) including EFL. She followed a self-prepared curriculum that integrated English and content within the topical units of the general lower primary education in a CLIL fashion. There were no specific weekly English lessons planned in the teaching program, but rather a number of short activities relating to the covered subject content were conducted every day. The student group consisted of 23 children who had no additional foreign language instruction outside the classroom.

3.2. Research findings

In the course of the research, numerous instances of all Kumaravadivelu's macrostrategies were observed. Their use, however, was strictly connected with the integrated form of foreign language instruction. In a vast majority of cases, the occurrence

of a given macrostrategy was possible only due to the specific conditions of formal language instruction. The following transcripts serve as examples of the discussed model application and are interpreted within the context of CLIL in which they were observed.

It could be argued that the first two macrostrategies refer to the instructor's skill of organizing classroom interaction. These are (1) *maximize learning opportunities* and (2) *facilitate negotiated interaction*. The former implies a willingness to constantly adjust lesson plans to the ever-changing dynamic situation in the classroom. Since classroom interaction is cooperative in nature, teachers must acknowledge all contributions from partners engaged in the process. They also need to notice and utilize all potential learning opportunities spontaneously emerging during classroom practice.

3.3. Maximizing learning opportunities in action

The very form of content and language integrated learning of English in a lower primary context aims at creating multiple learning opportunities that are hardly possible in the traditional model. Since the teacher spends with her students nearly all days, every day of the week, it is inevitable that all sorts of natural communication contexts will present themselves which she may choose to use as opportunities for language development.

Situation 1: Subject area – science. Students identify birds by their sounds.

- 1 T: ready?
- 2 Ss: ready!
- 3 CD: [SOUND OF STORK]
- 4 Ss: bocian! (*stork*)
- 5 T: bardzo dobrze to jest klekot bociana
(*well done this is a stork's clatter*)
- 6 S1: and in English?
- 7 T: stork
- 8 Ss: stork
- 9 CD: [SOUND OF WOODPECKER]
- 10 Ss: dzięcioł! (*woodpecker*)
- 11 T: yes! in English woodpecker
- 12 Ss: woodpecker
- 13 T: to jeszcze raz (*so again*) what bird is this?
[PLAYS THE CD – SOUND OF STORK]
- 14 Ss: stork! | bocian! (*stork*)

In this situation the instructor had no intention of switching to English. The initial exchange (1-2) is a typical feature of her classroom language as the teacher

usually gives parts of instructions and cues in English. Names of birds, just like names of flowers and trees, are not a part of lower primary curriculum and are, in fact, typically excluded from foreign language education on all other levels as well. However, they constitute an important element of science education area that is delivered in Polish. In the above quoted interaction, it is a student who initiates the code switch requiring the English counterpart of the word. The instructor decides to use children's natural curiosity and interest in the subject and switches to English herself providing further learning opportunities.

The second macrostrategy concerns a meaningful classroom interaction between learners and between learners and their teacher in which the students are free to initiate and manage the exchange rather than simply react and respond to cues. Negotiated interaction requires the learner to be actively involved in the process of learning.

3.4. Facilitating negotiated interaction in action

As the central figure in the process of education, the teacher manages all classroom life in its organizational, managerial, and disciplinary aspects in addition to transferring knowledge of content subjects all day long. In this aspect she has a significant advantage over a specialist English teacher who needs to use the precious little time she has to cover the curriculum. In the observed context the routine events that were a part of school life are used as opportunities to introduce English.

Situation 2: Routine of telling the day of the week and describing the weather.

- | | | |
|---|-----|--|
| 1 | T: | today is... pomagamy Zuzi (<i>we're helping Zuzia</i>) |
| 2 | S1: | Monday? |
| 3 | T: | no... |
| 4 | S2: | Tuesday? |
| 5 | T: | Wed... |
| 6 | Ss: | Wednesday |
| 7 | T: | today is Wednesday (.) what's the weather like? |
| 8 | Ss: | cloudy |
| 9 | T: | cloudy (.) it is cloudy (.) |

Since the teacher met her students every day in the morning, she started each day with the same routine. The above transcript comes from one of the first lessons in the first grade. With time the exchanges became more complex when students were required to name the day, the month, the season and the year as well as describe the weather in more detail. The same task would be difficult to do by the specialist English instructor as she would meet her students at different times of day and be always pressed for time.

