

CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING:  
STATE OF THE ART AND INSIGHTS INTO FUTURE GLOBAL SCENARIOS.  
AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID MARSH

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INTRODUCTION

For readers in North America, it may be important to compare/contrast Content-Based Instruction (CBI), which is more commonly seen in North America, and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which is more commonly seen in Europe, before we start the interview. Following is a brief introduction.

CBI and CLIL share similarities and differences. However, as they normally lean on the same key properties and are not pedagogically different from each other, CBI/CLIL are often considered as two labels for the same reality (Van de Craen, Ceuleers, Mondt 2007: 186; Dalton-Puffer, 2007: 6; Coyle *et al.*, 2010: 9), with CLIL being the most popular term in Europe and CBI in the USA and Canada. Both CBI and CLIL have been defined as «umbrella terms.»

Content-based instruction (CBI) is an umbrella term referring to instructional approaches that make a dual, though not necessarily equal, commitment to language and content-learning objectives. (Stoller 2008: 59).

CLIL is an umbrella term covering a dozen or more educational approaches (e.g. immersion, bilingual education, multilingual education, language showers and enriched language programmes). (Mehisto, Marsh, Frigols 2008: 12).

Clearly, both CBI and CLIL educational aims combine the learning of curricular content and language, although they may differ in the emphasis placed on language and content. CBI/CLIL can take place at all educational levels, from preschool to higher education levels. Their curricular role may reflect total immersion in the second language, or it may refer to content-based topics in language classes. One of the most widespread CBI/CLIL programmes is immersion, which has been defined as “the

quintessential model of content-based L2 instruction” (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary 2013: 3).

The term «CLIL» was launched in Europe in the 1990s and is often associated with teaching through the medium of English (Dalton-Puffer, Nikula, Smit 2010). However, the definition of CLIL also refers to an additional language besides English — basically any language other than the first language, therefore including foreign, second or minority languages (cfr. Eurydice 2006; Marsh 2002). The first scientific contributions published in the 80’s (Mohan 1986; Cantoni-Harvey 1987; Brinton, Snow and Wesche 1989) were followed by a growing body of ever more refined research on CLIL (Marsh and Langé 1999; Coonan 2002, 2006; Dalton-Puffer 2007; Balboni 2007; and others).

According to some studies, CLIL is quite different from other types of CBI such as immersion (Lasagabaster, Sierra 2010; Pérez-Cañado 2012). For example, some scholars stress the higher degree of importance of form in CLIL, which has been heavily influenced by studies in FL teaching (mainly referred to as *glottodidattica* in Italy), psycholinguistics and acquisitional linguistics (Muñoz 2007). On the other hand, other scholars (Cenoz, Genesee, Gorter 2014) analysed the relationship between a specific type of CBI, immersion and CLIL, focusing on the goals of each approach, student and teacher profiles, target languages involved, the balance between content and language instruction, and other pedagogical issues (such as material development and instructional methods), and they concluded that categorical distinctions between CLIL and immersion are unsupported.<sup>1</sup>

It should be pointed out that the educational aims of specific schools and societies and the sociolinguistic situation can all affect the implementation of different forms, i.e. some programmes may be more content-oriented than others or may present two or three languages. Applications labeled as CLIL today are numerous and diversified not only with regard to the language used (second, foreign, minority) and to implemented models, ranging from partial immersion to a variety of full courses (Dueñas 2004). Their common trait is marked by cooperative learning and

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<sup>1</sup> Author’s note: I am primarily indebted to Cenoz (2015) for the detailed framework provided in her article with regard to recent contrastive research on CBI and CLIL.

by using language leading to educational aims that go beyond simple language learning, such as developing textual competence, facilitating intercultural awareness and refining sociocultural aims in learners, to name a few.

As a final note, the methodology based on teaching content in a second or foreign language has witnessed an outstanding expansion since the 90's and is now being used by most European countries to implement educational pilot projects and academic learning. The need for international scholars and school teachers to cooperate and share the research findings of CBI/CLIL programmes is key to grant ever growing excellence to this field.

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## THE INTERVIEW

Dear Prof. Marsh, thank you for offering us the opportunity to hear your views about the state of the art of CLIL today, and future perspectives. You worked on multilingualism & bilingual education since the 1980s and you were part of the team that conducted groundwork leading to the launch of the term CLIL (*Content and Language Integrated Learning*) in 1994.

