WelComm: Communication Skills for Integration of Migrants
Erasmus+ Programme 2014

DIDACTIC APPROACH

1. The Didactic Approach

The WelComm didactic approach refers to the main documents written by the the European Commission about language learning in early age in migration context:

1. *Education and Migration: strategies for integrating migrant children in European schools and societies. A synthesis of research findings for policy-makers* (2008);
2. *Results of the consultation on the education of children from a migrant background* (2009);
3. *Good practice in Early Language in pre-primary settings* (2010);
4. *Language Learning at Pre-primary School Level: Making It Efficient and Sustainable. A Policy Handbook* (2011).

From these documents, which provide guidelines and suggestions not only for policy-makers but for teachers and researchers as well, emerge that:

- competence in the national language is a precondition for integration and education attainment;
- second language learning should happen as early as possible, preferably in preschool age;
- early language learning activities can be an enriching experience competences such as comprehension, expression, communication and problem-solving, enabling children to interact successfully with peers and adults;
- it is necessary to address the learning needs of both parents and children;
- involving the migrant communities is an important means to provide support for children.

Moreover, in the report *Early Language Learning in Italian Pre-primary School* (November 2014), most teachers define the type of activities implemented in their foreign language classes as game-based. The most cited ones are: role-play; bingo; language games; nursery rhymes; musical games; dance; drama; hands-on-activities; narratives; fairy tales; use of flashcards; use of puppets; use of finger friends; use of toys; iconic mediators; posters.

Therefore, we can state that the keywords suggested by the European Commission in the fields of early language learning – language competence for integration, needs of both parents and children, presence of migrant communities, game-based activities – perfectly correspond to the concept, the contents and the tasks of the WelComm project.

1.1. The Affective-Humanistic Approach and the Multimedia Learning

The WelComm Multimedia Learning Kit adopts the affective-humanistic approach (Rogers, 1969; Gordon, 1991), based on:

- attention to the communication needs of learners;

- importance of language as a tool for self-expression and social interaction (with particular attention to the socio-cultural,   intercultural and extra-linguistic factors);

- concept of learning as a constructive process during which learners must be actively engaged in the construction of their knowledge;

- awareness and appreciation of differences among learners resulting from their personal history, their social environment,   their specific interests, their life and school goals, their cognitive and learning styles.

The affective-humanistic approach involves several methods among which we chose the Total Physical Response (TPR) and the game-based activities.

The TPR (Asher, 1969) is popular with beginners and young learners. It is based on the coordination of language and physical movement: teachers give commands to learners in the target language, and learners respond with whole-body actions. In this method, listening and responding (with actions) serves two purposes: as a means of quickly recognizing meaning in the language being learned and a means of passively learning the structure of the language itself. Grammar is not taught explicitly, but it can be learned from the language input.

Finally, TPR is a valuable way to learn vocabulary, especially idiomatic   terms, phrasal verbs, ect.

In the method based on ludic activities (Piaget, 1945; Vygotskij,1978; Freddi, 1990; Mollica,2011), game is considered as a global and holistic experience integrating the following components:

- affective (fun, pleasure);

- social (team, group, compliance with rules);

- motor and psycho-motor (movement, coordination, balance);

- cognitive (developing of play strategies, learning rules);

- emotional (tension, challenge, freedom, fear);

- cultural (specific rules and procedures for reaction);

- cross-cultural.

The game-based activities must act on what Vygotsky (1978: 86) defines as the *"zone of proximal development",* that is *"the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent*

problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with   more capable peers".

On one hand the game aims at providing learners both a direct help through a significant relationship and an indirect help through a cooperative way of working; on the other one it aims at achieving a significant learning, to develop a sense of self-efficacy, to improve self-esteem and social skills (language for integration).

Moreover, the game highlights the evolutionary stages of child in his/her psycho-affective, cognitive and social growth, according to Piaget's classification of games (1945):

- *functional games* (repetitions of words, phrases, lyrics, rhymes, poems, songs, etc.; compositions; matching words/images, texts/images; cloze; motion games ; games related to problem solving; crosswords; acrostics; anagrams; word searches; symbolic games);

- *symbolic games* (miming; singing combined with gestures; rhymes combined with rhythm and gestures; transcoding, to pass from verbal code to iconic or motion ones; poster, collage; comics; memory games; puzzles; role-play);

- *rule-based games* (information gap; opinion gap ; traditional games whose rules can be the subject of intercultural analysis; dominoes of syllables, words, etc.; card games).

