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New Approaches in English Language Teaching: Teacher Training in the Framework of Content and Language Integrated Learning

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Abstract

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is an innovative approach to foreign language learning based on the integration of language with (non-language) content in a dual-focussed learning environment. This article addresses teacher training in the framework of CLIL, focusing on the specific needs and challenges for CLIL teachers. It also approaches the question of the existence of an “optimal profile” for these teachers, which is strictly linked to the educational stage we are working with. Moreover, the existing gap between the theoretical tenets of CLIL methodology and its application in the classroom is identified as a clear barrier in teacher training, which has to be addressed by building-up learning environments that allow for the exchange of knowledge and results. In this sense, this paper suggests creating university-school partnerships that serve as a breeding ground for transferring knowledge and exchange relevant information and results within the teaching community.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

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profesorado;
Multilingüismo

Nuevos enfoques en la didáctica de la lengua inglesa: formación del profesorado en el contexto del aprendizaje integrado de contenidos y lenguas extranjeras

Resumen

El aprendizaje integrado de contenidos y lenguas extranjeras es un enfoque innovador en el aprendizaje de lenguas basado en la integración de contenido curricular y una lengua adicional. El objetivo es analizar la formación del profesorado de aprendizaje integrado de contenidos y lenguas extranjeras, aproximándose a las necesidades específicas y los retos de estos docentes.

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Se aborda la cuestión de la existencia de un “perfil óptimo” de estos profesores, que está estrictamente unido a la etapa educativa en que la estamos trabajando. Además, se identifica la laguna existente entre los fundamentos metodológicos del aprendizaje integrado de contenidos y lenguas extranjeras y su aplicación en el aula como una barrera en la formación del profesorado, y se defiende que este desajuste debe afrontarse mediante la construcción de entornos de aprendizaje que permitan el intercambio de conocimiento. En este sentido, este trabajo sugiere que los modelos de colaboración universidad-colegio sirven como caldo de cultivo para transferir conocimiento e intercambiar información y resultados relevantes dentro de la comunidad educativa.

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Introduction

Over the last twenty years policies within the context of the Council of Europe and the European Commission have emphasized the potential of different forms of bilingual education in order to improve second language learning across all educational sectors. Thus, the Council of Europe has run relevant cross-European projects, such as the Modern Language Project, whose objectives are to promote large-scale multilingualism by assisting member states in encouraging all Europeans to achieve a degree of communicative ability in a number of languages to continue their language learning on a lifelong basis. This project also aims at diversifying the range of languages on offer, setting appropriate objectives for each language, improving the education/training of language teachers and promoting learner-centred communicative methodologies.

The European Commission for its part has followed a policy focused on diversity. One of its most influential works is the white paper *Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society* aimed at enabling all Europeans to communicate in two community languages in addition to their mother tongue. This document recommends that community language learning should be developed “as early as possible” and refers to the fact that increasing language competence increases mobility and also gives better possibilities for seeking jobs in different EU member states.

CLIL, standing for Content and Language Integrated Learning, is a pragmatic and professionally accepted innovative approach to foreign language learning that is based on the integration of language with (non-language) content in a dual-focussed learning environment. This approach has emerged throughout Europe to enhance the value of European linguistic diversity and to improve the second language competence of students at the primary, secondary and tertiary level (Coleman, 2006; Marsh, 2005).

As a way of combining the integration of the learning of languages and other areas of curricular content, CLIL has become a fast developing phenomenon in Europe, and interest is growing in an approach which seems to carry clear benefits for students at all levels of education (Lasagabaster, 2008; Marsh, 2002). But, as works like the Eurydice survey—which describes 30 different European CLIL experiences—show, it is also evident that there is a diversity of CLIL implementations in European countries, different terminology is used to describe models in different

contexts depending on the emphasis given to either the subject-based component or the language of CLIL. As De Graaf, Koopman, Anikina and Westhoff (2007) explain, CLIL is offered in a variety of forms within Europe and different CLIL programmes exist, which are manifestations of different ways of realising CLIL due to sociocultural settings and educational policies; even within the same territory, CLIL is implemented in different ways according to the particular features of the regions or areas involved. This is the case of Spain, where a decentralised educational system has led to the emergence of several policies, programmes and even methodological approaches as regards Content and Language Integrated Learning (Lasagabaster and Zarobe, 2010).

