A Review of “CLIL: content and language integrated learning”

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Online publication date: 16 March 2011
and five in hands-on, interactive and enjoyable experiences that are focused on preparing children for smooth and flowing movement and self-confidence for developing writing skills. The short, daily delivery of the whole-body movements would encourage exercise and activity and would be effective when delivered at times during the day when children need to refocus and concentrate.

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DOI: 10.1080/09500782.2010.518440


CLIL is an acronym which refers to the content and language integrated learning approach. Usually seen as an umbrella term, this broad language learning approach means that the target language is learnt through curricular content in mainstream education. Although closely linked with its American–Canadian counterpart, Content-Based Instruction (CBI), CLIL started in Europe to meet European demands regarding the plurilingual and intercultural education of European citizens. As CLIL began to be implemented in mainstream education, from primary to university, it gave rise to a number of models accompanied by the possibility of team teaching. These models could be seen as a continuum in which language-content integration varies. On the language end, one model could be a teacher of English teaching a topic-based lesson around volcanoes through which learners learn specific vocabulary and the present tense to describe processes. On the content end, we might find a teacher of biology teaching the subject through the medium of English. Regardless of the model adopted, CLIL promotes team teaching, that is, a content teacher working together with a language teacher. Since the 1990s, CLIL has been widely implemented across Europe and, more recently, in other parts of the world, thus creating the need for a book which outlines the rationale, models for implementations and classroom considerations for this innovative approach to be successful.
Therefore, *CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning* comes as a timely contribution for teachers, researchers and administrators connected with innovative content and language integrated approaches as they move from theory to practice. It is also helpful for those readers who would like to have a succinct yet rich account of what this second/foreign language learning approach involves. Coyle, Hood, and Marsh, the book authors, are leading experts in researching and promoting CLIL as a new conception of communicative language teaching.

The book is divided into eight chapters which start from the theoretical framework of CLIL (Chapters 1–3) and move to more practical aspects (Chapters 4–8). Chapter 1 defines CLIL, its historical development in Europe and the reasons for adopting it. It also covers the relevance of CLIL to contemporary education based on descriptive accounts of large-scale implementations. Chapter 2 is intimately connected with its preceding chapter as it describes different curricular models which exemplify large-scale implementations from pre-school to tertiary education. The authors suggest that CLIL should be seen as an umbrella term which encompasses the different models depending on specific contextual factors. By placing these models upfront, the authors help readers situate themselves in their actual contexts and reflect on adopting CLIL. Teachers might consider the examples as a starting point of possible adaptations in their own institutional contexts. In their descriptions, the authors highlight the main features of the different models. They also introduce ideal conditions for the models, or variations, to be successful. In so doing, they guide readers through aspects such as feasibility, resources, staff profiles, administration support and collaboration of all institutional actors. In that way, they highlight that CLIL cannot be carried out as a solitary exploration. Although each chapter finishes with useful references, I believe that a more specific list of references with accounts of implementations could have been offered in Chapter 2 to encourage more focused reading on the advantages and drawbacks of CLIL. Because CLIL shortcomings are not fully addressed, I believe that a rather evangelical picture is offered, implying to teachers that very few problems will emerge.

Chapter 3 outlines the rationale supporting language learning through content learning. The authors’ main sources for building up a theoretical framework come from sociocultural theory and Bloor’s taxonomy for lower-order and higher-order thinking processes. This latter highlights the fact that CLIL needs to be cognitively challenging content- and language-wise. In addition, Coyle, Hood, and Marsh raise crucial issues through a discussion of debatable dichotomies and the introduction of more refined theoretical representations. First, they suggest that language learning should integrate a focus on form with a focus on meaning. The authors suggest that language should be taught from three different angles: language *of* learning, language *for* learning and language *through* learning, to ensure that both form and meaning are taught. This ‘Language Triptych’ requires that teachers present the language necessary to access the content of the lesson (i.e. specific vocabulary, syntax and subject-matter discourse), the language needed to carry out the different tasks proposed, and the language incidentally arising from interaction and cognitive processes as classes unfold. Nonetheless, the authors admit that language learning needs to operate within a holistic framework in which content, communication and cognition are related. Such a relationship should promote intercultural awareness, always rooted in a specific context which portrays how all these constructs interact with one another. Because this framework needs to be realised in more tangible advice for teachers, Chapter 3 offers a CLIL matrix which suggests how to sequence sources of input and follow-up tasks as regards cognitive and linguistic demands.
The bridging of theory and practice is found in Chapters 4 and 5 where the authors develop a ‘CLIL toolkit’ which guides teachers through lesson planning and materials development. The toolkit includes reflection questions so that teachers can contextualise their lessons as a team and in close relation to their students’ needs and cognitive development. The toolkit features context-free lesson plan templates and an evaluation checklist to obtain feedback for further reflection and action. Further examples could have been offered in relation to the CLIL matrix as the templates are not sufficient for showing the theory–practice link. As it is, the toolkit can be seen as a recipe box for novice teachers. As a teacher, I would have expected to find a thorough lesson plan together with resources and materials. It is not until the section on creating materials (Chapter 5) that more practical, though limited, examples are shown. However, these examples are good quality in the sense that they address elementary learners rather than intermediate learners in secondary education, a common target of CLIL materials. Overall, the transformation of the theoretical rationale into practice could have been further explored by including more examples, references on lesson planning or worksheets and helpful resources.

In line with the practical aspects of the book, Chapters 6 and 7 deal with two important issues: assessment and programme evaluation on a larger scale. Chapter 6 focuses on productive assessment tasks as they require more language use. Through clear examples, the authors show how both language and content can be scaffolded so that learners are encouraged to pay attention to meaning without disregarding form. In addition, they suggest PowerPoint-supported oral presentations, preferably carried out in groups followed by peer and self-assessment. In so doing, the authors ‘walk their talk’ as they try to balance skills development by suggesting activities which look at the four macro-skills. In relation to programme evaluation in Chapter 7, I suggest that readers return to Chapters 2 and 3 to situate the portfolio proposed by the authors. To evaluate CLIL programmes by means of a portfolio, institutions need to consider performance evidence through student testing, affective evidence by means of interviews and questionnaires, process evidence by investigating classroom discourse and, last, materials and task evidence through materials evaluation. This overarching programme evaluation project implies coordination by skilled researchers as solid knowledge of and experience with research methods are needed to collect and analyse data. This point is made clear as all references at the end of Chapter 7 are the outcomes of evaluations in which researchers have taken a leading role. However, I feel that teachers might need extensive research knowledge to put the portfolio suggested into practice.

Chapter 8 revisits CLIL theory–practice links, drawing on research reports to highlight the need to situate CLIL projects and programmes within a larger and more complex setting picture: language planning and curriculum development at governmental level. The authors assert that much of what is needed depends on political decisions, a view I endorse as successful CLIL programmes need sustainable funding and support. On the other hand, the authors underline the crucial role that teacher education plays. If CLIL becomes a stable feature in different educational systems, language teacher education programmes need to be adapted. Until then, the book authors encourage teachers to establish their own communities going beyond their geographical borders to support each other and produce more classroom-based action research.

While all the authors’ ideas are obviously worth exploring, I encourage readers, whether teachers or administrators, to read more about CLIL so as to avoid a romanticised picture of what CLIL is. CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning is a reader-friendly introduction to CLIL which covers the main theoretical and practical aspects behind the
need to insert language learning across the school curriculum. Anyone interested in getting acquainted with the main characteristics of CLIL will find this book well worth reading and would hopefully take it as an invitation for further exploration.

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© 2011, Dario Luis Banegas  
DOI: 10.1080/09500782.2010.539045