The first question looks back at the genesis and evolution of CLIL, a methodology that has gone a long way in Europe and in other countries since the concept was introduced more than two decades ago. School systems, publishers, authors, multipliers, teacher trainers, FL teachers, subject-content teachers, and learners of all ages have “picked it up” and profited in many ways from its educational assets ever since. Can you tell us what personally motivated you to research and help design a dual-focused methodology, such as learning content in a foreign language, in the first place? Was building plurilingualism and reinforcing positive relationships among the peoples of the EU the basic DNA of the CLIL project from the start, or did it stem from a methodological, pedagogical, or other kind of premise, which then evolved into a tool for “Europeanization” and much more?

The design and launch of CLIL came through a wave of parallel and complementary forces. The pursuit of social equity in getting full access to excellence in language learning was at the heart of the European Commission’s interest. The desire to modernize language and other subject education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century was the most common driver amongst educators.

My interest was both professional and personal. As an educator I could not understand why additional language learning had not developed much since the 1970s, and why as a profession we followed the same old routines that led to the same old levels of widespread failure in certain educational systems. As a parent I wanted to think through how children and young people might learn languages in ways that are motivational, meaningful and joyful.

What I, and others, set out to do was to develop awareness of an open source operating system approach to language learning. Just like the

revolutionary Linux system, CLIL emerged as an open source equivalent that could support different types of language learning context. Indeed both CLIL and Linux were developed at the same time in Finland during the early 1990s. An approach adaptable, without ownership, and with tremendous cascade potential for reaching out and influencing change processes across education globally.

**Your background is very articulate: born in Australia, educated in the UK and now based in Finland, you have extensive experience of teacher development, capacity-building, research and consultancy in a range of different countries in Africa, Europe and Asia. This suggests that you probably met thousands of FL professionals, both in school systems and in the private sector. Based on that vast experience, what do you consider to be good indicators of an excellent use of CLIL?**

I have had the privilege of working in very different contexts across the world, ranging from those that are desperately poor and insecure, to those that are heavily financed and privileged. My work spans the public and private sectors. My heart is in the public sector because if it is possible to make positive change happen in large and bureaucratic public sector schools, then the credit goes to the concept and those teachers that develop it and achieve change for the better. The private sector tends to be much easier because when decisions are supported by evidence of improved performance, and greater student wellbeing, they tend to be made swiftly and effectively.

Education is like Antarctica. Everyone talks about it (because most people have experienced education and think they know about it); some claim it (often from narrow and unsubstantiated scientific perspectives); and few really understand it. In recent years those pioneering educators across the world that have achieved high levels of excellence in education are now being supported by substantive research evidence on what activities, actions and methodologies really do have a positive impact on young people from diverse backgrounds. When CLIL (applied using bilingual methodologies) replaces poor quality teaching in an additional language (often dependent on monolingual methodologies) considerable success can be achieved.

And as with Antarctica, politics often plays a major role in decision-making about education. Large-scale politically-driven visions and statements of bringing ‘bilingualism’ to a state or region, are often not supported by appropriate educational intelligence, systemic action planning, and resources. This is where variants of language learning can fail. They have, in the past, been driven by widespread introduction of teaching non-language subjects in an additional language. In the case of English, these may be termed English medium instruction. They often fail because when politics and education are deeply integrated and where short-term thinking (elections) and power-play (private sector sales) force the hands of educators. When teaching in an additional language succeeds, it is often driven bottom-up by educators, complemented by systemic support, and based on scientific reasoning and evidence. This is where CLIL is often placed, and where it can be seen to succeed.

**What are some of the most common pitfalls that teacher trainers, teachers and school districts should be particularly aware of when developing CLIL projects in their classrooms and in-service trainings?**

First, not assuming that anyone can teach in an additional language if they can speak the language to a high level of fluency. CLIL is more dependent on educational expertise rather than language fluency.

Second, being aware of the language industry, especially with English, which is sophisticated and powerful in many countries. The vested interest here wishes to keep the status quo. This often means keeping power and influence (CLIL can undermine this) and the pretence of dressing up old and possibly weak teaching and learning resources with new packaging stamped CLIL (sheep disguised as lambs).