This paper supports the idea that CLIL is an “umbrella term” covering several methodologies and approaches (Lasagabaster, 2008; Lorenzo, Casal and Moore, 2009) and, therefore, different adjustments need to be done depending on the particular context. Moreover, we understand CLIL is an approach rather than (only) a methodology, as suggested by some authors (Ball and Lindsay, 2010).

Content and Language Integrated Learning revisited

As Coyle (2007b) explains, in the 1990s there was a need to find a common term for the diversity of European models existing in national and regional contexts. European approaches to bilingual education were described using terms borrowed from other contexts, but especially drawing on immersion and bilingual movements in the USA and Canada. According to Coyle (2007a), there were several grounds for hesitancy around adopting an existing “label” for European bilingual education: one reason was that certain terms had connotations which may be perceived as negative by a range of European countries due to socio-political ideologies e.g. “immersion”, though used in some European countries, was not widely favoured due to its close association with Canadian models where the goals and contexts differed from many bilingual programmes across Europe. A second reason had to do with the diverse origins and varied purposes of different bilingual programmes throughout Europe which made it difficult some unification. A third reason was that as newer initiatives became more widely disseminated in the 1990s, a group of pioneers began to advocate alternative terminology to account for emerging models and pedagogies.

CLIL was adopted by the European Network of Administrators, Researchers and Practitioners in the mid-1990s, and it encompasses any activity in which “a foreign language is used as a tool in the learning of a non-language subject in which both language and the subject have a joint role” (Marsh, 2002:58). As Coyle (2007b) indicates the adoption of a “label” was an essential step to position CLIL alongside bilingual education, content-based instruction, immersion and so on and he clearly distinguishes CLIL from the other approaches:

The position of CLIL along this continuum is also determined by contextual and situational variables. As the 2006 Eurydice Survey concludes, different terminology is used to describe models in different contexts depending on the emphasis given to either the subject-based component or the language of CLIL. Many CLIL programmes exist in Europe (Coleman, 2006; Lasagabaster, 2008; Marsh, 2002) which are manifestations of different ways of realising CLIL due to sociocultural settings and educational policies.

Given this diversity, as Coyle (2007a:546) argues, such a flexible inclusive approach to CLIL is both a strength and a potential weakness: “The strength of CLIL focuses on integrating content and language learning in varied, dynamic and relevant learning environments built on ‘bottom-up’ initiatives as well as ‘top-down’ policy”. Its potential weakness lies in the interpretation of this “flexibility” unless it is embedded in a robust contextualised framework with clear aims and projected outcomes. In order for CLIL to earn its rightful place in the pedagogic arena of contemporary and future curricula, it has to demonstrate rigorous theoretical underpinning, substantiated by evidence in terms of learning outcomes and capacity building”. The emergence of CLIL as a distinct field of enquiry calls for the exploration of new venues of research (Coyle, 2007b).

Unveiling CLIL: definitions, types and implications

This section is intended to summarise some of the main tenets of Content and Language Integrated Learning focusing not only on its distinctive characteristics but also on the inner diversity of this approach. Although CLIL is regarded as a complex term welcoming different views and methodologies (Lasagabaster, 2008; Lorenzo, et al., 2009), we will explain how (some) teachers and educational authorities still consider CLIL to be a one-way avenue.

