



## Learning Technologies for CLIL in the Italian Schools

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### Abstract

*The paper will focus on the potential of learning technologies for CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), as recommended by the European Commission and as shown in international literature reviews. Some of the best known definitions and features of learning technologies will be discussed, considering different frameworks from recent literature and the wide range of applications for both language learning and CLIL.*

*A brief overview of CLIL provision in Europe will be also outlined, pointing out the innovative aspects of this methodology, which is considered by the European Commission as a driving force of success and quality in education.*

*Moving from this theoretical background, some practical examples will be provided to show how learning technologies can positively impact students' learning outcomes and teachers' professional development and growth.*

*In particular, an introduction to the Italian background concerning CLIL will be provided and some projects carried out by Italian school networks funded by the Italian Ministry of Education will be described, highlighting the different kinds of formats adopted by the schools for implementing innovative CLIL: digital contents, ebooks, ecards, platforms and websites, extensive reading for CLIL, etc.*

*The projects will be described within the framework of a recent monitoring report conducted by INDIRE on behalf of the Ministry, in order to investigate the outcomes and the reactions of schools towards the "CLIL revolution" in Italy and to show examples of good practices and material produced by the schools with the use of learning technologies for CLIL.*

*Keywords: CLIL, ICT, teacher training, online training, learning technologies*

### 1. A window on CLIL

CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) (Marsh, 1994) has become one of the latest significant curriculum trends in Europe. The key issue of this methodology is that curricular subjects (either humanistic or scientific) are taught in a foreign language.

This methodology can adapt to learning environments with different types of learners and a wide range of activities.

These are the key principles of CLIL, according to Genesee and Hamayan [1]:

- *additional-language instruction is more effective when integrated with content instruction:*

this principle refers to the added value given to meaning-making in a foreign language lesson, when the object of the learning is not only the language itself, but a specific content delivered through a foreign language as a medium of instruction;

- *explicit and systematic language instruction is important:* a metalinguistic reflection on the use and structure of the language is a key aspect and must be a systematic and constant dimension of instruction;

- *student engagement is the engine of learning:* students in the 21st century are constantly exposed to a wide range of inputs attracting their attention; schools must find the key to arouse their curiosity, interest and enthusiasm in order to get effective learning; to reach this aim, they have to be directly involved in the activities as the real protagonists of their choices and their learning experiences. That is one of the pillars of CLIL: being based on active, interactive and dynamic activities, laboratory/workshop experiences, experiential learning, peer and group work etc.;

- *both languages should have equally high status:* both the mother tongue and the foreign language play a key role in the learning process. In some cases, especially in the early stages, a shift from the foreign

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language to the mother tongue can be a good solution to some doubts related to the specific content or the particular cognitive activity;

- *the first language can be a useful tool for learning the additional language and new academic knowledge and skills*: the mother tongue can be the starting point in learning a foreign language and acquiring content delivered in that foreign language: scaffolding procedures can help the learner progressively leave their mother tongue in favor of a better and better mastery of the target language;

- *classroom-based assessment is critical for programme success*: CLIL activities are often peer or group activities and imply a “choral” involvement of the class, through activities based on projects (Project-Based Learning), whose outputs can be posters, interactive products, digital content etc. In these cases classroom-based assessment can be effective, as the learning becomes a co-constructive process, involving a collaborative effort from the whole class;

- *all children can become bilingual*: it is not a matter of innate attitudes: engaging, interesting and attracting the learner in the activities and in the interactional processes, everyone can develop a progressively better level of competence in the foreign language;

- *strong leadership is critical for successful dual-language teaching*: the teacher is essential in the planning and implementing of CLIL activities as a facilitator and moderator of the interpersonal exchanges in the foreign language, also taking the responsibility for the scaffolding process. In order to reach the educational aims, the teacher has to play a strategic leadership role during the whole teaching pathway.

Considering the above-mentioned reflections, CLIL methodology is a very complex and wide methodology, which can be easily adapted to the specific context and needs, without a predetermined and unique blueprint.

In light of the added value of CLIL in terms of students’ learning outcomes and teachers’ competences and strategies, this methodology is suggested by the European Commission as one of the most innovative ways for improving the quality of school curricula. Important suggestions come from the “Rethinking Education communication: investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes” [2] which offers interesting and useful suggestions on how to modernize European schools and training systems through the introduction of CLIL.

According to Eurydice report, “Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe” [3], CLIL has been successfully implemented in most European countries and is expanding more and more.

In Italy CLIL was introduced thanks to a Reform Law (Ministerial Decrees 88/89 dated 2010) which made it mandatory in all upper secondary schools [4] [5]. The latest “Good Reform” (Law 107/2015) is aimed at enhancing CLIL methodology in the Italian school curricula, even starting from the first cycle (primary school and lower secondary school). It is self-evident how Italian policy makers strongly believe in CLIL as the driving force behind innovation and improvement of the whole school system.

