

# CLIL implementation in Italian schools: Can long-serving teachers be retrained effectively? The Italian protagonists' voice<sup>1</sup>

Puesta en marcha del CLIL en los centros educativos italianos:  
¿Se puede dar una formación eficaz al docente con antigüedad  
en el oficio? La voz de los protagonistas italianos

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## Abstract

*Most Italian upper schools will have to offer at least one subject in a foreign language as part of the national curriculum as of the 2012-2013 scholastic year. This paper reports the results of a survey carried out between April and June 2011 in order to get the feel of the teachers' expectations, concerns, and other thoughts in the wake of Italy's "CLIL revolution". The intention is to offer those in charge of the project a chance to hear the voices of the teachers being asked to take on the task, requiring considerable extra work in a very complex moment for Italy, of aligning their decisions with current conditions.*

**Key Words:** linguistic input; bilingual education; language learning; learning motivation; training needs; training objectives.

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<sup>1</sup> The authors wish to declare that the Introduction-and Conclusions were prepared by Bruna Di Sabato, and the Methodology and Results & Discussion sections were prepared by Emilia Di Martino.

## Resumen

*A partir del año 2012-2013, los institutos italianos estarán obligados a impartir una asignatura en un idioma extranjero como parte del currículo nacional. Objetivo de esta ponencia es informar de los resultados de una encuesta realizada entre abril y junio de 2011 con el fin de sondear las expectativas de los profesores, sus temores y opiniones con vista a la revolución CLIL en Italia. La finalidad de la investigación es ofrecer a los responsables del proyecto la posibilidad de escuchar las voces de los docentes, a los que se les está pidiendo una gran cantidad de trabajo extra en un momento especialmente complicado para el país, con el fin de afinar las modalidades de realización del proyecto mismo con las exigencias de los profesores de instituto y la realidad actual.*

**Palabras Claves:** input lingüístico; educación bilingüe; aprendizaje de idiomas; motivación en el aprendizaje; necesidades formativas; objetivos de formación.

## INTRODUCTION

The incipit from *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (1933), which was also used as the opening line of a previous contribution to this journal on content and language integrated learning (Di Sabato 2008), seems to us to effectively capture our beliefs about CLIL at its best: if the meeting of two personalities cannot but have effects on both of them, this is also true of the “meeting” of two diverse areas of knowledge. And anyone who has any experience in the teaching of foreign languages knows this is particularly true when the contact takes place between a language, be it mother tongue or foreign, and some type of curricular content.

Hopefully, when integrating language and content, the “transformation” involved translates into an increased competence in both, but not everyone remembers to consider that, in addition to the learning outcome, the personalities of those involved in the process are also influenced by this blended experience. In 2002, Carmel Mary Coonan underlined the positive effects deriving from the exchange of views and experiences between the language teacher and the content teacher, the latter hopefully becoming more sensitive “to a whole series of issues and potential solutions that the non-foreign language subject matter teacher is normally not aware of” (p. 63). And the former, we would like to add, should become more aware of the value of words and texts in shaping contents and conveying the desired effect on the recipients in specific communicative contexts.

But, most importantly, by confronting the learning strategies involved in the concurrent learning of a language and a content, the learner may acquire awareness of and radically change his/her attitude towards learning. Also, the different organization of thought in relation to the specific area of study involved is strictly connected to the ability to communicate. Last but not least, these processes force the protagonists to concentrate on the functional aspect of language learning, which is also beneficial to those language teachers who unconsciously over-focus on the notional side (Di Sabato 2008).

Since 2002, however, much progress has been made in Italy, including a special issue of *Rassegna Italiana di Linguistica Applicata* devoted to CLIL (Di Sabato & Cordisco 2006), but—especially thanks to the work of Coonan and also of Gisella Langé, as well as of (together with) the many anonymous teachers at school and university level who have been working in a CLIL or CLIL-like environment as a consequence of personal choice through painstaking autonomous effort, especially in Southern Italy (see Cardona 2008 for the Puglia experiences). We feel it is our duty to stress here that up until now the content and language integration experiences recorded in Italy are all due to the personal and deliberate commitment of language teachers and to the joint effort of such language teachers with their content colleagues. Up to now, no content teacher at Italian schools has to our knowledge worked in a CLIL environment on their own.