Content and Language Integrated Learning relates to the teaching of a content-based subject by means of a language which is not the mother tongue of the students in the classroom. One of the most widely accepted definitions in academia is the classic one provided by Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010) stating that “CLIL is a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language”. This sentence sets the basis for the essence of CLIL since it specifies its dual-focus that should be understood here as the opportunity of teaching both, content and language at the same time. Hence, CLIL is normally implemented in non-language related subjects, being Science, Arts, History and Maths the most common ones in Primary and Secondary education throughout Europe. Regarding the

use of an additional language, we have to mention that, very frequently, teachers and authorities take the wrong assumption that CLIL is linked with foreign languages; however, the essence of this methodology is not using a foreign language (which is by far the most common option, being English the standard communication tool in CLIL classrooms) but any language which is not the tuition language in students’ context.

Our main concern as regards CLIL does not focus on the conceptual definition but rather on the application of the basic principles set by educational authorities and researchers to the classroom in general (and in higher education in particular). It seems quite clear that CLIL relies on a dual-approach which is intended to provide students with curricular contents by using an additional language as a vehicle for communication, improving not only the language competence of the students but also other elements such as their cognitive skills and their cultural awareness. However, the well-shaped conceptual basis for CLIL turn to be more problematic when they are translated into methodological approaches to be used in a classroom, falling into the everlasting gap between theory and practice in language teaching. In other words, the definition of CLIL as a dual-focused approach has to be regarded as programmatic rather than factual, and practices that are “content-oriented but language sensitive” (Wolff, 2007:17) cannot be regarded as firmly established. In fact, research has been devoted to the main problems perceived by teachers and students regarding the implementation of CLIL (Pavón and Rubio, 2010).

The key element to explain some of the main challenges found so far when putting CLIL into practice is the diversity and flexibility on methodological issues when using an additional language to teach curricular contents. In addition, since teaching is context sensitive, the variety found in the different territories where CLIL has been already applied is also a determining factor. Following this, we need to take into account that there are many CLILs, as it is suggested by the results of the 2006 Eurydice Survey in which the analysis of CLIL programmes in 30 countries concluded that “different labels are used in different contexts, which is why the reader can come across manifold labels for CLIL in literature on the subject” (Lasagabaster, 2008). This paper supports the hypothesis that there is not a single model for CLIL but the different varieties found under this umbrella concept all share the basic principle that integrates language and content teaching.

Distinctive features in Content and Language Integrated Learning

Arguably, beyond the use of an additional language to teach curricular contents, one of the most significant and distinctive characteristics to be associated with Content and Language Integrated Learning are the so-called four dimensions or 4Cs that form a conceptual framework which connects content, cognition, communication and culture (Coyle, 2007b; Coyle et al., 2010:41-43). According to this theory, CLIL should be able to integrate content learning (content and cognition) and language learning (communication and cultures). More precisely, CLIL should

contribute to form an interrelationship between content (subject), communication (language), cognition (thinking) and culture (Costa and D'Angelo, 2011). From the methodological point of view, the 4Cs create a conceptual framework that supports teachers in order to design and implement lessons and syllabi following a CLIL approach. On the other hand, the 4Cs are sometimes used to distinguish CLIL from other types of bilingual education.

Another relevant feature worth mentioning here is the use of both languages in the classroom, something which is not always promoted in foreign language teaching where the use of the mother tongue of students is (normally) discouraged. However, in CLIL the use of both languages, and in particular, switching from one language to the other is not only accepted but also supported. In fact, code-switching or “translanguaging” (Coyle et al., 2010:16) clearly underpins the idea of bilingual education as it might contribute to avoid that students are not able to express complex ideas or command specific terminology in both languages.

The way in which contents are structured and offered to students also needs to be taken into account; hence, supportive learning, scaffolding and activating students' previous knowledge are normally regarded as fundamental items to be included among CLIL best practices. The main reason for this is that we need to bear in mind the cognitive processes of students acquiring specific contents through a language different than their mother tongue. Some other research-based assumptions are the use of meaning-focused activities, the exposure of students to appropriate demanding input, the elicitation of effective output production, or the use of compensation strategies to promote communication (De Graaff et al., 2007). In addition, it is worth considering low-speed of instruction, the use of simplified language, and a higher amount of redundancies, repetitions and rephrasing strategies in teachers' discourse. On a macro-level approach, Navés (2009) also mentions hiring multilingual or bilingual teachers, the presence of long-term teaching staff, using authentic materials, and respect and support the students' mother tongue and culture, among other elements.

