

## CLIL into Schools

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### Abstract

*The paper focuses on some aspects of CLIL practice as piloted in selected Czech schools within a project funded by the European Commission.*

*First, we shall briefly deal with the general concept as we use and understand it, because the term CLIL is sometimes misinterpreted. This first part of the paper will also explain the situation in the Czech Republic.*

*In the second part, the paper will describe an ongoing three-year project entitled *The Development of Methodological Materials and Procedures for the Introduction of English Teaching through CLIL in All the Subjects in the Second Grade of Primary Schools and Lower Grade of Secondary Schools*. The project is based on the cooperation of experts from the Department of English Language and Literature at Masaryk University and seven partner schools from three different regions of the Czech Republic. All activities connected with the creation of the teaching materials together with the communication between (sometimes) very distant participants take place in the virtual learning environment Moodle.*

*The paper describes the project's three phases. During the first phase an appropriate vocabulary was collected by teachers of the partner schools, translated into English, completed with audio files and proofread by Masaryk University teachers including native speakers. In the second phase the materials are piloted at schools, verified, evaluated and developed into final form, which together with the experience gathered in this phase will result into methodological recommendations published in 25 booklets with DVD.*

*The main emphasis in the final phase of the project will be the dissemination of the project's results in the form of a national conference, seminars and meetings with teachers while the experiences from the project, examples of lesson plans, including the introduction to CLIL methodology will be displayed in a digital library and available to the public.*

### 1. Introduction

The term CLIL (Content Language and Integrated Learning) represents an educational approach in which non-language subjects are taught using a second language. Its concept is interpreted in various countries in different ways. In some countries the term coincides with bilingual education, while in others it could be conceived differently.

Even though CLIL has been described as 'a major methodological revolution' in language teaching, it is nothing really unknown in the history of language teaching and learning. The term itself was coined at the beginning of the 1990s, but bilingual education has been known in the many countries throughout their history much longer. There had been periods when for example instruction was partly in Latin (or in Central Europe often in German) while Latin science terminology is commonly used at schools even today.

### 1.1 Situation in the Czech Republic

While CLIL is currently a rather fashionable term within the European education system, this form of learning has not been fully exploited in the Czech Republic yet, although it became part of Czech foreign language policy adopted by an EU document entitled *Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004 – 2006* several years ago.

In the Czech Republic, CLIL is different from the idea of 'bilingual education' in many respects. The Ministry of Education distinguishes sharply between these two. Bilingual education means that the whole subject is covered in a foreign language while CLIL is understood as teaching using the foreign language for only part of the subject matter with no precise definition of what percentage of the teaching should be done in a foreign language and how much of it should be covered by the mother tongue. If a school wants to teach bilingually, they have to have a specially approved curriculum and the teachers involved have to be fully qualified in both the subject and the foreign language, which is a rather rare situation and common state schools usually cannot afford this luxury. On the other hand, introducing CLIL into curriculum is in the competence of the headmaster.

One of the reasons for not integrating CLIL into common teaching is that both headmasters and teachers themselves have the idea that for the introduction of this form of teaching it is necessary to speak a foreign language, in our case English, fluently. This, of course, would be an ideal situation, but the reality of our schools is vastly different. It is not a secret that there are not enough qualified English language teachers especially at basic school level (pupils up to 15). Yet, for introducing CLIL one does not have to be a fully qualified foreign language teacher. Basic knowledge of the terminology and a passable pronunciation could be sufficient. But precisely this constitutes one of the main problems – not just the lack of foreign language knowledge among non-language teachers, but frequently its total absence. In addition to the fact that teachers not have language skills to enable them to communicate with students in a foreign language confidently and routinely, they, as a rule, have not mastered even the basic terminology of their subjects. The problem has its roots in the history prior to 1989 when other languages besides Russian were not taught at basic schools. The vicious circle starts at universities, mainly because the departments of languages and the departments of non-language subjects mostly do not coordinate their teaching activities well enough. Unlike students of other faculties, where foreign language teaching often focuses primarily on the acquisition of specialized vocabulary of the disciplines and ESP, the students at the faculties of education undergo training in foreign languages focusing on basic grammar and not on the vocabulary of the subjects they will be teaching in the future. The reason for that is their insufficient basic knowledge of foreign languages they bring over from the secondary schools. The past five year results of online testing of first year Masaryk University students in English is unambiguous: the students of the Faculty of Education (excluding those whose major is English) have had the worse results of all the tested faculties (of Economics, Medicine, Law, Science, Arts, Social Studies). During the two semesters of a foreign language learning the students should achieve the general B1/B2 levels as described in the European Framework of Reference, while neither the classroom language nor the vocabulary of a particular school subject demand the overall level with respect to all the grammar nuances of B1/B2 levels. The emphasis in a foreign language for basic school teachers should be on the pronunciation and the vocabulary of the subject in question, yet it is on general grammar instead with little or no emphasis at all on communication.