Third, understanding that initial teacher education in many regions is still not producing graduates with the required competences for teaching in this age. And recognizing that in-service teacher education is frequently inadequate in enabling teachers to learn and apply innovative methodologies in their own working contexts.

Four, not recognizing the power of teamwork, and small-scale development of CLIL through cross-curricular (transversal) teaching modules and learning projects. Successful change through CLIL often comes from

within a school, and not from external entities that wish to bring it to a school. Guidance from outside is excellent, but ready-made packages rarely work.

Finally, not recognizing that teaching and learning through a bilingual perspective is essential for CLIL.

**Some people feel that, although a growing number of schools use CLIL worldwide<sup>2</sup>, very few schools understand how CLIL works and how to offer this form of teaching properly. Is this also your view? What advice can you give to teachers?**

Yes this is my experience. Unfortunately education has a long history of embracing fads and fashion, and using these for gain even though they may be superficial or even false. My advice to teachers interested in developing CLIL is to be ‘street-wise’—assume that the journey towards CLIL may feature false friends and the risk of deviating into dead-ends. Take as much care of those who criticize CLIL from narrow perspectives, as those who claim to be authorities. Think of Linux, and take control of what you intend to do, with whom, and for what purpose. And then seek out those advocates and practitioners, who may well live in different countries across the world but who face similar challenges in embracing quality innovation and launching relevant and impactful language learning experiences.

**Trainers of future CLIL teachers in Italy are well aware that trainees may continue to feel «lost» or «inadequate» when they go back to their classrooms and face the challenge of teaching content in a foreign language—for example, a science teacher presenting a science experiment in English or a history teacher delivering a history lesson in English. The point is that CLIL lesson plans have dual aims, meaning that lesson outcomes must cover content and language; and that teachers must understand how to deliver the content and simultaneously have a grasp of how to teach language. Basically, first and foremost, trainees must be taught to think differently or, to use a colorful expression, they**

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<sup>2</sup> The Law of School Reform of the upper secondary school implemented in 2010 has introduced teaching through the medium of a FL also in the Italian education system.

**need to “put on a CLIL thinking-hat.” So, what advice do you have for teacher trainers?**

Introduce practical examples of CLIL which are modest, adaptable for the interests of different teachers and schools, project-based (enabling students to manage much of the content learning without direct interventions by teachers), phenomenon-based (learning about real-life) phenomena which are relevant to the lives and interests of the students, and which justify why a particular topic is being taught in an additional language such as English. Learn to design and manage a ‘learning experience through English’ which crosses disciplines (such as ecologically balanced lifestyles drawing on chemistry, physics, biology, economics); which have competence-based learning objectives, and which invite use of digital media outside the classroom to achieve project goals.

**The FL publishing industry is marketing a wide range of exciting books presenting various degrees of genuine integration of content and language. One almost feels as if there were two types of CLIL: the first, travelling on full-fledged standard tracks; the second, running on some sort of narrow-gauge tracks, more “trendy” than “really CLIL”. For example, some primary school EFL textbooks featuring a short CLIL section with a few CLIL worksheets may ask pupils to match images with basic words (such as names of monuments for history or geography content, names of animal features for a science activity, and so on). If improperly used, these drills may be too simple and sporadic to provide exposure to the L2, as well as to measure up even with the short «language showers» of ten minutes a day proposed by TIE-CLIL<sup>3</sup>— which in fact allow learners to acquire basic words and phrases *and***

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<sup>3</sup> TIE-CLIL is the acronym of Translanguage in Europe-Content and Language Integrated Learning. The TIE-CLIL project (funded through Socrates-Lingua Action A, and coordinated by Gisella Langé) promotes plurilingualism through the introduction of Content and Language Integrated Learning in five different EU languages (English, French, German, Italian, Spanish). The major aim of TIE-CLIL is to provide pre and in-service development programmes in CLIL for language teachers and subject teachers through building on existing knowledge of this field, to provide state-of-the-art understanding of theory and practice. For more information, visit <http://www.tielil.org>.