Teacher training in CLIL: the case of Spain

The field of teacher training in CLIL is still in an initial stage in Spain. However, several research groups have been created in various Spanish universities (the institutions based in the regions of Andalusia, Catalonia, Madrid, and the Basque Autonomous Community seem to rule the roost in this sense) and some papers have been published focusing on the development of teacher training programmes in CLIL in different regions (Alejo and Piquer, 2010; Ball and Lindsay, 2010; Escobar, 2010; Fortanet, 2010; Halbach, 2010).

The interest in Content and Language Integrated Learning, encouraged by the European Union, and the particular initiatives promoted by educational authorities and Autonomous Communities in Spain have contributed to raise awareness on the need of specific and tailor-made programmes for Spanish teachers willing to engage in CLIL programmes.

A detailed look at the Spanish panorama shows two different stages as regards the implementation of teacher training in CLIL. First, there is a top-down approach in the perception of CLIL as a beneficial teaching paradigm by society: after research conducted at a European level, the good results obtained compelled the European Union to encourage educational authorities and policy-makers to consider the possible application of CLIL at a national level. The enthusiasm for CLIL and the interest in contributing to promote bilingualism was transferred to the Autonomous Communities, some of which translated the suggestions of the European Union into particular regional programmes intended to promote bilingualism in their territory: this is the case of Catalonia, the Basque Autonomous Community, or Andalusia, to put just three examples. The implementation of bilingual programmes extended the interest in CLIL and brought it to the very neuralgic centre of education: schools. This is the turning point where a boomerang effect can be spotted as long as teacher training is concerned, and marks the second step for the creation of CLIL programmes for teachers. The generalisation of the positive effects of bilingualism by transferring this knowledge into society gave way to the demands of many parents for bilingual programmes in their schools. The “pressure” of society has somehow turned the tide and propelled a “bottom-up” tendency in which the need for teacher training has climbed up the ladder until reaching institutions of higher education. In a nutshell, teachers of primary and secondary education, as well as those ones teaching in baccalaureate, require specific training in order to enrol in teaching content through an additional language.

In a first stage, teacher training was frequently provided by external agents and consultants, mainly from the United Kingdom and Finland –two countries with a longer tradition in CLIL–. Foreign teachers came to Spain to offer short courses on CLIL methodology to Spanish teachers, who had the opportunity to make a short stay abroad to improve their teaching skills (Halbach, 2010). In parallel with this, some institutions such as the British Council offered courses on CLIL as well as assistance and support for schools and also for Regional Ministries of Education in the implementation of bilingual programmes –although in many cases, the Autonomous Communities relied on the advice provided by expert committees created *ad hoc*–. Although a fluent collaboration between foreign trainers and local or regional courses has been kept, there has been a shift in order to offer “in-house” training provided by Spanish instructors. Hence, this “in-house” training has been offered by Spanish teachers (who have previously received training by foreign educators) at school level and also at the Teacher Centres, which have been particularly active in the development of workshops, seminars, and short courses on different CLIL-related issues. In this sense, student-teachers (STs) were trained by mentors or old-timers with previous experience in CLIL (Escobar, 2010), promoting the transfer of knowledge within the teaching community.