Indeed, CLIL is still on the agenda of the European Union in the *Council conclusions on language competences to enhance mobility* (Council of the European Union, 2011), which recommends CLIL for both general education and VET (Vocational Education and Training) as a teaching tool that is “particularly effective in enhancing the mobility and employability of workers” (p. 4). Moreover, it is part of the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020) (Council of the European Union, 2009).

Today, as of the 2012-2013 scholastic year, in line with European Union policies and as in most European countries, the present Italian school reform requires that the majority of upper schools offer at least one subject in a foreign language as part of the national curriculum starting next year.

In the following pages, we will try to map out these requirements, the actions meant at implementing them, the likely effects on the teaching at secondary level and, most importantly, the teachers’ feelings and attitudes towards all this with

reference to a ‘delicate’ area of Southern Italy, the province of Naples. These aspects have all been surveyed by means of a questionnaire distributed to several schools located in southern Italy (more precisely, the Naples area) from April to June of 2011 in order to get the feel of the teachers’ expectations, fears and thoughts in the wake of the “CLIL revolution” in Italy. We chose this area both because of our inside knowledge of it—we know it better due to our living and working there—and because, unfortunately we must say, it is fairly well known that the southern part of Italy is lagging behind (we consciously decided to use this verb to avoid any euphemisms or false politically correct sensitivity). Our feeling was that, as frequently happens (at least in Italy), reality is quite different from the ideal world to which some projects seem to be tailored. Both the data collected by the Italian Ministry of Education regarding the foreign language competence of non-language teachers currently working as permanent staff in Italian secondary schools and the *quantitative* (though not statistically meaningful) part of our data would seem to show there is no real worry about the successful implementation of the project. Nevertheless, the *qualitative* data we collected seem to contradict this reassuring picture.

In line with the educational perspective from which we tend to approach all our studies, even ‘purely’ linguistic ones (as we both share a strong appreciation for the value of action research, we have the practical effects of our work in mind at all times), the overall aim of the action research plan—of which the survey described in these pages is just an initial step—is to offer those in charge of the CLIL project the possibility to at least attempt to understand the teachers who are being asked to take on a task requiring considerable extra work in a very complex moment for Italy. The questions we tried to address in this specific step of the plan were: “What do those involved in the CLIL revolution actually think of this innovation? How do they feel about it?”. The objective of this study is to help the CLIL project succeed by helping those working on it to align with current conditions and with the expectations of stakeholders.

The methodology guiding the specific work presented in this article is described and justified in the Methodology section; we will just anticipate here that we adopted an open-ended questionnaire as a survey tool. As for the wider action research plan, in order to ground it in the actual world of practice as profoundly as possible, we based it on qualitative investigation, which can offer in-depth

understanding of people and contexts. Whilst referring the reader to previous work on qualitative research for a more detailed analysis of assets and liabilities of one such type of investigation (Di Martino 2004), we would like to share the consideration that the very nature of less structured materials might offer precious insights into the determinants of actions and the development of deeper understandings of the situational context. Indeed, experimental investigation in the field of education has never been proved to be a successful form of research, since the object of investigation is rather heterogeneous, made up of individuals with personal characteristics and motives interacting in unique and ever diverse situations.

### **CLIL in the Italian school system**

The project, introduced by the ex-Minister for Education, Gelmini, and approved by the previous Government, provides for (Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca, 2010c):

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. (Allegato B)<sup>2</sup>

When we read this, we immediately felt that what is undeniably (we admit it) theoretically well-planned would irremediably show some serious weaknesses when faced with the reality of Italian schools (or at least with their reality in some parts of the country). One of these weaknesses, is, indeed, due to the failure to lend an ear to those actually required to work in the project, which openly ignores the focus CLIL experts lay on the involvement of all stakeholders: teachers, students, and families as well.