In this way, young teachers graduating from the Faculties of Education cannot achieve knowledge and skills needed for introducing English when teaching their specialized subjects. Sure, there is also another possibility of performing CLIL in practice: one subject is taught by two teachers simultaneously: one with a qualification of a foreign language, the second with a qualification of the

selected non-language subject, but anybody who knows the everyday situation at Czech schools knows how difficult it would be to introduce the system on a daily basis. In many schools it would not be possible at all.

## **2. CLIL into Schools project**

Since the exact ratio of the mother tongue and a foreign language in the CLIL classes is not strictly determined, we tried to grasp the problem from a totally different angle. The complexity of English language is not the issue, the main aim is to collect appropriate terminology and complete it with a very good pronunciation. The next step is to persuade teachers – who might not speak English at all – that they CAN do it, that they CAN use an English sentence here or a phrase there. Convinced of the benefits of CLIL we believed that for its successful implementation it is necessary to create a functioning network of schools and teachers who would jointly develop teaching materials and share them. This led us to conceiving the creation of methodological materials based on lesson plans with adequate terminology for each subject. One of the pillars was the belief that if the teachers themselves participate in this activity, they will no longer be afraid of the method, and they will realize that even their low foreign language level may not be an obstacle.

In 2009 we received funding from European Commission for the CZ.1.07/1.1.00/08.0005 project with its full name Development of methodological materials and procedures for the introduction of English teaching through CLIL in subjects taught at the higher grade of primary schools and lower grade of secondary schools. Our target group has been teachers who would use elements of English routinely in their everyday teaching. The project is based on the cooperation of experts from the Department of English Language and Literature at Masaryk University and seven partner schools.

### **2.1 Phases of the project**

The project has three phases. During the first phase, from the very beginning until November 2010, the collection of appropriate vocabulary was carried out. This vocabulary has been translated into English by teachers of the English Department and proofread by native speakers. Collection and all communication between (sometimes) very distant participants took place in the virtual learning environment of Moodle. In the next phase, the team of Masaryk University teachers has been putting together the acquired vocabulary in an appropriate format accompanying it with methodological recommendations. The role of collectors, however, has not ended with the actual data collection, but in the second phase, when the materials are being piloted at their schools, they verify, evaluate and develop them into final form. The objective of this phase is to collect feedback after the introduction of CLIL into the lessons. Throughout the second phase of the project we have been focusing on the treatment of materials, evaluation and completion of methodological recommendations. Experience gained in the project, examples of lessons, including the introduction of CLIL methodology in teaching will be the main emphasis in the final phase of the project together with the dissemination of the project results to other schools interested in CLIL.

### **2.2 Outputs**

There are a number of tangible outputs planned in the project.

First, there will be 25 methodological workbooks for each subject at the second grade of primary schools and lower grade of secondary schools. Methodical recommendations will be incorporated both in the text format and electronic form on a DVD together with lesson plan samples created, introduced and evaluated at pilot schools. Another outcome will be a methodical course covering each subject in an e-learning format in the virtual learning environment of Moodle.

After creating, piloting and evaluating all the planned outputs of the project, the materials will be transferred to the digital library portal at Eldum.cz <http://eldum.phil.muni.cz/>, where they will be made available to the public throughout the country. Information on the outputs of the project will be sent to all Departments of Education in the Czech Republic. In this way, a network of schools using ready-made materials can grow with other interested parties and lay the bases for an online community. Among the planned outputs there are also seminars and workshops disseminating examples of lesson plans, CLIL methods, teaching materials and information on how to use the digital library. We believe that these materials will also become an ESP source for university students of other subjects.

### 2.3 Our experience so far

Although we are only in two thirds of the three year project and a considerable way is still ahead of us, we are already very pleased with the results. For example, one of the participants, the head teacher of a small village school, summarized the situation in his school in the following words:

"Our experience is that just ... preparation of individual words, phrases, and [their] evaluation ... makes my colleagues think very carefully about the curriculum, its effectiveness, efficiency, etc., and for me this means that it leads to their professional growth, which I very much welcome. And the benefit for students - it is very, very clear ..."

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