Finally, in the last years universities have started to design and offer courses on CLIL (normally at graduate level). The Universidad de Oviedo offers a Masters' Degree in Content and Language Integrated Learning for Teachers of Secondary Education and Baccalaureate and another for teachers of Pre-School and Primary Education. Also, there is a Master

in Bilingual Education in the Universidad Pablo Olavide (Seville), a Master in Bilingual Education for Secondary Schools and Immersion in English (offered by the Universidad Juan Carlos I), a Master in Bilingual Education for Teachers of Primary and Secondary Education (Universidad Antonio de Nebrija), and a Master in Bilingual Education offered by the Universidad de Extremadura. Also, the Master course in Teacher Training offered by the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona and the Master in English as a Foreign Language taught in the Universidad de Alcalá include a specialization track in CLIL. In addition, some Masters' Degrees offer individual subjects in Content and Language Integrated Learning; this is the case of the Master in Applied Linguistics for English as a Foreign Language (Universidad de Jaén), the Master in Secondary Education, Baccalaureate and Vocational Training in of the Universidad de Comillas or the Master in English Linguistics: New Applications and International Communication (offered by the Universidad Complutense de Madrid).

Some of these Masters' Degrees have benefited from previous experiences from other well-established courses in other European universities, such as the University of Nottingham (United Kingdom), the University of Maastricht (the Netherlands), the Free University in Brussels (Belgium), the University of Tampere (Finland), or the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main (Germany).

Leaving aside the offer of official Masters' Degrees, it is worth mentioning that there are quite a few graduate courses in CLIL (mostly Specialist Courses or University Expert Courses) offered by Spanish universities (among others, Salamanca, Valladolid, and Leon). This offer is completed by seminars, workshops, summer courses and university extension courses organised by institutions of higher education.

Although CLIL has clearly caught the attention of policy-makers, educational authorities and researchers, the number of teacher training programmes is still scarce in our country, especially when we consider the number of papers, conferences and symposia celebrated in the last years. It can be expected that the growing demand for CLIL teachers will promote the creation of more courses on methodology and training addressing teachers of primary, secondary and tertiary education. Masters' degrees and graduate courses for teachers willing to complement their curriculum with training in CLIL seem to be a logical follow on in the current context.

Specific needs and challenges for CLIL teachers

Currently, there are no standards or established criteria that clearly define the background of teachers working in CLIL or other bilingual approaches in Spain. It is commonly accepted that CLIL teachers are expected to fulfil three main requirements in order to teach content through a foreign language: they need to be specialists in a given area of expertise (e.g. maths, science, arts); they need to command the foreign or the additional language of tuition (although in the case of CLIL English is also the *lingua franca*, there are CLIL programmes in Spanish, French or German, not to mention other less spoken languages or even

minority languages); finally, teachers should be familiar with the specific methodology (and approach) needed to teach contents through an additional language. In other words, teachers need to grasp the basic skills for subject-matter teaching through a foreign language with the objective that their students learn both, contents and language at the same time.

Halbach (2010) states that CLIL teachers need training mainly in five areas: language skills, integration of content and language teaching, teaching literacy in the foreign language, classroom management, and materials development (including here, the use of ICT and audiovisual resources). We agree on this curriculum for CLIL teachers—stressing the paramount importance of methodological issues, since they are the key to train competent teachers in content and language—but it cannot be ignored the fact that this proposal is only addressing content-teachers (who will require more training in language issues but not on their specific areas of expertise, as opposed to language specialists who normally need to acquire knowledge on curricular subjects). This brings us to the question of the existence of an “optimal profile” for CLIL teachers, or if it is more suitable or easy for content-teachers (subject-matter teachers) or language teachers (language specialists) to get engaged in CLIL, a question that has been approached by several researchers (Ball and Lindsay, 2010; Lorenzo et al., 2009; Moore, 2007). In our view, this question is strictly linked to the educational stage we are working with, and we agree with Alejo and Piquer (2010) who find that, in the case of Extremadura, in primary education CLIL teachers are normally specialists in foreign languages (with a degree in language teaching), whereas in secondary education we find both, content-teachers and language specialists, with a slightly higher percentage of subject-matter teachers. In the case of Asturias, we confirm this tendency, as there is an overwhelming majority of language teachers in CLIL programmes in primary education (normally with a diploma in teaching), while graduates in arts, chemistry or maths are more frequently engaged in CLIL programmes than philologists.