The need to take in the opinions and the advice of all those involved in the CLIL project is underlined by CLIL experts at all times. Students, parents, teachers, the whole school need to be involved, to feel they are part of a change

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<sup>2</sup> “The teaching in a foreign language of a non-language subject chosen among the ones which are compulsory or among those which can be activated as part of the curriculum in respect of that specific year’s estimated (and assigned) workforce”.

which will not just affect the classroom dynamics. This is because CLIL forces schools to rethink their pedagogy, and the correct involvement of all the protagonists of the educational process is the major prerequisite to the success of CLIL. As Peeter Mehisto (Marsh et al., 2009) puts it:

It is simply not possible that the CLIL teacher goes off and does his or her CLIL "thing" .... One of the realities of CLIL in schools, and I have been in schools researching the issue, is how CLIL impacts on what is happening on a daily basis in schools. It actually forces schools to rethink their pedagogy, rethink how they are going to do things. It requires a discussion, it is simply not possible that the CLIL teacher goes off and does his or her CLIL "thing". It requires a discussion about pedagogy, about CLIL, how we are going to work together and that tends to have a major impact on an institution. In many ways CLIL has become a motor for reform in schools; that is what we are hearing from country after country where we have gone to look at these programmes.

We feel that the "political" choice to ignore the main actors' voices makes the Italian effort towards a CLIL "revolution" seriously questionable if not contradictory in the extreme.

Now, going a little deeper into the technicalities of official documents, we find that Italian school legislation (Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca, 2010d) looks at CLIL as an:

Approccio metodologico che prevede l'insegnamento di una disciplina non linguistica, in lingua straniera veicolare al fine di integrare l'apprendimento della lingua e l'acquisizione di contenuti disciplinari, creando ambienti di apprendimento che favoriscano atteggiamenti plurilingui e sviluppino la consapevolezza multiculturale. (p. 86)<sup>3</sup>

The teachers affected by the reform are mostly those who are already part of the school system on a permanent basis (as from 1, c. 605, legge 296/2006, D.M. 68

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<sup>3</sup> "A methodological approach which implies teaching a curricular subject in a foreign language with the aim of integrating language learning and content acquisition, thus producing learning environments which promote plurilingual attitudes and develop multicultural awareness, which is obviously commendable. The students involved are those attending the last year of general education and technical upper secondary school (third year of upper secondary in the case of students specialising in language studies). The project does not affect vocational schools and schools below upper secondary, but these can start a CLIL experiment autonomously, if they like."



del 30/07/2010, MIUR/Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca 2010). Most importantly, however, the reform does not apply to foreign language teachers at all; all the responsibility for CLIL implementation is placed in the hands of non-language teachers.

In order to be taken on CLIL training courses, these teachers (that is, the “non-language” teachers) must possess a language competence of at least B1 level according to the *Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (Council of Europe, 2001) in the language chosen as a vehicle for the subject contents, an entry requirement mentioned specifically in the reference documents.

Space constraints prohibit offering any more details about the legal provisions. Restricting our data to short term measures, we will just say here that one of the most relevant actions of the project is the methodological training of the teachers whose language competence falls within the C1 level of the CEF, as provided for by a recent decree by the Ministry of Education (Ministero dell'istruzione, dell'università e della ricerca, 2011).

As we have just hinted, the training that will take place in the immediate future, and for which we hope the Ministry has already set aside enough funding, will entail methodology courses for the teachers at C1 and C2 level, but also for those teachers who are willing to attend language courses aiming at C1 level while also attending methodology classes (Ministero dell'istruzione, dell'università e della ricerca, 2010a):

Il percorso di formazione linguistica sarà curato dai Centri Linguistici di Ateneo o dalle Facoltà universitarie o da altri Enti individuati dal M.I.U.R., avrà la durata di almeno quattro anni per i docenti in possesso di competenze linguistico-comunicative di livello B1 e di almeno due anni per i docenti in possesso di competenze linguistico-comunicative di livello B2.