**develop listening and speaking skills<sup>4</sup>. Do you also feel that a well-meant primary school teacher’s eagerness to be up-to-date doing “some” CLIL may breed a risk of turning a methodology into a faddish way of teaching in the long run, thus stripping CLIL of its original empowerment and meaning?**

I like the metaphor of the rail tracks. I think the point is that both types of railway gauge can be purposeful in introducing alternative ways of language learning, but there is a difference between the more superficial language learning outcomes that can be achieved through one type of activity (such as much communicative language teaching), and the deeper learning that can be achieved by CLIL. It is not so much the size of the tracks but the vehicles on those tracks that makes a difference. The TIE-CLIL language showers were purpose-designed and could work well with young learners. Quite a lot of the materials on the market now for early learners called CLIL are not CLIL at all. And don’t be taken in by vacuous terms like Hard and Soft CLIL which not only invite confusion but are used to sell precisely what you describe—traditional language learning materials and activities devoid of substance.

**Our readers are surely very interested in your views on the future evolution of CLIL. Borrowing from a biological metaphor, would you say that CLIL as we know it today may already have fully defined its “genome”? Could it be considered as a “finite” methodology? Or is it possible to predict that CLIL will undergo further modifications of its ideal “gene expression” in a future educational scenario, due to the time of extremes we’re living in and to foreseeable big shifts in the world and big changes in our lives? In other words, is there a cutting-edge type of CLIL behind the scenes, waiting to come to the forefront and to turn into the latest, more sophisticated stage of this approach?**

Think again of the ecosystem of Linux. CLIL is the same. It is constantly regenerating itself through practice whilst retaining its core academic and pedagogical foundations. Not only is education evolving exponentially by leaps in isolated locations, but so is CLIL. This is hardly sur-

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<sup>4</sup> Langé, G. (Ed.) 2001. *Teaching through a foreign language. A guide for teachers and schools to using foreign languages in content teaching*. TIE-CLIL: 90-91.

prising given that CLIL is embryonic and continuously evolving. The drivers of integration in education are becoming steadily stronger, and this will continue. And one day soon, certain schools will not bear any similarity to the appearance and operations many of today’s schools. Over the past twenty years CLIL has evolved and established itself through different forms of practice. Why? Because students, teachers and schools across the world have different forms of need. In relation to English I think the immediate future will be an expansion of student autonomy and ownership of cognitively demanding projects, the realization of which will depend on international student collaboration, and use of digital media with learning partly in-class and mostly out-of-class. Evaluation will be formative and summative, and learning objectives will be cognitive and competence-based. This is where I think we are going in the immediate future.

**Last, but not least, in recent years you worked on establishing links between multilingualism and creativity, acted as Strategic Director for CCN (Europe)<sup>5</sup>, and handled various educational development and research initiatives in the European Union & East Asia. Would you share with our readers some information on the local or global context of your future projects and interests (innovative curriculum, teacher training providers, professional learning communities that you plan to address, etc.)?**

One overwhelming characteristic of my professional global journey has been, and continues to be, one of connectivity. Achievements attributed to me have often resulted from close collaboration with other people, from different countries, disciplines, age, language, and expertise.

I have witnessed how diversity brings about intellectual solutions and outcomes that can be difficult to achieve when working alone in isolation from others who have different life experiences. And I have seen how smoothly ideas can be converted into actions when people share comple-

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<sup>5</sup> CLIL Cascade Network (CCN) is a three-year network project under the Key Activity 2/Languages in the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission. It was founded in 2007 by twenty-one core partners from fourteen different European countries and fourteen associated partners from five different European countries. Cfr <http://www.onestopenglish.com/5748.file>. URL last accessed on 03.14.2017.

mentary expertise and perspectives, resulting in the breaking of boundaries, changing of the status quo, and nurturing the processes of innovation and transformation for the benefit of all.

At present, I am finalizing publication processes for *The Children of Cyberspace: Towards a New Understanding*.

My ongoing work related to CLIL involves project-based CLIL for High School students where current levels of English are low and resources limited; CLIL in emergency migration contexts; CLIL for early learning and primary education; professional development of teachers and schools capacity-building for CLIL; CLIL curriculum design, and CLIL in Higher Education.

It is said that Canada geese can travel 70% further when flying in formation than when flying alone. Like a Canada goose I have been privileged to have been able to contribute to advances in plurilingual education whilst working in communities moving in the same direction with shared vision and aspirations. I look forward to continuing to meet new people and experiencing the same in the future years.