

Where is CLIL taking us?

¿Hacia dónde nos está llevando el CLIL?

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Abstract

CLIL is a chameleon which means different things to different contexts. It is generating a whole new ELT industry. So is this just a new fad or is it something seriously groundbreaking in education? This article explores the what, the why, the how and give a personal opinion. It will briefly explore the implications of CLIL on ELT materials and teacher training in the future.

Keywords:

CLIL, content and language integrated learning, ELT, English language teaching.

Resumen

CLIL es un concepto camaleónico que significa diferentes cosas en diferentes contextos y que está generando un nuevo sector de la enseñanza del inglés. ¿Se trata de una nueva moda o es en cambio algo seriamente innovador en educación? Este artículo explora el *qué*, el *por qué* y el *cómo* y da una opinión personal sobre estas cuestiones. En él se abordan brevemente las implicaciones del CLIL en los materiales y en la formación para la enseñanza del inglés en el futuro.

Palabras clave:

AICLE, enseñanza y aprendizaje integrado de contenido y lengua extranjera, enseñanza del inglés.

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The supposed purpose of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) is to lead to an integrated approach to teaching and learning, not just focusing on the language but on the educational process. CLIL is an «innovative methodological approach» which stretches far beyond language teaching as it aims to «develop proficiency in both the non-language subject and the language in which this is taught, attaching the same importance to each». This explanation of CLIL was given by Eurydice, the institutional network which links European Union institutions (Eurydice 2006).

This article is being written in order to attempt to understand the above and comprehend what impact this will have on teacher training and materials in the near future.

1. The *what*

The term ‘innovation’, implies something new and untried. Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010) have warned that innovation is «often messy, because it involves complex processes [and in the context of CLIL] a major rethink of how we teach what we teach».

So is this ‘innovative methodological approach’ the new educational bandwagon of the 21st Century with roots in the 20th Century? Is it a backlash against the apparent lack of success of its predecessor in the ELT (English Language Teaching) world, the ‘communicative language approach’? Surely we have reached the ‘post approach’ era? The key words here should be ‘methodological approach’, which suggests that it is the methods used in the approach that are the innovations.

Maley (in Deller & Price 2007) says that CLIL has become ‘»something of a cult movement» and although the text is about CLIL, the title is ‘Teaching Other Subjects Through English’ implying that even the publisher and authors were not convinced about using the acronym as a title.

Coyle et al (2010: 1) argue that CLIL is «an innovative fusion» of content and language, but do concede that learning content through another language is not new, even the Romans were doing it two thousand years ago! The difference between what has occurred before and now is that the «subject is not taught *in* a foreign language but *with* and *through* a foreign language» (Eurydice 2006: 8) which is supposed to be a novel way of learning content. So it would seem that the language is taught in parallel to the subject, using the subject as the context for the language. Mehisto, Marsh and Frigols (2008: 9) described CLIL as a «dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language».

Deller & Price (2007) say that CLIL is «entirely subject-led and the subject dictates what language support is needed (...) language is one part of the process, rather than an end in itself» and « it is assessed on subject knowledge». They usefully distinguish between the use of language in a CLIL class and a language class. In the latter language is the 'end product' and in the CLIL class they are the 'means of learning new information' as well as 'displaying an understanding of the subject being taught'. In their words, in CLIL language is 'a means to an end' rather than the 'end' itself.

So it would seem that CLIL is a method, where the role of English learning (or any other language which is used to teach the subject through) is 'acquired' (Krashen 2004) alongside a subject. The language component of teaching the subject comes from the needs of the subject, and not to comply with some invisible tick box of language functions or components. That is not to say that language functions or components are ignored but they are a by-product rather than 'the' product.

2. The *why*

The most compelling reason the writer can think for CLIL, is that as English becomes the lingua franca (Graddol, 2006) of the world that it could make communication between cultures easier, that is if one did CLIL in English. Coyle et al (2010: 9) do mention that CLIL is « not synonymous with English language learning and teaching» but it would appear that as there is a huge interest in learning English, this might just be semantics.

Deller & Price (2007) query claims that say that there are advantages of CLIL but do admit that an advantage for students could be that it is a preparation «for future study and the workplace where they are likely to need to operate in English» and for teachers that the «content is ready made». They also suggest that learning through English might be more motivating than learning the language for the sake of language learning.

So why has the teaching and learning of an additional/second/foreign language, and for the purpose of this article no distinction is being made between them, ventured into the realms of subject teaching? And what will be the impact on a) ELT materials and b) teacher training? This article will venture into the realms of the unknown and speculate.