The following two macrostrategies could be perceived as calling upon the instructor's skills of working on the cognitive level of students' development. They include rule (3) *minimize perceptual mismatches*; and (4) *activate intuitive heuristics*. The third principle is based on a view of communication "as a gradual reduction of uncertainty" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 204). As a result, in every L2 lesson some kind of disagreement between the teacher's intention and learners' interpretation is imminent. The sources of this mismatch can be cognitive, as the students' mental processes governing the way in which they gain conceptual understanding of the reality may differ from those of the instructor. They can also result from unequal distribution of linguistic tools and communication strategies between the instructor and the learners. When the students and the teacher do not share the understanding of short- and long-term objectives, the disagreement has pedagogical sources. Similarly, when the instructor expects the learners to use certain learning strategies to gain, store, and use information that they are reluctant to implement, the mismatch has a strategic source. The misunderstandings can also arrive from differences in the attitude towards L2 and the nature of its instruction as well as from different understanding of target culture norms. The last group of possible sources of mismatch relate to the procedures used in the classroom and include controversies around evaluation models, procedures used to resolve immediate problems and instructional directions given by the instructor. The awareness of all these possible sources of perceptual mismatches may help teachers to understand the nature of a problem in the classroom and allow him to modify his actions so as to adjust to the current interpretative abilities of the students and achieve his intended goal.

3.5. Minimizing perceptual mismatch in action

The following interaction was observed during an activity in the skill of numeracy. Since this education area belongs to the integrated subjects curriculum the initial exchanges are in Polish. The teacher initiates the discourse focusing on the content and the S1 correctly interprets her intentions by providing the right answer in the same language. However, in exchange 3 the instructor finishes her move with a cue that is, in turn, interpreted by S2 appropriately as an invitation for a code-switch. The ratios between L1 and L2 change gradually as the exchange progresses from L1 only to L2 only.

Situation 3: Subject area – mathematics. Students solve individual equations to form teams.

- | | | |
|---|-----|--|
| 1 | T: | ok Max przeczytaj swoje równanie (<i>read your equation</i>) |
| 2 | S1: | cztery dodać trzy równa się siedem (<i>four plus three equals seven</i>) |
| 3 | T: | Czy ktoś ma jeszcze wynik seven? (<i>does anyone else have the result</i>) |

- 4 S2: ja mam seven! three plus four (*I have got*)
5 T: anyone else?
6 S3: I... five plus two

The transition from Polish to English in the above exchange seems smooth and not thrust upon the learners but is rather a natural consequence of minimizing the possible perceptual mismatches between the teacher's expectations and students' performance by gradual switching of language codes by all participants of the exchanges.

The fourth principle encourages language educators to activate students' intuitive understanding of the linguistic system by providing enough textual data for them to infer the rules of form and function from contextualized examples. This principle promotes implicit teaching of language systems.

3.6. Activating intuitive heuristics in action

Creating conditions for promoting active construction of meaning based on provided language examples seems perfectly fit for a lower primary foreign language class context. In the observed classroom the teacher typically relies on her learners' intuitive heuristics and personalization when introducing a new structure. The emphasis is always on content rather than form and it is the students who work to adjust their utterances to the model.

Situation 4: Subject area – social education. Students express their likes and dislikes.

- 1 T: ok, ask me do you like...?
2 S1: do you like grapes?
3 T: yes, I do [NODS AND SMILES]
4 S2: do you like onions?
5 T: no I don't [SHAKES HER HEAD AND MAKES A DISGUSTED FACE]
6 S3: do you like tomatoes?
7 T: yes I do [NODS AND SMILES]
8 S4: do you like leeks?
9 T: No, I don't [SHAKES HER HEAD AND MAKES A DISGUSTED FACE]
Zuzia do you like carrots?
10 S5: yes (.) I do
11 T: Michalina do you like onions?
12 S4: No, (.) I do... I don't

In the interaction above the instructor provides a model on the basis of her own personal preferences introducing reality into the task. Exchanges 1-9 serve as model language input that is followed and copied by the students. At no time does the teacher provide the students with translations believing that

the context and body language are sufficient for grasping the meaning. She also allows the students time to internalize the structure by not finishing the utterances herself but waiting for them to construct the sentence. The resulting activation of intuitive heuristics may be best observed in the final move (12) where the learner self-corrects her response to fit the model.

