

## Planning, Implementing and Evaluating a CLIL Online Course

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### Foreword

This narrative doesn't want to be a study on CLIL, its methodology and implications, but a critical analysis of an experience of teacher training aimed at innovating school curricula, at developing teachers' competences in CLIL, at activating students through motivating content and activities, and at creating a stimulating learning environment.

### Needs and objectives of the course

In the "Piano di studi" attached to the Riforma dei Licei (Gelmini, 2010) it is written that there must be the teaching of a subject in a foreign language in the last class of the Licei or for the linguistic course also in the 3<sup>rd</sup> classes. What subject teachers read in the new programs and timetables:

*"È previsto l'insegnamento, in lingua straniera, di una disciplina non linguistica (CLIL) compresa nell'area delle attività e degli insegnamenti obbligatori per tutti gli studenti o nell'area degli insegnamenti attivabili dalle istituzioni scolastiche nei limiti del contingente di organico ad esse annualmente assegnato"*[1]

creates in them curiosity and interest but also some doubt, in particular as concerns the competences required to teach CLIL. Unlike their colleagues - foreign language teachers who know what CLIL means and implies - subject teachers (of history, geography, math, science, art, gym, technology and others) in the upper secondary schools need to improve their language skills and to be trained in CLIL methodology before starting to experiment CLIL units/modules in their classes.

Having in mind this urgent necessity a few LEND teacher trainers have decided to plan and implement an online course *Percorsi per insegnare e apprendere CLIL (CLIL paths for learning and teaching)* whose specific objectives are:

- to develop the competence of a foreign language through the study of content;
- to create occasions of real use of the foreign language;
- to educate to a multicultural and multi-disciplinary approach to knowledge;
- to foster more consciousness of the subject through the learning of a foreign language.

Besides, the course highlights more general and transversal aims such as:

- to learn how to use technologies and how to communicate and work in a virtual environment;
- to develop a sense of entrepreneurship and professionalism in a perspective of lifelong learning;
- to be able to work cooperatively;
- to contribute to educating the future European citizen through an approach which is widely recognized all over Europe. [2]

It has been clear since the very beginning that the cooperation of subject teachers and foreign language teachers for the planning and implementation of the CLIL modules is essential in the sense that the two competences - the one of the knowledge of the subject and the other of the practice of the foreign language - have to match and develop together. This is why one pre-requisite for the enrolment to the course was the presence of a subject teacher and a foreign language teacher in the same school as well as their willingness to work in pair. Indeed, what seemed to be a difficulty (to find a partner and be engaged in cooperative work) has resulted in strength and richness of experience because, even though the two teachers were not in the same class (there were only a few examples of "co-teaching") they have been able to exchange ideas, plan and evaluate together, and really improve the quality of their teaching.

Another criterion which has been considered in the selection of the applications has been the presence of the four foreign languages most practiced at school (French, German, English, Spanish),



because lend supports a policy of multilingualism and multiculturalism and wishes to promote more approaches, languages and methodologies.

Finally a group of Comenius assistants has been admitted to the course as these young teachers prefigure the profile of the future CLIL teacher as they teach different subjects through a foreign language in a European context.

## **Description of the online course**

### **Methodology, materials and tasks**

The first thing we – as a work group [3] - wondered about was the necessity to create a virtual environment which could turn out interesting, lively and motivating for subject and foreign language teachers who lived and worked in different parts of Italy. The course had to be completely online on the Moodle platform of lend and mostly in an asynchronous mode. Which meant that materials of various genre had to be chosen and activities and tasks had to be well defined and focused on. Also the organization of the modules had to be clear and the path had to mark different steps of knowledge and competence (from the initial methodological approach to technologies, to planning and evaluating, up to the creation of a CLIL module). With these ideas in mind we decided to offer six modules dealing with the following topics:

1. *Familiarizing with the e-learning environment*
2. *Approaching CLIL*
3. *Technologies*
4. *Planning CLIL units*
5. *Authentic and integrated evaluation*
6. *Creating a personal CLIL path*

Each module opens with a quotation about CLIL in a foreign language, then it presents in a detailed way the topic and the materials (articles, essays, interviews, PPT presentations, maps and charts) to be examined and discussed in the forum through specific questions and suggestions, and ends with a final task to be carried out by the participants in pair or individually. While the forum stimulates the teachers to think and reflect on the materials and exchange opinions with colleagues, the task tends to be personal and creative as it asks teachers to create segments of work or activities for students in the light of what they have explored and learned. Another activity which has resulted to be quite worthwhile is the creation of a glossary on CLIL made up of teachers' contributions.