3. The *how*

In order to understand the implications on ELT materials, one needs to get a grasp of the difference between what Cummins (1984) has termed as BICS (basic interpersonal

communicative skills) and CALP (cognitive academic language proficiency). Simplistically, BICS is the type of language you generally find in ELT (or second/additional language) coursebooks, CALP is what you find in subject coursebooks. Cummins (2000) suggests that in order for success in second language learning, a minimum threshold of first language cognitive/academic development is necessary. He also implies that if the threshold of cognitive proficiency is not reached, the learner may have difficulties achieving bilingual proficiency. But is this then the purpose of CLIL? Bilingualism? Is CLIL an attempt to motivate teachers and learners to learn another language by using it to teach another subject?

Calabrese and Rampone (2007) one of the first materials writers for CLIL, interestingly called their book 'Cross-curricular Resources for Young Learners' avoiding the term CLIL in the title but made it very clear in the 'purpose of this book' that it was written for CLIL. Their stance on the CLIL continuum could be called 'soft' as they suggest that one does not need to teach the whole subject in a foreign language but can select «some significant areas to be exploited and developed in a foreign language». What is encouraging is that they propose that the subject can be introduced in the mother tongue and then be 'expanded' in the foreign language and that this can be done the other way around. What is important for them is that CLIL is not a translation of activities from one language to the other but that «the activities in the two languages complement one another».

Pinter (2006) suggests that « some sort of integration between the rest of the curriculum and the foreign language seems sensible for a great many reasons» and a plus seems to be that «the underlying message[is] that everything can be talked about in both the first and the foreign language». Pinter gives examples of where CLIL has been implemented, including Finland where it was introduced gradually from the age of nine and another study, which looked at Chinese being learned in the USA. The latter study was based on only two hours per week and was a content-driven programme. The children in this study were motivated and with the use of 'good visuals and other supporting materials, even children at the start of learning the target language were able to communicate with each other and learn new content through Chinese'

There was a dearth of research in CLIL until recent years and now some data is appearing which would support its implementation. This article is not going to explore these findings as the contexts are so diverse that more findings from similar contexts are needed before conclusions can be made.

The impact on teacher training is also very complex. It starts at training subject teachers at teacher training establishments to not only understand their content but be proficient

in delivering it in an additional language. For the sake of argument let us conjecture this will be in English. Is this what trainee teachers have registered on courses to do? Will there be a fall in demand for places at teacher training establishments because of this additional demand on their abilities? And what about the subject teachers currently at schools? How will they be re-trained? And how much re-training will it take for them to be able to deliver their subject content in English?

Deller & Price (2007) usefully identify some of the worries that both language and subject teachers have about teaching through English which include: a) difficulties in explaining in English, b) students not liking listening in English, c) students finding it difficult to read English, d) teachers having to write most of their materials. In their text these authors have described activities teachers could use to make subject learning through English more accessible. They also make some suggestions for modifying subject materials by i) simplifying text; ii) making text more visual; iii) identifying the language support which will be needed; and v) adapting an activity to another subject.

So it would seem that CLIL is already having the 'messy' impact which Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010) predicted, but will it lead to better teaching and learning? And if so *what* and *why*?

4. *A personal opinion*

Despite its chameleon-like appearances, the writer believes that CLIL will bring about an improvement in language learning and education. After a decade of writing ELT coursebooks based on BICS, for learners who are unlikely to interact with a speaker of English in the near future, the thought of actually developing materials which focus on both language and an authentic subject context is very exciting! Learners WILL interact with each other using English (or another target language) in CLIL classes, because of the interactive methodology. They will interact in a purposeful way that was not possible to create in a BICS type coursebook. But this does mean that a new style coursebook is needed which integrates subject and language in a developmental and comprehensible way.

The methodology changes include an understanding of different learning styles, this can be as broad as including aspects of Gardner's 'multiple intelligences' (1999) or as simple as acknowledging that there are at least three learning styles which include 'visual, auditory and kinesthetic' strengths. An acknowledgement that learners learn in different ways and so teachers need to teach in the way that learners learn, could well be an

innovation in an education system which is still using traditional teacher fronted methods.

Learners of English need to be scaffolded on the language side so that the content can be 'comprehensible input' (Krashen 2004) so care is needed on the language support for both the teacher and the learners needs. This will need considerations in both the initial teacher training, continued professional development (including in-service training) and materials.

The first cohort of teachers teaching their subject in a foreign language WILL find it challenging. There is no doubt about that. However, the writer thinks that they will be surprised at how well the methodology supports this 'innovation' in teaching and learning.

So all in all, despite its clumsy name, CLIL, or whatever you wish to call it, is about good classroom practice and learning a subject *through* a foreign language, not *in* it. The language is the 'tool' not the aim. This means a fundamental shift in any education system which takes on this 'innovation'. For some that decision has already been made (Bologna Declaration 2000) and preparations are well underway for training future subject teachers who are able to deliver content through a foreign language. The aim for the 'promotion of mobility' between countries needs great care in order to implement this innovation, but the results will be enhanced workers of the future, able to work and communicate across cultures. Countries who do not have a good track record for language teaching might well review CLIL as a viable option.

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