

## **Editors' Note.**

### **Moving towards integrative learning experiences**

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This thematic issue of the Bulletin of the Transilvania University encompasses the contributions of the authors who have answered our call for a cognizant analysis of the state-of-the-art of English teaching at a time when educational schools of thought have weakened leaving room for personal approaches to teaching English. And it is not that personal touch in teaching does not matter, but teaching is too important to allow experiments and personal inconsistencies to dictate in education. Against a disconsolate background where the latest teaching approach, the Communicative one, has attracted most appreciations, the emergence of a unifying approach is desirable as it is likely to uniformize teaching and learning. It goes without saying that uniformity is not preferred to the detriment of effectiveness, which is why the identification of an effective unifying approach to teaching English is the objective of this demarche.

The editors' supposition is that an important remainder of the Communicative approach has attracted sufficient acceptance so as to be integrated into the concoction of newer teaching approaches, such as Content-based teaching and Task-based teaching. None of them has risen to the level of the Communicative approach in terms of researchers' support, books written about, teaching material produced, etc., but each of them separately has pointed out the formidable contribution brought about by the idea that teaching might bear much better results on condition teaching skills is not dealt with separately, but in integrative activities. In ESP (English for Special Purposes) and CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) integrated teaching has majorly been brought to the fore by highlighting its gratifying addition to the efficiency of the learning by integrating the teaching of language into the teaching of English by means of authentic materials. The advantages of this approach are multiple ranging from the exposure of learners to authentic materials (written or video) produced by native speakers, thus avoiding the artificiality of non-natively produced materials to a language embedded teaching where teaching language happens naturally in the context

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when the situation may appear. It thus removes grammar- or vocabulary-dedicated classes which focus on topics in an artificial way, without providing authentic contexts for teachers to explain on and for the learners to learn from.

The articles in this thematic issue relate to the topic of integrated teaching from a variety of perspectives which complement to offer a more comprehensive, though not exhaustive, capture of the integrated teaching approach.

The first article authored by Carol Almajali calls attention to the relevance of using authentic texts when teaching English, which, the author claims to positively impact not only English learning, but also the cultural awareness of Jordanian learners of English. As proof for her stand, the author reports on a piece of research that she conducted and which proves beyond any doubt that learners do progress when immersed in an all-English speaking environment where authentic English materials are used for teaching. Almajali stresses one of the findings of her research which supports the idea that authentic materials used in teaching bears positive results on the children by the claim that she makes that learners imitate the native speakers of English in their attempt at improving their own English.

The authors of the second article state what may have been only guessed before, namely, that learning in present times is hardly ever limited to the school environment only since learners' exposure to English has reached an all-time height. Running against general perceptions that blame games and game playing for disrupting young learners' attention and negatively impacting school acquisitions, Arnold-Stein and Hortobágyi test the impact of playing games in English on the vocabulary acquisition of secondary school learners. Moreover, the authors have measured the games' impact on learners' communication openness, and they conclude that games that presuppose interaction between participants contribute markedly to their willingness to communicate in English. Arnold-Stein and Hortobágyi lay emphasis on the contribution that online games have on school learners unlike traditional games where interaction is reduced and cooperation is limited. Though unexpected, integrating games into learning proves to be a key to success by prolonged exposure to playing online games in English.

In the third article, Violeta Ichim reviews a plethora of teaching approaches and dwells on those where skills are integrated in a holistic approach such as penpalling which encourages oral or written communication over long distances or flipped teaching which stands out by its practical immersive quality that encourages learners to discover data from other school field in English. CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) is an approach which the author brings forth thanks to its integrative approach to learning foreign languages. The author italicizes the fact that languages are used in this approach as media to a goal which is learning in a field other than foreign languages. Mathematics, physics, biology, informatics

make perfect environments as school subjects for the learners to accumulate data in that subject by means of English. Relieved of the burden of being a subject in itself, any foreign language, English included, obtains the status of something that is already known and actively contributes to the acquisition of other pieces of knowledge.

Alexandra Stan contributes with a practical demonstration of how integrated teaching tends to teaching English. She exemplifies with a course outline that she created herself for her forestry students bearing in mind that their main interest is in their fields not in English which they perceive as not one of their main preoccupations. Relying on Coyle's definition of CLIL, Stan designs the course by focusing on content, language and cognition in order to help learners acquire domain-specific knowledge in English. The author exemplifies with types of activities that cover the four skills, highlighting her being keen on using authentic materials selected from encyclopedias or internet pages. Without being idealistic, the author mentions the drawbacks of the approach and underlines the joint effort of both teacher and learner for the ultimate purpose to be attained.

The fifth article authored by Szabó Noémi and Failasofah Failasofah brings into focus another perspective on integrated teaching by analysing the way in which the teachers of English and German switch between the languages they teach and their mother tongue which is the learners' mother tongue, as well. The authors have been interested in *if* and *how* the teachers of English and German teaching local minority school learners in Hungary engage with their mother tongue either in order to check comprehension or to compare the structures of English to those of their mother tongue. Running against the recommendation of the Communicative approach which favours an immersive environment for learners of English, the question of whether to use the mother tongue in teaching or not has gained its admirers and its sceptics. The findings of the article are the more surprising when the teachers of English more than the teachers of German are reported to use the mother tongue in teaching.

The sixth in this thematic issue points out the progression of teaching approaches that has led to the initiation of the integrated approach with special emphasis on the Communicative approach which brought into discussion the all-English communication and the organization of learning based on skills. The article is careful to showcase the differences between the Communicative approach and the approaches that are based on the integrated teaching strategy: ESP, CLIL, Content-based and Task-based teaching. The authors Cristina Vâlcea and Pavel Ecaterina illustrate the concept of integrated teaching with examples from medicine and engineering (at the tertiary level of education) where English is presented as a tool to the end of exposing learners to as much authentic

information as possible from their fields of interest. Though it might be claimed that the approach is adaptable to the university level only, the authors bring proof in support of the fact that it could be used at all level of education by adapting the teaching context to the learners' age and experience. Last but not least, the authors touch on the concept of integrated teaching in relation to integrated skill teaching identifying advantageous ways of relating skills and of safeguarding knowledge transfer between skills.

The last article in this thematic issue broadens even further the idea of integrated teaching by pinpointing the major advantages of making technology, robotics in this case, part of teaching. The integration of robotics into teaching, besides its irresistible attraction for learners, plays a major role in the development of the children's collaborative skills and construction of narratives as the authors Camilla Monaco and Tiziana Ceol have demonstrated. As technology is naturally handled by children, teaching by means of technology is an asset which should be exploited to the immediate benefit of the instructional process. The experimental nature of the authors' research is a proof of the interest they take in teaching as a process which adapts not only to learners' needs, but also to the technological advances of the period. The gradual development and testing of i-Code demonstrates the challenge that producing a teaching tool adequate to learners poses to developers who are highly motivated to create an effective teaching/learning tool.