



## From Theory to Practice: English Language, CLIL and Technologies from Teacher Training to Students' Learning Outcomes

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### Abstract

*The presentation is aimed at showing the potential of teacher training in the field of English language, CLIL and technologies in terms of professional development and improvement of teaching practices and students' learning outcomes.*

*Reference will be made to two online training initiatives carried by two of the authors, designed both as training and research paths. The initiatives, aimed at guiding participants in the discovery and experimentation of webtools for language learning and CLIL will be described in order to highlight the design of the pathways, the learning process and some of the main outcomes, detailed in terms of participants' interaction, language, methodological and technological outcomes, products realized during the courses. The impact of these initiatives on the teacher's profile will be directly mentioned by the third author, a primary school teacher, passionate about language learning, CLIL and innovative methodologies who attended all the initiatives proposed and was eager to experiment what she had learnt in her classes: from theory to practice. The lesson plans and the activities carried out with her students, also in the frame of national projects funded by the Italian Ministry of Education, will be depicted to show the direct impact of teacher training for better teaching and better student learning outcomes and for enhancing innovative teaching processes, English language competences, digital competences and transversal competences.*

*The lessons learnt and the inputs received from the training paths attended by the teacher will be considered and examined from the perspective of a new classroom language learning environment, a wider use of technologies during the English and the CLIL lessons, a higher level of participation and enthusiasm of the students, better learning outcomes.*

*Keywords: CLIL, English, language learning, technologies, teacher training, learning outcomes*

### 1. The "theory"

CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) is an innovative methodology suggested by the European Commission as a quality agent for the modernization of European educational systems [3]. It is a "dual focus" approach, which is based on the delivery of subject content through a foreign language, considering that it is impossible to separate the content from the language, which conveys it [2].

The acronym CLIL [7] stresses the integration of content and language: while using a foreign language, you can learn content at the same time.

One of the main CLIL conceptual frameworks is the so-called '4 Cs' model proposed by Do Coyle [1]: Content, Communication, Cognition and Culture/Citizenship. According to Coyle, the learning process results from the integration of these four dimensions, which include linguistic, metalinguistic, cognitive and cultural aspects.

CLIL approach is learner-centred and is based on active methodologies enabling students to be the real protagonists of their learning pathways, such as webquests, simulations, interactive activities group-work, laboratory lessons, in which the foreign language is used to perform authentic tasks, according to the TBL (Task-Based Learning) [8] [9].

CLIL methodology has been successfully experimented in a large number of European countries and it is spreading more and more [5]. In Italy it was introduced by a Reform Law in 2010 and it is mandatory in the last year of all upper secondary schools [6].

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In 2014 the European Commission published a report titled “Improving the effectiveness of language learning: CLIL and computer assisted language learning” [4], which highlights the importance of learning technologies for CLIL and refers to some examples, such as authentic foreign language material, video clips, flash-animations, web-quests, pod-casts, online environments, social media, voice/video conferencing, game-based learning.

Within this framework, training the teachers for CLIL and learning technologies is of crucial importance to overcome the challenges of the students engaged in 21st century learning environments.

## 2. Training pathways

Two of the authors, Letizia Cinganotto and Daniela Cuccurullo have been cooperating for a long time on different action-research and training projects on a wide range of topics, mainly related to English language learning, CLIL and learning technologies. A couple of examples will be mentioned to show the added value they could have on a teacher’s continuous professional development, the third author, Marina Screpanti, a primary school teacher, who attended a wide range of training initiatives with successful outcomes.

### 2.2. eTwinning Learning event

From 28th September to 9th October 2015, Letizia Cinganotto moderated a Learning Event hosted by eTwinning, titled “CLIL & ICT” focused on the implementation of CLIL with the use of multimedia and technologies. About 170 teachers took part in the initiative, attending both synchronous and asynchronous activities with great enthusiasm. The highest percentage of teachers came from upper secondary school level, but also primary school teachers were well represented (35%).

The Learning Event consisted in the following steps:

#### *Step 1: Kick-off webinar*

#### *Step 2 (a): CLIL in Europe and in Italy*

Links, materials, resources about the state of the art of CLIL in Europe and in Italy were provided during this phase.

#### *Step 2 (b): CLIL & ICT*

The participants were guided hands-on to explore and experiment some tools of web 2.0 for language learning and for CLIL to use in innovative learning environments.

#### *Step 3: Forum & Blog*

This was the core of the *Learning Event*, where teachers could share ideas, materials and reflections on their experimentations with the webtools. The materials produced during the pathway were collected in a digital repository, which shows the teachers’ creativity, enthusiasm and passion about CLIL.

#### *Step 4: Wrap-up webinar*

During the final webinar the teachers were invited to take the floor and present their activities to their colleagues: in this way they could become the real protagonists of the initiative.

