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CLIL as a Catalyst for Change in Languages Education

“It’s not so much that we’re afraid of change, or so in love with the old ways, but it’s the place between we fear....it’s like being in between trapezes”
Marilyn Ferguson

La Société des Connaissances ouvre le chemin à l’assimilation de secteurs jusque là clairement cloisonnés. Cette approche d’assimilation prend une ampleur considérable dans le milieu éducatif grâce au développement de méthodes innovantes qui permettent aux enseignants d’adapter les pratiques d’enseignement aux besoins des communautés dans lesquelles ils évoluent.

Celles-ci bouleversent profondément notre manière d’enseigner et d’apprendre et il devient nécessaire d’établir des fondements sur une base « écologique » afin de servir les intérêts et répondre aux besoins en temps et en lieux. L’Enseignement d’une Matière Intégrée à l’enseignement d’une Langue Etrangère (EMILE) fait figure de catalyseur au développement écologique d’une bonne pratique d’enseignement justement parce que cette méthode répond aux besoins de notre société en général et du milieu scolaire.

Entre 2004 et 2007 le CELV a œuvré en faveur du développement d’un outil internet (la matrix EMILE) conçu pour les enseignants, d’une part, dans le but de définir les compétences et les connaissances nécessaires pour assurer la qualité de la méthode EMILE et d’autre part afin d’examiner dans quelle mesure l’enseignant doit être formé à cette méthode. La matrix permet aux enseignants de prendre conscience des potentielles modifications, des avantages et des risques de cette méthode.

The Knowledge Society is treading the path towards integrating sectors which were separate in the past. This process known as convergence is having a major impact on education, since it has led to creating innovative methods that help teachers adapt good practice to the needs of the communities in which they live and work.

Because innovation is causing a profound impact on how we teach and learn it needs to set roots on “ecological” drivers -to suit and serve the interests and needs of time and place. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has emerged as a catalyst for the ecological development of good teaching practice because it responds to the demands of two fundamental environments: the wider society, and the schools.

From 2004-2007 the ECML supported development of an internet tool (CLIL Matrix) for teachers, designed to consider the skills and knowledge necessary for achieving quality CLIL, and examine the extent to which a person is professionally ready for teaching through CLIL. The Matrix makes teachers aware of the potential changes, gains and hazards which exist when content and language converge and a high degree of authenticity for each is achieved in the learning context.

One of the characteristics of the Knowledge Society in which we now live is the creation of new working models. These innovations often involve moving away from fragmentation towards integration; following a process known as convergence in which there is fusion between sectors which may have been quite separate in the past.

One obvious example of sector convergence is driven by technology and can be seen in the new fusion between the media, telecommunications, entertainment and computing – resulting in our owning pocket sized telephones that contain more power, and have vastly more functions, than the computers found in some schools a decade ago. Another is related to entertainment and has to do with the integration concept proposed by Cirque du Soleil. This is an innovation derived from the

convergence of circus, modern music, dance, acrobatics and gymnastics. The founders produced a new performance form based on some very long-standing skills and expertise. The circus purists rejected it saying ‘this is not circus, there are no animals’; the theatre purists announced that ‘it is not theatre, there is no proper acting’; others questioned the very idea of breaking barriers and combining established disciplines in such a new way.

The widespread impact of the new technologies, as well as the outstanding success of the Cirque du Soleil concept, involve blending ingredients from different sources into a coherent whole and in so doing, creating innovative tools and experiences. Convergence is having a profound impact on our lives, and it is as relevant to telecommunications, and entertainment, as it is to teaching and learning.

Over the last decades we have seen waves of innovation impacting on how we teach and learn languages. Some of these led to large-scale change and had a major impact on the teaching profession. Others disappeared almost as soon as they surfaced. For example, whereas the initial development of 'communicative language teaching' in the 1970s has remained very important in what we now do in the classroom, the 1980s 'cooperative language learning' was soon side-lined and forgotten.

The so-called 'new' approaches which soon disappear are often not actually 'new'. This is because they are based on a re-packaging and re-naming of practice which is already taking place, and thus do not invite or lead to any substantial changes in our work practice.

