Peer assessment in ULPGC on line CLIL course

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Abstract.

Introduction to Content Language and Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a 60 hour on line course offered by Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria within its extra-curricular courses. During three years we have had 76 students whose final assessment has been to create a CLIL lesson which was evaluated by their peers. The tool for the peer assessment has been the Moodle platform; forums. The assessment was guided by a list of questions they had to apply when evaluating the lessons, but the replies from the CLIL lesson creators did not have any predetermined structure or guidelines to be followed. We have analysed the assessments and replies by grouping them according to content similarities. The use of peer assessment has been chosen as the most reliable evaluation tool since 80% course participants were experienced school teachers and therefore knowledgeable. Also, our intention was to enhance the reflective practice as well. The results of this study show that Moodle forum peer assessment is a valuable tool in on line courses resulting in a beneficial and effective reciprocal feedback.

Keywords: CLIL, Moodle platform, forum, reflection, feedback, teaching and learning

1   Introduction and motivation

There is no doubt that in our daily lives we learn from each other and mostly we learn from people who have similar knowledge like us or shared interests. It can be said that this way of learning is an informal way of learning; therefore we have given to peer learning/assessment a clear structure and evaluating features. In this case students had a university degree and/or were about to finish their university degrees in foreign languages and/or in translation and interpret-

ing and in primary school teaching. These characteristics made this group of students homogenous and appropriate to carry out the study of analysing whether on line peer assessment is an effective way of learning or not.

Students of any age compare their class notes and study together in and outside the classroom. Not only they study together, but also they assess each other´s performance. The main reason behind that is that sharing and assessing what they learnt are one of the most efficient ways of learning. By checking what somebody knows you learn at the same time. The importance of peer learning in higher education courses has been studied by Boud et al. (2014) whose book answers the following questions (2)

- What is peer learning and what is it good for?
- How can it be best fostered?
- What issues need to be considered by teachers and students?

This paper tries to answer these questions by analysing the forum contributions of 76 students during a 60 hour course in the Moodle platform. We have gathered the comments on produced CLIL lessons and subsequent replies by the creators of those lessons. This activity has been planned in all 3 courses as a compulsory part of their final assessment mark   (for extracurricular courses at Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria there are only two final marks; pass and fail). The assessment has been guided by the teachers in order to give a clear structure, here are the questions which were included within the course guidelines and grouped in three main topics: context, teaching content and activities:

- Is the context clear? Is the material appropriate for the specified level? Is it relevant?

- Is it realistic? Is it motivating for the pupils?

- Have all the skills been integrated? Do they follow a logical order or a sequence? Are they interesting? Are they interactive /original? Can they been enlarged upon and how?

Students had to produce a single CLIL lesson of a subject of their choosing by proving the following features: context (subject, level, school year/age) teaching content (for example to solve the problem with multiplications, design (creating or adapting materials and activities that integrate the four skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking), and the last slide had to include the resources and links used to prepare the presentation.

The main or dual aim(s) of having peer assessment was/were clearly expressed in the course guidelines and assessment criteria; to be able to analyse and evaluate work done by the Moodle platform classmates and to receive feedback not only by the course teachers, but also by their peers. This made the experience more valuable for the evaluators and for the evaluated students since it is mutually beneficial, Boude and al. (2014) label this experience interdependent or mutual learning. Students by using peer assessment collaborate in forming new common knowledge and receive feedback. By using peer learning/assessment students become more responsible for their own learning and feel like members of a university community where their opinions do count. The communication among students who assess each other relies on mutual

or reciprocal experience and thus making them sort of experts for they share the same previous knowledge, the same conundrums when facing the tasks and same doubts when fulfilling tasks. Maybe the most important factors in this case are the emotion and motivation.

Technology as a tool can help to boost motivation among students, according to Comey and Stephenson (2011) learner support and dialogue are essential especially in an on line environment:

Many of the detailed accounts focused on benefits for learners, such as increased understanding, closer engagement with content, learner motivation, collaboration, skills development, increased learning and greater efficiency, and detriments such as technical problems, learner motivation, isolation, learner readiness and contact with teacher. (38)

Peer assessment/learning and support can be useful tools to diminish the sense of loneliness or being on his/her that most on line learners suffer from. We can even confirm that peer learning/assessment is a king of collaborative learning therefore it implies cognitive and social processes: Learning is the key concept not the education. The teacher is a more of facilitator, negotiating the learning and education with learners and handing over more control. The group determines group roles and it is the personal sense of the learning that signifies collaborative learning. (Boud et al. 2014:7). In our case we did not ask students to assess every single CLIL lesson, they have analysed only three lessons that they have considered the most interesting ones, leaving some lessons not being commented at all. This situation has caused some discomfort among those whose lessons have not been evaluated, but the course teacher did assess every single lesson posted by the course par-

ticipant using the same criteria given to the students and assessment tools. This decision has been proven to be the most appropriate one for those students whose lesson were not assessed appreciated the feedback.

Benbunan-Fich et al (2005) mention the concept of Education as conversation coined by Brufee in 1999: Education initiates into conversation and by virtue of that conversation initiates use of thought. (113:199 in 2014:18). Collaborative learning has the power to eliminate the differences between sometimes wide gap between students and teachers. The theory that supports this kind of learning is constructivism which basically means comparing new experiences to previous ones and then modifying those experiences. In our case study students had lot in common: similar degrees, years of teaching experience and the wish to improve their methodology in their classrooms. When they analysed the lessons they have used their previous knowledge and applied the new one learnt during the course and formed a new experience all together.