The main outputs of the *Learning Event* refer to the process of interaction and exchanges among the participants documented in the blog and forum and to the huge amount of digital content and lesson plans produced during the initiative.

In the blog the participants liked sharing their opinions and comments on the various webtools and resources while in the forum they posted their comments on their peers’ activities and replied to the hints and prompts provided in the different threads by the moderator or by their colleagues.

The initial and final questionnaire delivered to the participants allowed the moderator to collect a wide range of data and research input, useful to understand the potential of a similar initiative in terms of a teacher’s continuous professional development.

### 2.3. Techno-CLIL

In January and February 2016 and 2017, Letizia Cinganotto and Daniela Cuccurullo moderated a free five-week online training session on CLIL and ICT, titled “Techno-CLIL for EVO”, which was delivered



in English and was attended by about 5000 participants. EVO, Electronic Village Online, TESOL International, is a global community of peers mainly interested in English language teaching and learning technologies. These were the aims of the session:

- discussing the theory, methodology and practice behind a CLIL approach
- considering how to plan CLIL class activities using the Internet and 2.0 webtools
- discussing teaching and assessing learners through a CLIL approach
- reflecting upon the participants' awareness of what CLIL is and on how to teach through it.

Therefore, the session aimed at eliciting reflections and discussions among teachers and at sharing CLIL practices from the different countries through synchronous and asynchronous activities.

This was the format of the training pathway:

- Week 1  
*Brainstorming*  
*Sharing experiences with CLIL, comparing methodologies and strategies from a global perspective.*
- Week 2  
*Surfing the net*  
*Exploring the potential of Web 2.0 in the implementation of CLIL.*
- Week 3  
*CLIL pathways*  
*Planning and implementing a CLIL path using webtools and the internet.*
- Week 4  
*Reading in CLIL*

Exploring the potential of extensive reading to design a CLIL lesson, considering that books and eBooks can provide effective links to CLIL activities.

- Week 5  
*CLIL repository*

Guided web tours to find resources such as videos and other materials in order to build up a repository of CLIL practices relevant to the single participant's subject and needs.

### 3. From “theory” to “practice”

The third author of this paper, Marina Screpanti, primary school teacher, attended both the *Learning Event* and the two editions of Techno-CLIL (2016 and 2017). These training initiatives were crucial for her professional growth, as she started experimenting CLIL in her class regularly. Mostly she proposed CLIL with history and art, as they were two of her subjects. Since the very first moment she started working with CLIL, she realized that it was a really useful methodology able to develop good language competences and to create real communicative contexts.

In particular Techno-CLIL provided a wide range of ideas, materials and tips on how to use CLIL together with ICT. At the same moment in Italy the “Piano Nazionale Scuola Digitale” (PNSD) was issued, a national plan promoted by the Ministry of Education to implement the use of technology in schools.

So, after her principal's approval, she decided to plan and implement a project, called “TIC-CLIL” (TIC stands for ICT, in Italian) with a group of colleagues. Immediately afterwards, she started disseminating CLIL in her institute, involving a group of teachers willing to experiment this methodology. Firstly she organized a training course for them in her school and supported experimentation in their classes. Joining Techno-CLIL was the natural evolution of this personal and professional development. All these courses gave her the opportunity to understand better CLIL's theory and frameworks and to develop the competences needed to put into practice this methodology. As her school is not new to CLIL, her principal decided to create a network with other nine schools from Abruzzo. The network, called “#CLILforLand”, arranged to work on a common topic, earthquake, which unfortunately occurred in their region (Abruzzo): earthquake from a scientific point of view; earthquake's language; earthquake's safety, CLIL methodology.

From this experience she learnt that CLIL is perfect to help students, even young pupils, to improve fluency and overcome their insecurity in speaking. In fact it moves the attention of learners from the language to the topic, creating a great motivation towards communication and cooperation. Moreover,



for its own features, CLIL's activities demand a great use of thinking skills aimed at the achievement of key competences.

Marina Screpanti has been teaching English in Primary school for 25 years. Comparing her current classed with the previous ones she can realize that CLIL has improved their level of competences: they are more creative and also more collaborative, they are able to listen and understand a whole lesson in English, they are not afraid of speaking in English, they can make personal changes in the already known sentences but they are also able to use the chunks of language used during the lessons in new contexts and to plan and create products and outputs with creativity.

Now she is engaged in spreading CLIL methodology in her school and she is planning to activate an experimental class offering the teaching of an entire subject in English.

#### 4. Conclusion

The aim of the paper was to provide some examples of how training pathways can impact a teacher's professional development and growth, referring to the area of English language, CLIL and learning technologies: getting hints from training and implementing them in class with the students is the most effective way to put theory into practice.

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