The language formation will be carried out by university language centers and/or faculties. The length of courses will be at least four years for teachers at B1 level and two years for those at B2 level.

What actually strikes us is that a recent decree of the Italian Ministry of Education allows for universities to set up methodological courses for permanent teachers possessing the C2/C1 CEF level in a foreign language. This seems such a huge effort if you consider the numbers of teachers understood to possess those levels according to a recent survey by the Ministry of Education. Taking regions as

a sample, in Lombardy there are 28 teachers at C2 level and 53 at C1 (out of a total of 186). In Campania, there are 27 at C2 and 48 at C1 (out of 1142). What we mean is that it seems natural to suspect this measure has been taken to show the political intention to move forward but while also keeping an eye on what is actually feasible with available funds. The other possible explanation is that the Ministry knows their numbers are unreliable. This might be partly due to the fact that the mere rumour of this reform lead to enormous speculations with any language school offering any sort of CLIL language course to teachers. Luckily, the Ministry has recently decided not to accept just *any* certification (which would have actually meant a failure of the project, since we suspect that money buys any level you want these days), but *only* those recognised by the governments of the countries where the foreign languages to be certified are spoken:

Saranno ammessi direttamente ai corsi i docenti in possesso di certificazioni rilasciate da Enti certificatori formalmente riconosciuti dai Governi dei Paesi nei quali la lingua straniera è lingua ufficiale. Per i docenti sprovvisti della certificazione verranno organizzati appositi test di posizionamento nella lingua straniera (Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca, 2012a).

2. L'elenco degli Enti certificatori di cui al comma 1 è costituito presso la Direzione generale per gli Affari Internazionali di questo Ministero ed è reso di sponibile al pubblico sul sito internet; è aggiornato su richiesta dei Governi interessati per il tramite delle rispettive Ambasciate ovvero attraverso la richiesta degli Enti medesimi, previa presentazione della documentazione attestante il riconoscimento di cui al comma 1.
3. Ai fini della costituzione dell'elenco di cui al comma 2, la Direzione generale per gli Affari Internazionali richiede formalment e l'elenco degli Enti certificatori riconosciuti:
  - a. alle ambasciate dei Governi dei Paesi membri dell'Unione europea nei quali la lingua straniera è lingua ufficiale;
  - b. alle Amba sciate dei Governi dei Paesi non comunitari la cui lingua ufficiale è insegnata in Italia.
4. A partire dalla pubblicazione dell'elenco di cui al comma 2, le corrispondenti certificazioni assumono validità ai sensi del presente decreto (Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca, 2012b).



While obviously welcoming the Ministerial will to clear the waters, we feel the decree has come too late to avoid speculations. But it is indeed good to hear the effort is not considered to have been accomplished once and for all:

5. L'elenco viene aggiornato a cura della Direzione generale per gli Affari Internazionali a seguito di verifiche periodiche (Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca, 2012b).

## METHODOLOGY

Given our research question, the type of evidence that was needed to address the issue in a convincing way was, essentially, the teachers' own voice, so when it came to making decisions about the research design, we opted for a qualitative research method in the form of qualitative survey, a type of survey that “does not aim at establishing frequencies, means or other parameters but at determining the *diversity* of some topic of interest within a given population” (Jansen, 2010). The specific goal we had in mind was not “coverage of the diversity” but rather an attempt at “conceptualizing the common essence” (Jansen, 2010) in the surveyed teachers' experiences and expectations. This, we felt, would make it possible to sketch a reasonably complete picture of the context which was the object of our study in relation to the CLIL “revolution”. The main method of data collection was a semi-structured questionnaire administered to a small sample of teachers, which was made “meaningful” (that is, oriented at finding out and analysing the diversity of the surveyed teachers' experiences and expectations—attitudes, behaviours, reasons for concern—rather than merely counting the number of teachers sharing the same characteristics) by including open-ended questions aimed at eliciting reasons and therefore helping to form hypotheses about the central values around which the individuals surveyed aim to orient their CLIL teaching.