Finally, in developing the WelComm Multimedia Learning Kit, the benefits coming from the affective-humanistic approach will be combined with the seven principles of multimedia learning (Mayer, 2009) according a learning process pointed out in the figure 1:

1. Multimedia Principle: students learn better from words and pictures than from words alone.

2. Spatial Contiguity Principle: students learn better when corresponding words and pictures are presented near rather than far from each other on the page or screen.

3. Temporal Contiguity Principle: students learn better when corresponding words and pictures are presented simultaneously rather than successively.

4. Coherence Principle: students learn better when extraneous words, pictures, and sounds are excluded rather than included.

5. Modality Principle: students learn better form animation and narration than from animation and on-screen text.

6. Redundancy Principle: students learn better form animation and narration than from animation, narration and on-screen text.

7. Individual Differences Principle: design effects are stronger for low-knowledge learners than for high-knowledge learners and for high-spatial learners rather than for low-spatial learners.
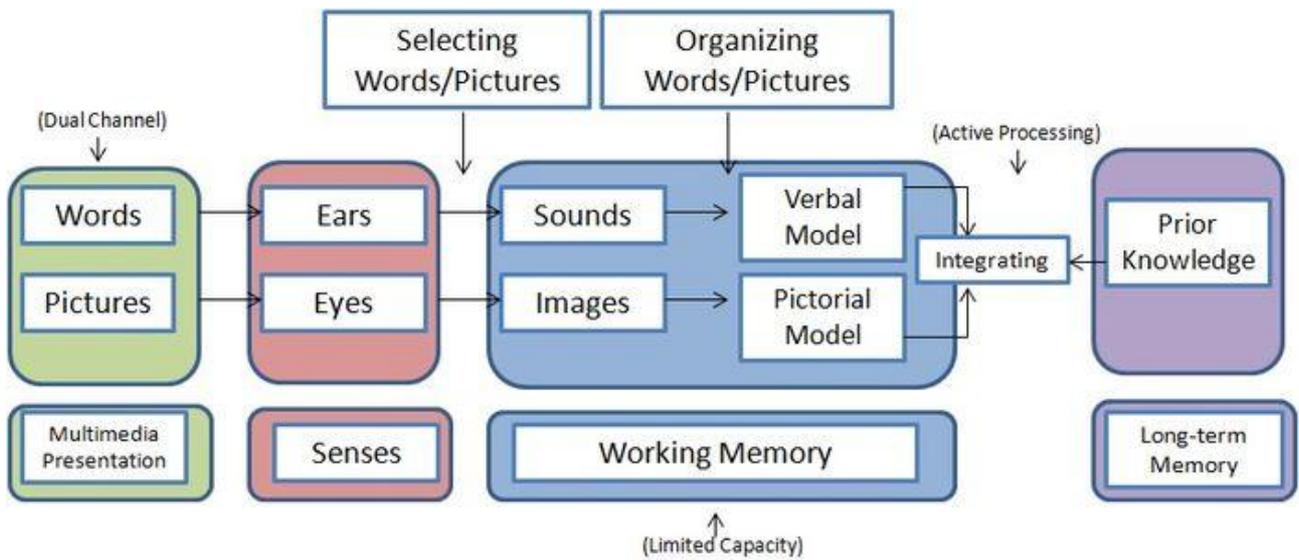
Figure 1 – The learning process in the Multimedia Learning

References

1. Asher J.J., The Total Physical Response Approach to Second Language Learning. *The Modern Language Journal*, 53, 3-17, 1969.

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5. Mollica A., *Ludolinguistica e Glottodidattica*, Guerra Edizioni, 2011.

6. Piaget, J., *Play, dreams and imitation in childhood, Heinemann*, 1945.

7. Rogers C., *Freedom to learn*, Merrill, 1969.

8. Vygotskij L., *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, Harvard University Press, 1978.