The next three principles refer to the language instruction in the L2 classroom and they recommend (5) *fostering language awareness*, (6) *contextualizing linguistic input*, (7) *integrating language skills*. By raising language awareness Kumaravadivelu means the actions undertaken by the teacher to draw learners' attention to the form of the L2 in order to reach a higher level of explicitness using strategies that foster understanding.

3.7. Fostering language awareness in action

Language awareness as defined by James (1999) as a capacity of „having or gaining explicit knowledge about and skill in reflecting on and talking about one's own language(s), over which one hitherto has had a degree of control and about which one has also a related set of intuitions" (p. 102). It seems reasonable to use the learners' environment and incidentally acquired lexical items to raise their awareness.

Situation 5: Subject area – geography. Students draw a map of the Hundred Acres Wood.

- 1 T: żeby narysować mapę musimy znać kierunki mamy...
(*to draw a map we need to know the directions we have got*)
- 2 T | Ls: wschód zachód północ południe (*east west north south*)
- 3 T: a dlaczego tu mamy literki N S E i W?
(*but why have we got here letters N S E and W*)
- 4 L1: Bo to jest po angielsku? (*because it's in English?*)
- 5 T: Tak to są pierwsze litery nazw kierunków czyli...?
(*yes they are the first letters of names of the directions so...*) [POINTS AT THE LETTERS]
- 6 Ls: north south east west
- 7 T: To są takie międzynarodowe oznaczenia i musimy je znać
(*these are international symbols and we have to know them*)

The above exchange was recorded during an activity that is a part of content area focusing on naming directions and reading a map and, as such, is an inherent part of lower primary integrated subjects curriculum delivered in L1. The intention of move 3 is to raise the students' awareness of the international nature of some linguistic symbols. The teacher made it clear on many other occasions as well that it is important for her that the learners understand the elements of English used in a variety of every day contexts that go unnoticed if not drawn particular attention to.

In its natural form language occurs in context. Introducing learners to isolated items of the system deprives them of the necessary cues, and thus, makes the process of decoding the meaning harder. The author of the present study believes that contextualizing linguistic input is primarily the instructor's responsibility. Regardless of the course book used, it is the teacher who can create a comprehensible context for the students using the knowledge that is specific for this one and only educational environment shared by the learners and their practitioner.

3.8. Contextualizing linguistic input in action

A classroom is a specific context for communication. However hard the teacher may try to make it resemble real life interaction, the artificiality of the situation is inevitable. It seems that, especially at lower stages of education, the likeness of classroom discourse to genuine communication is questionable. Attempts to create situations that involve elements of real life exchanges are, therefore, desirable.

Situation 6: Routine of asking for milk.

The school subject to this research took part in a nationwide project of promoting healthy lifestyle. Within the framework of this project students were offered milk that came in different flavors. This everyday experience was used effectively to practice functional language.

- 1 T: zapraszam pojedynczo do mnie.
come to me one by one
- 2 Ss: [LINE UP IN FRONT OF THE DESK]
- 3 T: can I (.)
- 4 S1: can I have milk
- 5 T: can I have milk...
- 6 S1: please (.) can I have milk, please?
- 7 T: what kind of milk?
- 10 S1: vanilla (.) can I have milk vanilla, please?
- 11 T: can I have... vani...
- 12 S1: can I have vanilla milk, please?
- 13 T: here you are (.)
- 14 S1: thank you

The strongest point of this discourse is its real life effect. Learning functional phrases by the students is immediately followed by the intended result. The same way students are encouraged to ask for fresh fruit and vegetables delivered to the school and distributed among children.

The last principle in this group concerns integration on the level of language skills. The natural process of communication involves a number of skills and language components used simultaneously. Focusing on separate skills creates

an artificial condition in which the natural language behaviour is hampered and overall development made more difficult. As Kumaravadivelu (2006) emphasizes, “as we learn from the whole-language movement, language knowledge and language ability are best developed when language is learned and used holistically” (p. 206).

3.9. Integrating language skills in action

The main concept behind the notion of holistic teaching is integration. As Brinton, Snow and Wesche (1989) have observed, when presenting various subject areas together, more opportunities are created for the learners to notice the links and “by appreciating these links, students develop a stronger grasp of subject matter, a deeper purpose for learning and a greater ability to analyze situations in a holistic manner” (as cited in Farrell & Jacobs, 2010, p. 45).