We will now shift to a detailed presentation of our survey, which we carried out in four different steps:

1. The setting up of a FB group
2. The preparation of a teacher questionnaire
3. The preparation of a student questionnaire
4. A questionnaire for colleagues abroad to survey the situation in other countries.

We are still working at the data from the last step (the one aimed at colleagues who have already tried their hands at CLIL abroad) whereas the student questionnaire

has already been dealt with elsewhere (Di Martino, forthcoming a), and so we will here concentrate on the teacher side of the survey, in particular on the teacher questionnaire which is featured above in step 2.

As briefly outlined in the description of the steps, in order to stimulate some sort of information exchange (but also an exchange of ideas, attitudes and feelings) amongst teachers, we also set up a Facebook profile inviting a group of colleagues to post comments, information and anything else which they felt would help discussion. However, this part of the research did not prove to be very successful; few people accepted the invitation to join the group and only a handful actively participated in a meaningful way. This was probably due to the teachers' resistance to "publicly" expose themselves through a social network, but we are still considering other possible reasons to explain why the "traditional" paper-and-pen questionnaire proved more successful. However, to stay on the main topic without going into unnecessary detail, let us just reiterate here that the teacher questionnaire we handed out was organised in sections mostly based on open-ended answers, which therefore left much room for the participants' comments.

In what follows, we do not claim to be providing data that are reliable from a statistical point of view and, as previously mentioned, we had no intention of offering any "hard", generalizable results from the outset. The real aim of this survey was always to get a sense of the surveyed teachers' previous experiences and future expectations about CLIL—attitudes, behaviours, reasons for concern—in order to open up a discussion with those in charge of making decisions, later on, on the basis of the comments, reflections, and observations collected. This we felt would help initiate a reflective process at higher levels, aimed towards addressing the issues identified (and possibly solve the problems anticipated) in our survey. Knowing the environment in depth would certainly help those working at CLIL implementation to develop the necessary strategies to fine-tune it to actual reality and effectively meet the expectations of stakeholders. It would also close up our action research cycle, hopefully bringing about positive trickle-down effects for the whole community of practice involved in the CLIL "revolution".

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### The teacher questionnaire (quantitative results)

We sent a considerable number (we cannot be any more precise than that since we mostly distributed our questionnaire by email, asking our recipients to help us spread it around, so we do not have a precise idea of the number of people we actually reached) of questionnaires to upper secondary schools in the Naples area, but only received 52 back, fully filled-in. The questionnaires we collected were grouped into three different sets according to the types of school where the teachers surveyed work: 13 from upper secondary schools (*Licei Linguistici, Scientifici, Classici, Artistici* and *Socio-Pedagogici*); 25 from polytechnic schools (*ITE, ITC, ITIS*); and 14 from vocational schools (*IPIA, IPAM, IPC, IPSSCT*)<sup>4</sup>.

The 52 surveyed teachers were composed of 41 females and 11 males, 4 of them within the age range 30-40; 23 within 40-50; 20 within 50-60; and 5 over 60. This “sample”<sup>5</sup> group is particularly revealing of the well-known “old age” of Italian school teachers; unfortunately, we must say we have been experiencing a virtually complete lack of new hires over the last ten years or so.

Going straight into the analysis of data, the questionnaire asked the teachers to begin by assessing their competence in the foreign language. Some participants declared advanced competence in two languages, which we found quite surprising, since our research actually started from the perception that Italian teachers were not linguistically ready for the CLIL challenge. The languages mentioned were (see (Figure 1 and Figure 2):

