



CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING (CLIL) IN THE UK

Up until recently, it was compulsory in the UK for all pupils to study a foreign language between the ages of 11 and 16 at secondary school. However, this age limit has now been reduced to 14. In an age when the rest of Europe is talking about further integration and multilingualism, this policy risks sending mixed messages to both pupils and parents. Above all, it has far-reaching implications for the standing of foreign languages in the school curriculum and even greater implications for any initiatives such as teaching other subjects through the medium of a foreign language (CLIL).

Indeed, it comes as no surprise that mainstream CLIL is a rare phenomenon in the UK except in the Welsh, Scottish and Irish immersion contexts. Yet, despite the odds, there have been some outstanding pioneers of CLIL in the UK, such as William Ellis School in Camden, London, where there is a fine example of Geography being taught to selected Year 9 pupils entirely in Spanish. However, when we consider most schools in the UK, such initiatives are the exception rather than the rule.

Do Coyle, of Nottingham University, in her article for the European Platform for Dutch Education¹, outlines attempts by a pressure group to have a sentence included in the new National Curriculum in 1994 advocating that other curricular areas could be delivered in a foreign language. These recommendations were ignored by SCAA (School Curriculum and Assessment Council), and the National Curriculum therefore has no reference to CLIL. Similarly, the British examination boards, which largely lead the curriculum and are also profit-driven, do not include any provision for teaching through the medium of any other language except English.

On a more optimistic note, unofficial sources state that 50% of Primary schools in the UK now have some foreign language provision, as opposed to 25% in 1999. According to CLIP (Content and Language Integration Project)²: “The launch of the National Literacy Strategy has significantly increased the importance that teachers attach to connections between literacy development in English and comparative or reinforcement work in a foreign language.” Indeed, many primary schools are integrating foreign language teaching into their literacy syllabus, very often due to the time constraints of the curriculum. By 2010 all primary school pupils at Key Stage 2 (7-11 years) will be entitled to some language teaching. The suggested amount is 45 minutes per week and provision for this should be within the curriculum, not in after school clubs. So where does this leave CLIL?

Certainly the idea of “integrating” language tuition into the existing curriculum could lend scope to the development of CLIL at primary level. There are already examples of a foreign language being used to teach numeracy, ICT (Information & Communications Technology) or PE (Physical Education). These exist largely due to the initiative of individual schools and teachers and such projects last as long as the teacher is at that particular school. As with Primary languages, there is no agreed methodological approach and “tuition” in the foreign language is open to interpretation. It might comprise 10 minutes at one school or half an hour at another.

¹ Coyle, Do, “Language Medium Teaching in Britain”. In: *Teaching Content in a Foreign Language, Practice and Perspectives in European Bilingual Education*. Stichting Europees Platform voor het Nederlandse Onderwijs, Alkmaar, 1996, 155-176.

² www.cilt.org.uk



Similarly, at secondary school, any CLIL teaching is a result of the schools' initiatives and staffing availability, rather than any government policy. When it does occur, it is often in international schools, private schools and schools with "language college"³ status, mostly at Key Stage 3 (11-14 years). CLIL takes place normally in humanities subjects such as History and Geography and often exploits existing links with partner schools in other countries. Some UK schools have launched a GCSE fast-track class in foreign languages due to the progress made by CLIL pupils at Key Stage 3. This is an exciting development that proves the effectiveness of CLIL.

The Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research, CILT, provides a useful overview of the situation of CLIL in the UK and cites schools that are involved in CLIL teaching. Certainly, the St Martin's MOBIDIC team feel that the MOBIDIC materials can be put to good use. Not only do we organise in-service courses for CLIL teachers from abroad, but also for UK language teachers. Both provide excellent opportunities to disseminate good practice and, of course, project results. Training materials on bilingual teaching will also play a growing role in preparing our undergraduate students for European placements, where they will be expected to teach subjects through the medium of English. Let us hope that EU projects such as MOBIDIC will help inform UK teachers of the advantages of teaching through the medium of a foreign language, and encourage schools to explore the possibilities and benefits of CLIL.

³ Schools that declare a special interest in teaching languages and can bid for extra government funding towards equipment and facilities.