[4]

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

Monitoring and evaluating the process and the products of the course have soon appeared to be quite complex, but throughout discussions inside the work group (where different competences have come together and personal contributions have been valued) we have decided to adopt the following tools:

1. a self-evaluation chart at the end of each module
2. feedback by the e-tutor on the participation in the forum
3. feedback on the final task of each module
4. a questionnaire at the end of the whole course

These four tools have been thought with different aims and specific features:

1. the self-evaluation chart wants to make participants reflect on their involvement in the activities and in the relationships with the other colleagues;
2. the feedback on the participation in the forum is intended to monitor teachers' intervention and evaluate the quality of their observations and comments through the use of adequate descriptors;
3. the feedback on the task concluding the module has been quite demanding: various descriptors have been formulated to evaluate the quality of the personal products and a verbal remark has been provided to the teachers attending the course (no marks have been given because the teacher trainers have intended to give evaluation a positive connotation and to



convey a more in-depth sense of the process of growth in the competences achieved in the course);

4. the questionnaire has been quite useful in order to collect the teachers' overall impressions about the materials and the activities as well as to ask for suggestions for a possible future edition of the course.

Finally, in order to give each teacher a certificate, a chart has been made with all the results of the feedback/evaluation for each module and four levels of competence have been identified as described in the personal certificate. Our whole work on evaluation has been very engaging but also fruitful as it has brought to the creation of standard models which could be useful in other learning contexts. [5]

## Lights and darks

After the two editions of the course (Feb. – Jun. 2012 and Nov. 2012 – Apr. 2013) it is possible now to reflect on the whole experience and point out its strengths and weaknesses as synthesized below.

Lights	Darks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The structure and the organization of the modules</li> <li>- The presence of four foreign languages and various school subjects</li> <li>- The gradual path of the presentation of the contents and of the building up of competences</li> <li>- The clear and lively graphic design</li> <li>- The communication and the interaction among the teachers</li> <li>- The valid contribution given by teachers in different learning contexts to the debate on CLIL methodology</li> <li>- The possibility to create one's own CLIL materials (according to the different content and to the level of the foreign language) to experiment in classes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Having to fulfill all the engagement within the allotted time (for teachers as concerns their tasks and products; for teacher trainers and tutors as concerns providing adequate feedback)</li> <li>- A few difficulties in the use of technologies</li> <li>- A few examples of misunderstanding (as for the task to carry out or the feedback provided)</li> <li>- Some difficulties in achieving common standards and shared descriptors</li> </ul>

Furthermore, we have to add that the asynchronous way of learning has been perceived in some way as positive (one can work at his/her own pace and time) in others as negative (no possibility of interaction more directly and in real time).

## Future perspectives

Probably our next work will be to collect all the products of the course in a virtual library which could be visited by all and provide models of CLIL units and modules. This could be the most suitable conclusion of the course: in such a way teachers would be able to find hints and materials for further exploitation and activities. But on the other hand the experimental nature of these learning paths makes them unique and valid only in certain situations and with specific "actors". This sounds natural because teachers always look for new ways and methodologies and are quite aware of the fact that everything we build at school is in progress. Even though there may be acquired and achieved competences on behalf of teachers and students the teaching/ learning process is in continuous development.

As a conclusion we have to underline the good results of the final questionnaire of the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the course, in particular the following data:

- 83% of the teachers have found the course satisfying;
- graphics has been judged excellent (30%), fairly good (30%);
- the quality of resources has been defined as excellent (41%); fairly good (33%);
- the most loved module has been "Technologies" (58%);
- the involvement in the forum has been fairly good (31%) and satisfying (45%);



- personal expectations have been fulfilled (94%);
- one would suggest this course to colleagues (97%).

So this experience of e-learning paths could be proposed again. When? Addressed to whom? With what purposes? With what changes due to different needs and contexts (only subject teachers involved, CLIL courses run by universities, etc.)?

These questions have no definite answers at the moment, even though they express the common desire to continue working with teachers in schools on the fascinating area of CLIL!

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- [2] <http://www.lend.it/moodle/>
- [3] Work group  
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