

Chapter 1: An Introduction to CLIL

1.1 The Progress of CLIL

The term Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) was launched during 1994 in conjunction with the European Commission. This followed a Europe-wide discussion led by expertise in Finland and the Netherlands on how to bring language learning excellence, found in certain types of school, into mainstream government-funded schools and colleges.

At the time, the launch of CLIL was both political and educational. ‘The political driver was based on a vision that mobility across the European Union required higher levels of language competence in designated languages than was found to be the case at that point in time. The educational driver, influenced by major bilingual initiatives such as in Canada, was to design and otherwise adapt existing language teaching approaches so as to provide a wide range of students with higher levels of competence’ Marsh (2012). Now some twenty years later the concept of CLIL has emerged as not only a way of improving access to additional languages, but also bringing innovative practices into the curriculum as a whole.

CLIL as an approach has slowly been gaining acceptance in European countries. In fact, in some countries, teachers are now required to use CLIL in their classrooms. The trend seems to be that CLIL will be used more and more in the future in most of the countries of Europe.



1.2 So what exactly is CLIL?

Definition

*“CLIL is a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of **both** content and language.” (EuroCLIC 1994)*

In simple terms, CLIL integrates both Content Learning and Language Learning. Using CLIL, students learn one or more of their school subjects in a targeted language, often English, but sometimes in another second language. Students aren’t expected to be proficient in the new language before they begin studying. They learn the language they need for studying at the same time as they learn the subject.

With CLIL, learning the content and learning the language are equally important. Both are important curriculum subjects for the students, and they are developed and integrated slowly but steadily. In the long term, students learn both the content and the new language as well as, if not better than, students who study content and language in separate classes.

CLIL involves a change of focus in the classroom. When teachers use the school lingua franca (SLF) for teaching, they can tell the students everything they want them to know, and the students can understand them. However, when they teach their subject using a new language, this isn't possible. Because of this, they have to show students how to find out information for themselves, and how to work and talk together to discover new ideas, so that using the language becomes part of the process of learning. In other words, the teachers have to change their methodology, and find different ways to help students learn.

By doing this, the teacher prepares young students for the modern world, where people work in project teams; use other languages to talk to various colleagues and to communicate with people in different countries. They are expected to solve problems, plan their own work and find out things for themselves using a range of sources, especially the Internet.

CLIL, then, is designed to prepare young people for the future. It provides the first step to learning and understanding independently.

1.3 Features of CLIL

Ioannou Georgiou, S and Pavlou, P (2011) say that CLIL has three main characteristics:

- a) The learning of an additional language (AL) is integrated in content subjects such as science, history or geography. Students learn the target language through which the content is facilitated.
- b) CLIL has its origin in different socio-linguistic and political contexts and CLIL relates to any language, age and educational level from pre-primary, primary, secondary, higher to vocational and professional learning. In this sense, CLIL responds to the EU lifelong learning programme proposal for all citizens, where multilingualism and multiculturalism is thought to promote integration, understanding and mobility among Europeans.
- c) CLIL is an approach which involves the development of social, cultural, cognitive, linguistic, academic and other learning skills, which in turn facilitate achievements in both content and language. (cf Mehisto et al 2008: 11-12).