Language teachers have long experience of working in a profession which has embraced innovation for many years. But what is it that makes some innovation become deeply entrenched in influencing how we work, whilst others have very little impact?

Ecological development

One issue relates to how we adapt good practice to the needs of the wider, global communities in which we live and work; how we seek out and implement change in our professional lives. Another is whether the specific innovation is a form of 'ecological' development; or whether it is driven by narrow interests such as those generated by commercial organizations. If innovation is to have a profound impact on how we teach and learn, and not just result in some superficial and often temporary change, then it has to be driven by ecological drivers; it needs to suit and serve the interests and requirements of time and place.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is an educational approach which is fundamentally ecological. Ecology involves the re-

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lationship between an organism and its environment. CLIL has emerged as an ecological professional development in language teaching because it responds to the new, changing and immediate demands of two fundamental 'environments'; the wider society, and the schools. Parents, for example, may be increasingly aware that their children's future lives will be enriched by competence in a second language; and seeing a direct link between multilingualism and language education, politicians may require schools to adopt major changes in languages provision so as to improve overall success rates.

The term CLIL was adopted in Europe during 1994 to help professionals explore the types of good practice and sometimes very significant outcomes being achieved where 'language-supportive' methodologies were used to learn both language, and authentic content. Many of us in language teaching may have been using such methodologies long before the 1990s. So did the introduction of CLIL mark something new which would lead to change? Or was this simply another example of re-packaging certain existing features of good language teaching practice?

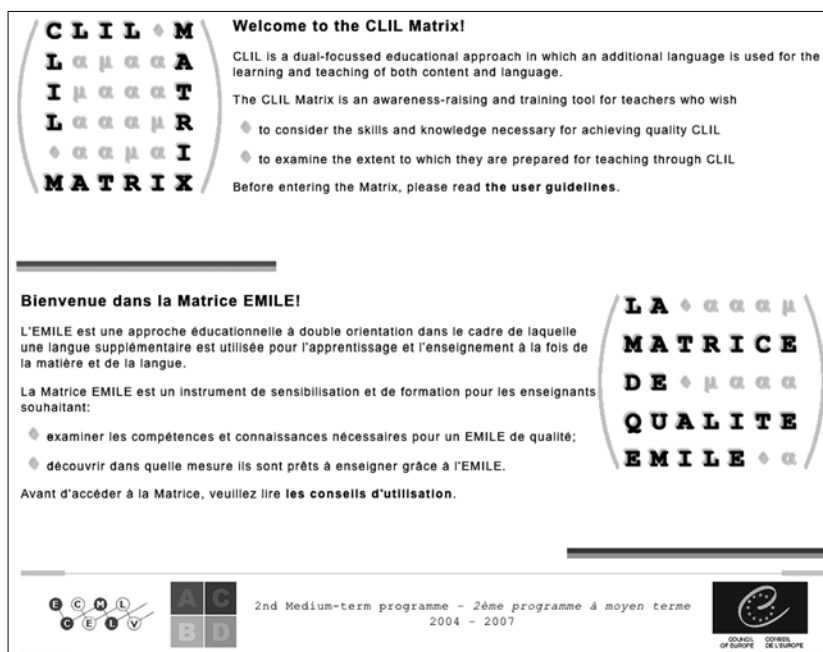
When the term was adopted, those experts involved realized that they were dealing with something which was neither language teaching, nor

subject teaching, but rather a fusion of both. This fusion introduced a higher level of relevance and authenticity than could be otherwise achieved in the classroom. Thus the process of convergence led to a methodology being formed which was drawing on both content and language learning, and which was considered 'integrated'. This integration offered a radical change in existing features of language teaching practice. The dual focus on having simultaneous content and language learning outcomes was quite different to conventional practice. This became even more so as research on CLIL gave rise to the triple focus concept, whereby content and language goals are pursued with a sophisticated understanding of student cognition, usually referred to as thinking skills. CLIL was a catalyst for change because it provided teachers with considerable opportunities for re-thinking educational practice and reaching out for an upgrading of performance.