The understanding of the fact that language is an essential element in all subject teaching led to creating the concept of *language across curriculum*. There is obviously a strong interdependency between language competence and success in learning other subjects

Situation 7: Subject area – arts and crafts. Students make posters with different materials.

- | | | |
|---|-----|--|
| 1 | T: | [SHOWS A WOODEN BIRD] It is made of... |
| 2 | Ls: | wood |
| 3 | T: | [SHOWS A SPOON] |
| 4 | Ls: | it is made of metal |
| 5 | T: | [SHOWS A HANDBAG] |
| 6 | Ls: | it is made of (.) |
| 7 | T: | leather |
| 8 | Ls: | leather |

The final three macrostrategies in this framework deal with the socio-cultural aspect of L2 learning. They suggest the instructor should (8) *promote learner autonomy*; (9) *ensure social relevance*; and (10) *raise cultural consciousness*. Underlying the eighth principle is the belief that language learning is primarily an autonomous activity and thus learners should be equipped with metacognitive, cognitive, social and affective strategies to take control over and responsibility for their own process of learning.

3.10. Promoting learner autonomy in action

Autonomy defined by Benson (2001, p. 47) as “the capacity to take control of one’s own learning” is a rarity in formal instruction contexts and especially at the early stages of education. However, children tend to be creative users of

language and may construct their own utterances based on a small sample of input treating it as an element of play. In situation 8 the learners are preparing to stage a simple story they have heard in small groups.

Situation 8: Subject area – drama. Students prepare to stage a story.

- 1 S1: giraffe, giraffe the lion is coming
- 2 S2: she can't hear
- 3 S3: hello elephant...
- 4 S2: can you tell giraffe...
- 5 S3: can you tell giraffe the lion is coming?
- 6 S4: [WHISPERS] ja na końcu powiem thank you very much parrot!
(at the end I will say)

In the above interaction the creative element occurs in move (6) when the learner decides to add her own utterance to the story. Although the drama activity requires children to reenact a text, student 4 takes control of the situation by modifying the original story and making it her own.

Since a language learning environment is not limited to the classroom, but is situated in a much broader educational, social, cultural, and political contexts, it is crucial to be aware of all variables shaping the pedagogic situation. Understanding this broad context and its influence on the students, teachers should work to ensure that the extralinguistic knowledge that students bring to the classroom is used and shared in order to present a variety of personal perspectives.

Language, even a foreign one, is always a medium of content. Young learners are very sensitive to meaning. Situation 9 below describes a situation in which the instructor modifies her pedagogic discourse to adjust to the personal needs of her student.

3.11. Ensuring social relevance in action

Situation 9: Subject area – social education.

- 1 T: look at my photo what's this? [SHOWS A PRINTED IMAGE OF A CAT]
- 2 Ss: cat
- 3 T: yes it's my cat I've got a cat her name is Luna
[WRITES THE TWO SENTENCES ON THE BOARD]
- 4 T: teraz każdy narysuje swoje zwierzątko albo takie które chciałby mieć
(now you will draw your animal or one you would like to have)
- 5 Ss: [DRAW THEIR ANIMALS THEN PRESENT THEM IN FRONT OF THE CLASS]
- 6 T: ready? Małgosia
- 7 S1: I've got a dog his name is Brutus
- 8 L2: I've got a... proszę pani jak się mówi myszokoczek?
(miss how do you say gerbil?)

- 9 T: gerbil
 10 S2: I've got a gerbil her name is Pusia
 11 S3: jak to się pisze? (*how do you write it?*)
 12 T: [WRITES 'GERBIL' ON THE BOARD]

In this context the teacher chooses to let her student produce a genuine utterance that is meaningful for the child, rather than focus on the form. This decision is followed by a positive reaction of other students who decide to include this word as a part of their lexicon. The educational situation is used flexibly to ensure relevance of the material she teaches for real interests of the learners.

3.12. Raising cultural consciousness in action

Culture is an integral part of any language and cannot be excluded from the curriculum. As Brown (2007) puts it, "A language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture" (p. 189). A classroom where the foreign language is integrated with subject knowledge provides optimal conditions for the introduction of cultural elements that address young learners' natural curiosity. Along with the requirements of national as well as European educational policy, elements of foreign culture should be presented in comparison with the native language traditions. Lower primary students in the observed context are eager to participate in activities that involve their general knowledge of Polish customs and enrich it with elements of English culture. The exchange quoted below is an example of a lesson on culture involving Christmas traditions that aims to raise the awareness of diversity in customs.