As regards higher education, we agree with Fortanet (2010) in the sense that content-teachers are the ones to be engaged in CLIL programmes since university teaching is even more strictly bound to the field of expertise; although many university lecturers are confident content-related discourse due to their academic background (research articles, international conferences) they are not confident as regards “classroom discourse” (Fortanet, 2010) and they need training on methodological issues (e.g. the use of translanguaging, the rate of speech, discourse markers, signposting, repetition and rephrasing techniques, etc.) in order to transfer knowledge in a foreign language in an effective way as they would do in their mother tongue.

In all the cases, teachers need to master and command the language in which they are going to communicate with their students. In this regard, it is normally taken for granted that teachers and language specialist who are “fluent” in the foreign language are able to teach contents through this language. However, even though the requirement for (primary and secondary school) teachers is set in a B1 or a B2 according to the CEFR (depending on the Autonomous Community), we would suggest that C1 is a more suitable

and realistic level for teachers to be competent in teaching subject-matter contents in a foreign language.

As regards methodological issues, we need to point out the scarce training in teaching practices received by most teachers in Spain (including language teachers), who normally acquire their teaching skills when they start working in the classroom. This fact comes to highlight the importance of specific courses and Masters' Degrees on CLIL, which can contribute to complement and update teachers' knowledge and skills. Regardless of the time in which teachers receive training (i.e. pre-service or in-service), one of the main problems that can be found lies in the existing gap between the theoretical tenets of CLIL methodology and its application in the classroom.

The gap between theory and practice is not new in education or in applied linguistics. However, in the particular case of Content and Language Integrated Learning, failing to put into practice what has been learned at university (bringing the theoretical knowledge into the classroom and applying this knowledge into the teaching practice) might be even more harmful, as it can clearly spoil the required balance between contents and language teaching and steer the focus towards one or the other (in an exclusive way).

As long as CLIL is concerned, we need to bear in mind that this is not an isolated educational initiative but it has to be regarded as a comprehensive and consistent approach to be implemented and promoted by several agents (authorities, policy-makers, universities, researchers) at all levels of education, developing a planned and structured long-term programme. Therefore, the imbalance between theory and practice has to be addressed by building-up learning environments and partnerships that allow for the exchange of knowledge and results. In this sense, creating university-school partnership models serve as a breeding ground for transferring knowledge and exchange relevant information and results within the teaching community.

Conclusions

This paper has approached Content and Language Integrated Learning focusing not only on its distinctive characteristics but also on the inner diversity of this approach, supporting the hypothesis that there is not a single model for CLIL but the different varieties found under this umbrella concept all share the basic principle that integrates language and content teaching.

The main idea to bear in mind is that CLIL is not a single and straightforward methodology but it offers some room for adjustments. Moreover, we support some authors' argument that CLIL can be understood as an approach rather than (only) a methodology.

The present paper has focused specifically on teacher training in the framework of CLIL, analysing the particular needs and challenges for CLIL teachers. It is clear that CLIL teachers need to grasp the basic skills for subject-matter teaching through a foreign language; therefore, they need specific training in language skills, integration of content and language teaching, and methodology. Rather than opting for an "optimal profile for CLIL teachers", we support the view that both content teachers and language teachers should be effectively trained for CLIL teaching,

bearing in mind the educational stage we are working with and adapting this training accordingly. In any case, teachers need to master and command the language in which they are going to communicate with their students. Therefore, even though the requirement is set in a B2 according to the CEFR, we are of the opinion that C1 is a more suitable and realistic level for teachers to be competent in teaching subject-matter contents in a foreign language (even in primary education).

We have also pointed out that one the main problems that can be found in teacher training lies in the existing gap between the theoretical tenets of CLIL methodology and its application in the classroom. This question is especially important in CLIL where a balance between content and language teaching is required so that none of the elements (content or language) is emphasized to the detriment of the other. We consider that the imbalance between theory and practice has to be addressed by building-up learning environments and partnerships that allow for the exchange of knowledge and results. In this sense, creating university-school partnership models serve as a breeding ground for transferring knowledge and exchange relevant information and results within the teaching community.

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