The emergence of CLIL as part of the ongoing ecological development of good language learning practice can be traced back through the activities of the Council of Europe, alongside other trans-national bodies such as the European Commission. For example, from 1995 onwards, the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) has been actively developing this innovation. Further expanding the outcomes of two landmark events, Council of Europe Workshops 12 A and B (1993 & 1996), the ECML has been engaged in a range of work exploring aspects of CLIL, often using the terminology 'bilingual education' and 'languages across the curriculum'.

The CLIL Matrix

From 2004-2007 the ECML supported development of an internet awareness-raising tool (CLIL Matrix) for teachers which was designed to:



- Consider the skills and knowledge necessary for achieving quality CLIL
- Examine the extent to which a person is professionally ready for teaching through CLIL

Recognizing the historical and clearly ecological path by which CLIL has emerged as a major educational innovation, the experts involved with the creation of the CLIL Matrix initially set out to identify the core elements which influence how good practice is achieved. This was done by examining how integration was taking place in CLIL classrooms, and finding ways of making this insight readily accessible to teachers.

The main foundations of CLIL were identified as:

Content (the topic or subject)
 Language (the language learning / practice goals)
 Integration (the new fusion of both content and language learning goals)
 Learning (the thinking skills required/ developed to manage this fusion)

Each of these foundations was then examined in relation to essential features of practice through looking at how they converge with:

Culture

including:

- teacher/student cultural backgrounds, and first languages
- diverse mindsets (ways of thinking) which arise from age, first language, lifestyle preferences, gender, socio-economic background, etc.
- subject-specific cultural ways of thinking and learning

Communication

including:

- teacher and student communication skills
- types of communication in rich learning environments
- use of information and communication technologies

Cognition

including

- the types of language needed to learn certain types of content
- the types of thinking skills required

for achieving different learning outcomes

- the types of preferred learning styles and strategies which students have, and ways in which to use methods so as to maximize the potential of these

Community

including:

- the school/college(s) in which teaching takes place
- the municipal/rural community in which the school is located
- the working life stakeholders and the future lives of students

The ECML project team created the Matrix by combining theory and practice to produce 16 'indicators' which the user can rely on to see the extent to which s/he is ready to effectively teach through CLIL and to establish a platform for improvement of teaching practice, detect teaching/learning necessities s/he wasn't aware of. Each indicator is shown on the Matrix as a coloured box (See Figure 1, p. 36).

Clicking on a box leads to four navigation elements. The first is an introduction to the quality indicator. The second provides an example of how the indicator is applied in the classroom. The third invites the users to answer a set of questions so that they can position themselves with respect to CLIL expertise. The fourth provides extra information in a brief text which is accessed by passing the cursor over the respective box answered. As the user answers the questions in each indicator an assessment is automatically made of the degree of his/her readiness with respect to that specific indicator (See Figure 2).

For example, the box Content & Communication handles the importance of interactive methodologies in the classroom. It explains that:

