Empowering teacher agency in the Finnish CLIL context

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For 2016, the Finnish national core curriculum has recognized the importance of language innovation and integration in education and maintains that every teacher is a language teacher. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is not a new trend in teaching, yet it is one that has become considerably popular recently. CLIL is a teaching methodology that regards the acquisition of linguistic skills at the same time as content knowledge by integrating a foreign language (L2) into the teaching of a curricular subject. Although CLIL offers Finnish teachers an opportunity for classroom-based professional development, teachers have experienced significant challenge when integrating content with language learning. The purpose of this Ph.D.-research is to support teacher development at pre-service and in-service levels by seeking better understanding of the professional, relational and pedagogical resources and constraints teachers encounter in content and foreign/English language integrated learning and teaching. Teacher agency is conceived as the product of the dynamic inter-relationship among types of agency experienced at the sociocultural, relational and classroom level. One kindergarten teacher and thirteen primary school CLIL teachers working in Finland were interviewed, and thematic analysis was used in data analysis. It is anticipated that this study will contribute to a more elaborate understanding of professional agency and how it is related to continuous learning at work. Consequently, practical suggestions can be made to inform and develop teacher education and CLIL teaching practices at the level of the classroom, the school and the wider community. The aim of the presentation is to introduce a more encompassing understanding of professional agency as well as aspects that may enable or obstruct learning at work, particularly in light of the grass-roots approach teachers have taken to implementing CLIL in Finnish schools.

Keywords: resources and constraints, teacher agency, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).