Situation 10: Subject area – culture.

- 1 T: what's this?
 2 S1: christmas cracker
 3 T: to jest tradycja polska czy angielska? (*is this a Polish or English tradition?*)
 4 S1: English
 5 T: i co to jest takiego? (*and what is it?*)
 6 S1: taki niby cukierek i się to ciągnie i wypada jakiś prezent
 (*it's like candy and you pull it and some gift falls out*)

The integrated character of the curriculum allows for this activity to be a part of a culture education area rather than foreign language class. This shifts students' attention from linguistic means to cultural content helping them to internalize the concepts rather than treating them as mere vehicles for language learning. It seems that in the observed lower primary classroom the CLIL form of instruction

made it possible for the teacher to apply all the postmethod principles and create conditions for a more natural and effective language acquisition.

4. Conclusions and implications

Kumaravadivelu's (2003) macrostrategies are designed as guiding principles based on current theoretical, empirical and experiential knowledge of L2 learning and teaching practice. Thus, they are potentially applicable to all possible educational contexts. Since formal foreign language instruction is an important part of the curriculum in largely monolingual countries such as Poland, its application in this context merits interest. In a vast majority of European schools pupils start learning the first foreign language between the ages of 6 and 9 (Eurydice, 2017, p. 10). In many cases the additional language is obligatorily English and even in the contexts where it is not compulsory, it is very often predominant. The tendency to lower the onset age of EFL learning has brought about a necessity to adjust methods of instruction to the new, younger learners. The introduction of EFL instruction into this new sector needs to be in line with general policy of formal lower primary education in a particular national context. In Poland, lower primary instruction covers three initial years of formal schooling and refers to students aged between 7 and 9. During this time students have one teacher that delivers an integrated curriculum in the form of daily topics which are, in turn, organized in weekly topic areas closely linked with socio-cultural and environmental cycle of the year. Within a given topic area, the instructor covers issues from a wide variety of subjects including, mathematics, science, arts, music, physical education, etc. The only subjects that are typically excluded from this integrated program are religious education and the foreign language. These are taught by specialist teachers who meet the class twice a week for a forty-five-minute lesson.

It seems that the structure of Polish lower primary curriculum offers perfect conditions for integrating the foreign language with content. Such a solution, though promoted by the authorities, is a rarity due to the shortage of professionals with appropriate qualifications and internal schools' policies. Therefore, in a vast majority of lower primary contexts, English is taught by specialist teachers whose professional training rarely if ever includes working with young learners and who are often required to instruct lower primary classes against their preferences. As subject teachers, they also follow a separate curriculum that typically has nothing in common with the topical areas covered by the general lower primary instructor and so the knowledge gained in content subjects and English do not overlap. This lack of topical correspondence, infrequent exposition of the language and often mismatched expectations of the specialist teachers,

pose a threat to the whole process of lower primary foreign language instruction effectiveness. It seems doubtful that in such conditions a foreign language teacher is able to apply the above-described principles of postmethod pedagogy. In order to implement all the macrostrategies in the context of a lower primary classroom, a different philosophy of foreign language instruction needs to be adopted - one that perceives the foreign language as an integral element of the general lower primary curriculum and allows for it to be closely connected with the subject content covered at this level of formal schooling. The new regulation of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (Rozporządzenie MNiSW, 2019) is a big step in the right direction. In accordance with its provisions, elements of TEFL have been introduced into study programs of pedagogy faculties in Polish universities. In order to obtain teaching qualifications certificate, students will now need to study for five years instead of three, which allows pedagogy students more hours to develop their own EFL language skills also included in the study program. All this will, however, not be enough if the future lower primary teachers are not made aware of the opportunities they can create in their classrooms by using appropriate principles and macrostrategies which will allow children to acquire elements of English much more effectively than through separate EFL lessons. It seems that early years educators are, on the whole, much better equipped and more suitable for the job of teaching English to young learners. Specialist English teachers, though arguably more competent in the language itself, rarely choose to work with the youngest learners. They typically lack the interest, experience and calling to work with young children that pedagogy students start with. It is, therefore, important that lower primary educators receive support from EFL experts in order to provide the most suitable conditions for a balanced development of all skills acquired during the lower primary education period, including English.

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