Pair and group work are quite natural approaches to learning in a CLIL class-

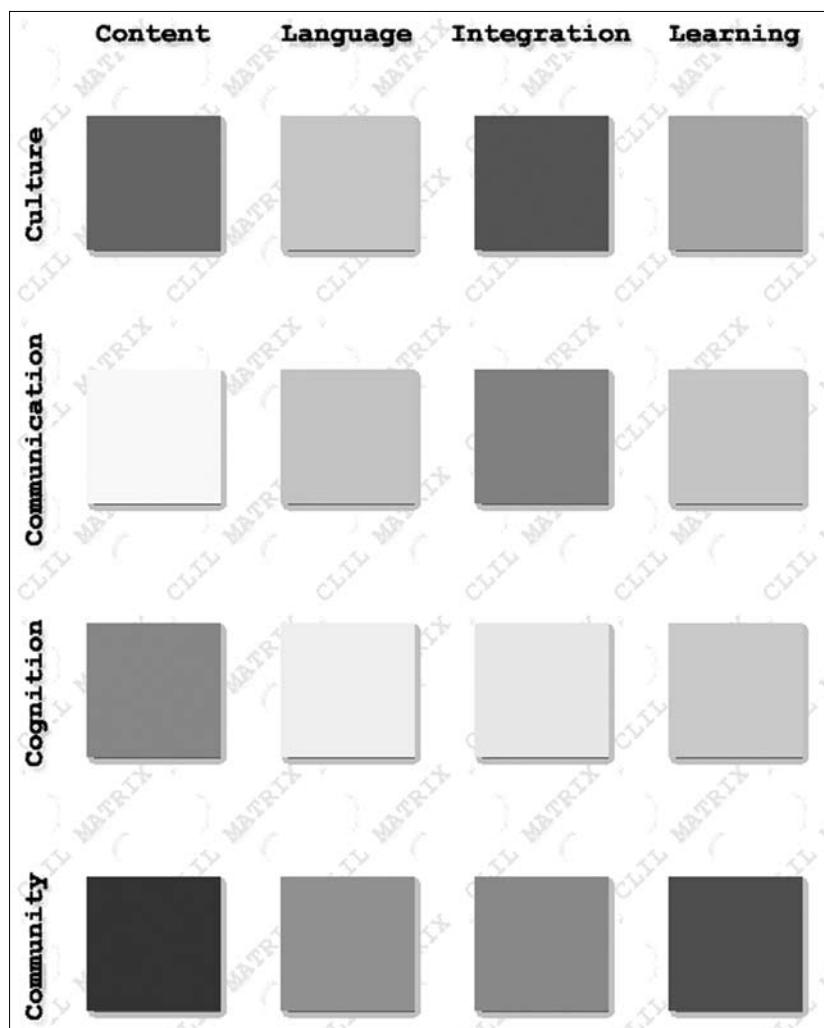


Figure 1 CLIL Matrix Indicator Site Page

room simply because there is so much more to do than in a traditional classroom. The teacher alone cannot provide learners with all they need to know in order to learn language and content in this integrated way. But the teacher can structure the classroom in order to achieve success. In a history classroom learner groups could, for example, work on different documents; in a geography classroom pairs of learners could prepare vocabulary which is necessary to describe a map or a chart. In this way learners move on much faster both in their content and language learning. And as they have to transmit the results of their group work to the other learners they use the foreign language, and thus develop more academic communicative competences.

Having answered the questions which follow the explanation, the user sees a 'water level' in the coloured box. A low level indicates a possible area for development. A high level indicates that the user is already aware of the significance of this indicator. When the user has completed all of the questions s/he can see a one page overview of his/her position with respect to all 16 indicators.

The CLIL Matrix has a limited but crucial function in making teachers aware of the potential gains and hazards which exist when content and language are combined in the classroom. The 80 questions included are not merely a questionnaire or form of test. They function to provide the user with a comprehensive overview of what s/he knows and does to ensure that the best possible outcomes can be achieved.

The CLIL Matrix can be used by experienced CLIL teachers as a tool to validate their approaches, and by less experienced teachers as a developmental tool. For teachers without previous experience of CLIL undergoing in-service education the CLIL Matrix may be instrumental in all the stages of the didactic process: helping them to reflect on how CLIL materials should be created and adapted, and

Content - Communication

Interactive learning
(e.g. cooperative learning through pair and group work as opposed to mainly teacher talk) is usually a quality feature in a common CLIL classroom.

□ ■ ■ ■ Example

CLIL Indicators:

- Content - Culture
- Language - Culture
- Integration - Culture
- Learning - Culture
- Content - Communication
- Language - Communication
- Integration - Communication
- Learning - Communication
- Content - Cognition
- Language - Cognition
- Integration - Cognition
- Learning - Cognition
- Content - Community
- Language - Community
- Integration - Community
- Learning - Community

Home Français

Figure 2 CLIL Matrix Introductory Page to a Quality Indicator

how CLIL lessons can be designed and implemented. In this type of context, it acts as a guide to good practice, and provides the framework for content-based and language-based competence-building.