2   Case study and results

The online dialogue was the tool that we have chosen; Moodle forums for all the aspects of course. Firstly, because all of us then had access to all the produced lessons and comments not only for the last final assessment of the course but for the rest of assessments throughout the on line course.: Instructors and course designers, for instance, cannot as-

sume that learners will be able to jump into group discussions, argue in online debates, or answer questions posed online, just because they are told to participate (Bonk, Angeli and Hara, 1998; Funaro, 1999; Mason, 1998 cited in Benbunan-Fich et al 2005: 39). To achieve full satisfaction of the students and to make sure that the structure and content are clear we have created a guided dialogue with no or very little room for improvisation. Our goal was as well to develop reflective practitioners and critical thinkers therefore we did not give any guidelines for the replies to peer assessment feedback. There are different paradigm grids that explain this process of collaborative learning in our case we have used the north- west quadrant which consists of a dialogue, involvement, support, control and teacher involvement. The main characteristic would be that it is teacher determined and task specific.

The Moodle platform was the tool chosen to teach and assess the course content. Moodle is an open-source course management

system (CMS) created to be portable and modular and it is used by the Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria as a support tool for face to face learning and as the only tool for on line learning. It was created basing itself on the constructivist theory: Due to its flexibility it can also be used in more outcome-oriented classroom environments. Moodle has many features expected from an e-learning platform including Forums, content management (Resources), Quizzes with different kinds of questions and several activity modules. (Zenha-Rela and Carvalho: 2006).

According to Florián et al. 2010 peer assessment is both formative and summative, since it summarises the learning, in our case putting into

practice what they have learnt and formative for it has feedback and encourages the learners´ control over their own learning process.

Collaborative e-learning is increasingly appealing to students and educational institutions as a learning approach (Lambropoulos et al. 2012 cited in Barra et al. 2014, 103- 104). Almost every learning center or institution has a Learning Management System (LMS) (e.g. Moodle or Blackboard). These LMSs allow teachers to introduce different activities from simple to very complex ones and to use multimedia and collaborative methods in the learning process. The use of LMS has been proven to be motivating and useful when teaching and assessing on line work. The main reason is the interaction between students and students and teachers. Below you can find some contributions done by our students in years 2011, 2012 and 2013 reproduced verbatim. Students have often used words of encouragement before they answered the questions that we have provided them to assess the CLIL lessons:

- The best part of assessment is that we can learn each other. First of all, thank you for your work. My comments are divided in three sections:…

- Apart from that I recognise taht it i a graet work because everybody should styudy something in English, and you have work a lot on making this topic accessible to the English language.

- I am a really impressed wit the work you have done. It is very very well organised and well explained.

- I have to admit that I have enjoyed a lot the presentatation. I think tat is a perfect topic for that age as children like "fan-

tastic" thing, I mean fantastic because nowadays we do not
see pirates as they were years ago.

- You have done a great work! Congratulations!

- I find your lesson very useful and interesting.

- I have really enjoyed your lesson. I really like the topic you
  have choosen, The Modern Age is such an exciting topic for
  the thrid cycle.

- I've seen your presentation and I've to say that it striked me
  the fact that you've chosen Geography area. I've never seen
  a CLIL Geography lesson before so I think it's very origina.

- I agree with Lara that you've done a smart work.

- I think you've done a great work in relation to creativity. In
  almost all the activities you include an aspect related to
  creativity and open-mind.

- I would like to comment on your highly interesnting lesson.

- Fist of all, congratulations, it looks motivating, well orga-
  nized and clear! I have never taught science and I found it
  entertaining

- However, it is a very good presentation of a teaching unit or
  prepared for more sessions. It's very good job. I congratu-
  late you.

- On the other hand, I think the slides have to much infor-
  mation, and it may seem boring for the students (for your
  level!).Maybe if you had used more animations or videos, it
  would be better.

- However, I would change the order the activities are organized, I mean, I would have finished with the debate because is when all students have enough vocabulary to express their opinions and because they have seen how a specific organism acts and they can generalize that to others.

As can be seen from the above examples, students have decided that they could not only answer the questions, they felt that words of encouragement were necessary before they started to analyse the lessons according to pre- established guidelines. Although almost all of them have started the comments with motivating words they did have some negative comments and feedback. These were accepted as constructive feedback by all of them and were highly valued, as one student has expressed:

Thank you so much for your kind comments on my CLIL lesson. Now that I have finished it I realized about the many mistakes I made and one of them was I should have contextualize better.

As an outcome of peer assessment we have more efficient and mutually beneficial learning. Teacher´s comments on the other hand have not been replied or commented by any of the course participants. This Moodle forum was not the only one set during the course, but it was by furthest the one where everybody has participated. When asked to participate in the suggestion forum for forthcoming on line CLIL course once again we can notice how students have appreciated the peer assessment:

I think it has been really interesting the course and I have learned a lot with my other classmates. To improve this course is doing it face to

face, because I think that as future teachers we need to know how to make s CLIL session.

This contribution has been chosen as an example of all the contributions since it sums up the need of student to have some face to face lessons and the paramount of having been assessed by their peers. The question that arises in this debate post is the one that still has not been solved related to the research of on line learning:

Is the effect of interaction idiosyncratic to the person, or is there some type of interaction that engenders more learning from a student. Is there an optimal amount of interaction between and among the faculty, students and content and does technology enable or change the quality of interaction. (Meyer,2014:50).

If we analyse the reaction by the previously mentioned student we can see that the interaction on line sometimes results in feeling of loneliness, despite the fact that there was a lot of interaction in the course debates between 200- 300 in each course.

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