Nevertheless, many schools and teachers involved in CLIL still operate individually without a sufficient macro framework. This is the reason why it is important to adopt an adaptable curricular model of reference to have a set of principles and ideas for designing curricula for professional teacher development in the area of content and language integrated learning (CLIL) and a tool for reflection in an area that is still experimental.

From this perspective, the European Framework for CLIL Teacher Education [6], a result from an ECML project coordinated by María Jesús Frigols Martín, Dieter Wolff, Peeter Mehisto and David Marsh<sup>2</sup>, can be proposed as an important conceptual lens and a model, not as a prescriptive template, i.e.

- a macro-framework that identifies the target professional competences for CLIL teachers;

- includes the competences necessary to teach content subjects and an additional language in an integrated manner;

- proposes professional development modules to help teachers attain these target professional competences.

Along the same lines, the Italian Ministry of Education has clearly defined the profile for the CLIL teacher<sup>3</sup>, whose expertise implies mastery of the subject as well as linguistic, methodological and technological areas.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://clil-cd.ecml.at>

<sup>3</sup> [http://hubmiur.pubblica.istruzione.it/alfresco/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/e079c910-cc4e-4eab-b3db-fc9f8da55099/dd6\\_profilo\\_docenteclil.pdf](http://hubmiur.pubblica.istruzione.it/alfresco/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/e079c910-cc4e-4eab-b3db-fc9f8da55099/dd6_profilo_docenteclil.pdf)



## 2. CLIL and learning technologies

Starting from this international and national background, the paper will now focus on another important dimension, which is strictly related to CLIL and can enhance its success in terms of students' learning outcomes and students' centeredness [7] [8]: learning technologies.

In fact technologies are playing an ever more important role in the students' learning process and style and in the creation of communities of practice and communities of reflective teachers, engaged with sharing their experiences and learning from colleagues.

Therefore, the discussion will now try to show how CLIL methodology is strictly connected to technologies, multistranded and multimodal, also taking into account the recent recommendations from the European Commission.

Moreover, the European Commission published a Report in 2014, entitled "Improving the effectiveness of language learning: CLIL and computer assisted language learning", [9] which stresses the link between CLIL and CALL, according to the following definition: "Computer assisted language learning (CALL) refers to any process in which the learner uses a computer to improve foreign language competence. The technology includes not only computers but also smartphones, tablets, MP3 players, and consoles" (p.19).

Another recent research area stressing the connection between language learning, CLIL and technologies is TELL (Technology Enhanced Language Learning) [10] [11] which strongly supports the integration of technologies in class during the different steps of the teaching/learning pathway.

Moving on from this background, it is now a common belief that a CLIL learning environment can be enhanced and supported through the use of digital content, open resources, web tools and multimedia platforms, always bearing in mind how crucial the role of the teacher is as a moderator, facilitator and guide for a wise and positive use of technologies for educational purposes.

"[...] even though there may well be teachers and students who are more knowledgeable on the technical side of things and have a higher rate of speed when doing things digitally, if you have a clear understanding of the pedagogic purpose of a technology in use, you are likely to put it into practice competently and effectively" [12].

From this quotation the importance of pedagogy behind the use of technologies is evident: effectiveness can be reached only upon a well-balanced and sound pedagogical planning of all the activities.

Innovative methods and digitally enhanced learning environments in approaching CLIL processes and helping teachers adapt them to their teaching scenarios, represent the backbone of the eCLIL actions promoted by the Italian Ministry of Education in 2015/2016 and 2016/2017.

## 3. Some projects carried out by the Italian schools

The eCLIL project was first promoted by DG for Schooling of the Italian Ministry of Education in 2011 [4], aiming to guide and support school networks in the planning and implementation of CLIL modules with the use of technologies. A similar initiative was promoted by the Ministry in 2015 and 2016: school networks were asked to submit CLIL projects with learning technologies to be financed upon evaluation and selection. In particular, a monitoring report was carried out by the author of this paper and INDIRE research team (the author in cooperation with Fausto Benedetti) on behalf of and in cooperation with the Ministry of Education (under the scientific supervision of inspector Gisella Langé) with the aim of collecting and analysing the outcomes of the CLIL projects funded by DM 435/2015.

134 projects were financed, distributed among the first and the second school cycle: school networks worked very effectively planning and implementing training actions for teachers and producing high quality materials with the students. Examples of digital products were: specific websites devoted to the project, blogs, digital content, learning objects, rubrics, e-books, e-cards, online tests etc. The variety and quality of these products show the added value learning technologies can have on successful CLIL, in terms of teachers' innovative methodologies and students' enthusiasm, engagement and learning outcomes.

## 4. Conclusion

The paper was meant to highlight the potential of learning technologies for CLIL in light of the great expansion of CLIL methodology in Italy and Europe in recent years. Some references to the main conceptual



frameworks have been mentioned, considering one of the latest monitoring reports conducted by INDIRE research team on CLIL projects produced by school networks in school year 2015-16, showing the increasing interest and the added value of learning technologies for successful CLIL.

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