As we have argued here, CLIL is not a straightforward ‘off-the-shelf’ new language teaching approach. It is an educational approach which has taken root and grown over time, and which is now flowering because of the surrounding environmental conditions. It may be complicated to understand because there are many different ways of carrying it out within the curriculum, and because it involves convergence. Convergence implies major re-conceptualization – that is a major re-thinking of boundaries, resources, and established ways of operating, which leads towards innovative inter-linking, dynamism and change.

Former innovations in language teaching such as Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) or Content-based Language Teaching (CBT), have served very well in enabling us to fine-tune the art of language teaching. They have enabled us to embed human commu-

nication and content deeply into the language curriculum. CLIL allows us to not only maintain these benefits, but go one step further because of the high degree of authenticity in the learning context– but it is rarely effective if simply added on to existing ways of teaching. CLIL requires change in how we structure our languages curriculum which requires the expert knowledge that we already have about good practice, but also new insight resulting from convergence with other teaching disciplines.

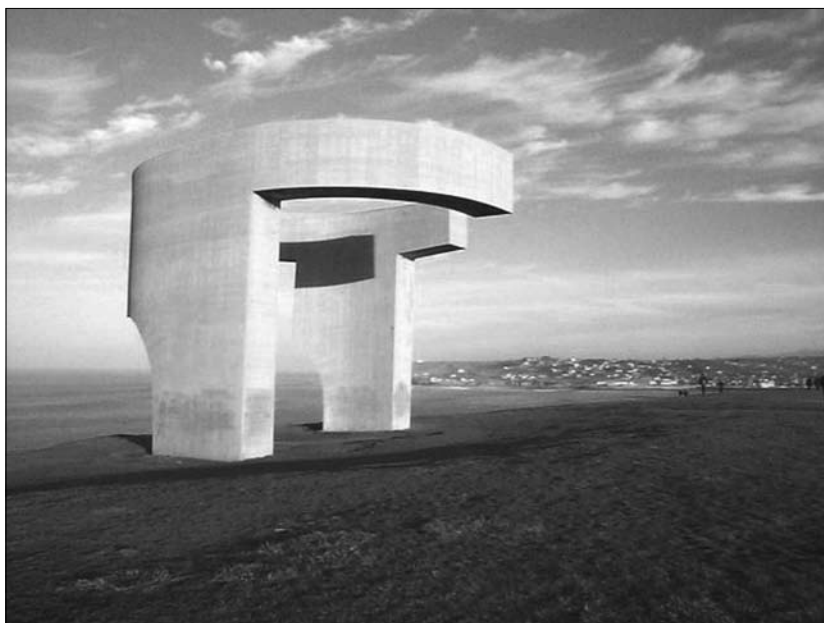
In countries across Europe pressure has grown to ensure higher success rates in the learning of languages. In one country the target language may be a major lingua franca; in another, a minority or heritage language which requires revival or support. In each case, parents, young people, and key stakeholders approach the language teaching profession and ask: How can you respond, effectively and quickly?

Indeed, one sign of the ecological nature of CLIL can be seen in the ways in which grass-roots forces (parents and young people) have been a major factor

in encouraging schools and teachers to provide this form of language and content integrated education; another is the speed at which leading professionals in languages education have responded swiftly, and often favorably, to taking a close look at what it involves, and the outcomes it can bring.

There has long been a need to improve language learning levels across mainstream school populations. The same applies to the learning of other subjects. We have now moved into a period of profound social change, and have this opportunity to modify the status quo so as to benefit both content and language learning. It is curricular convergence through CLIL which offers this opportunity. The CLIL Matrix is one tool by which to bring this opportunity closer to teachers, of both languages and content.

The CLIL Matrix was produced by an international team: Anne Maljers (Netherlands), David Marsh (Finland), Stefka Kitanova (Bulgaria), Dieter Wolff (Germany), Bronislawa Zielonka (Poland).



Eduardo Chillida, Elogio del horizonte.

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