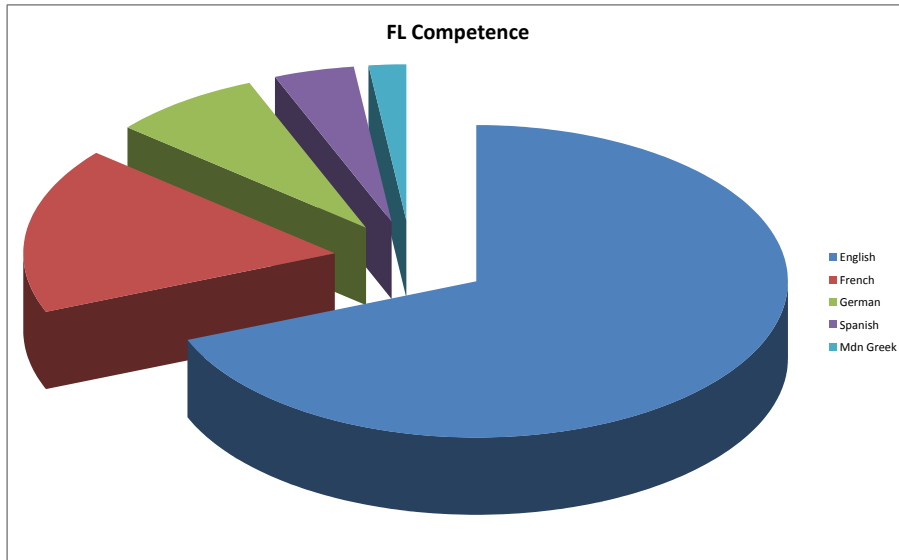
- English (slightly over 69%): 5 advanced competence, 16 intermediate, 15 beginner competence.
- French (slightly over 17%): 1 advanced, 3 intermediate, 5 beginner.

<sup>4</sup> In Italy the difference between general secondary schools and technical/vocational schools is sharp, the first being mainly characterised by curricula of three types: foreign language, humanities and sciences, the second aiming at a more technical if not vocational instruction.

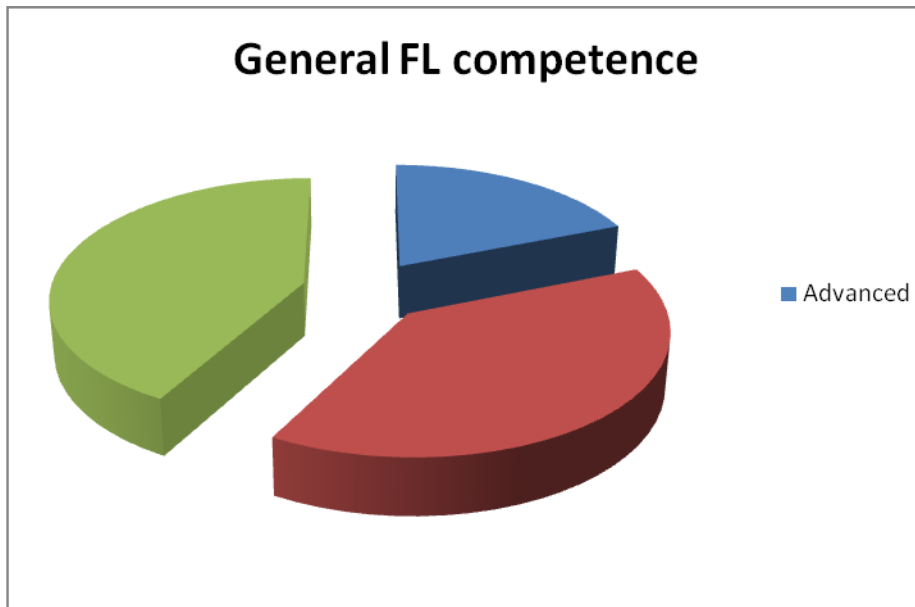
<sup>5</sup> The quotation marks are used here to denote an inappropriate use of the word ‘sample’, in consideration of what stated above in 2. Despite actually also referring here and there to the quantitative data of the questionnaires collected, our survey was in fact conceived and handled as an essentially qualitative instrument of analysis.

- German (below 8%): 1 advanced, 1 intermediate, 2 beginner.
- Spanish (slightly below 4%): 2 advanced.
- Modern Greek (slightly below 2%): 1 advanced.
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**Figure 1: Distribution of FLs known as declared by surveyed teachers.**



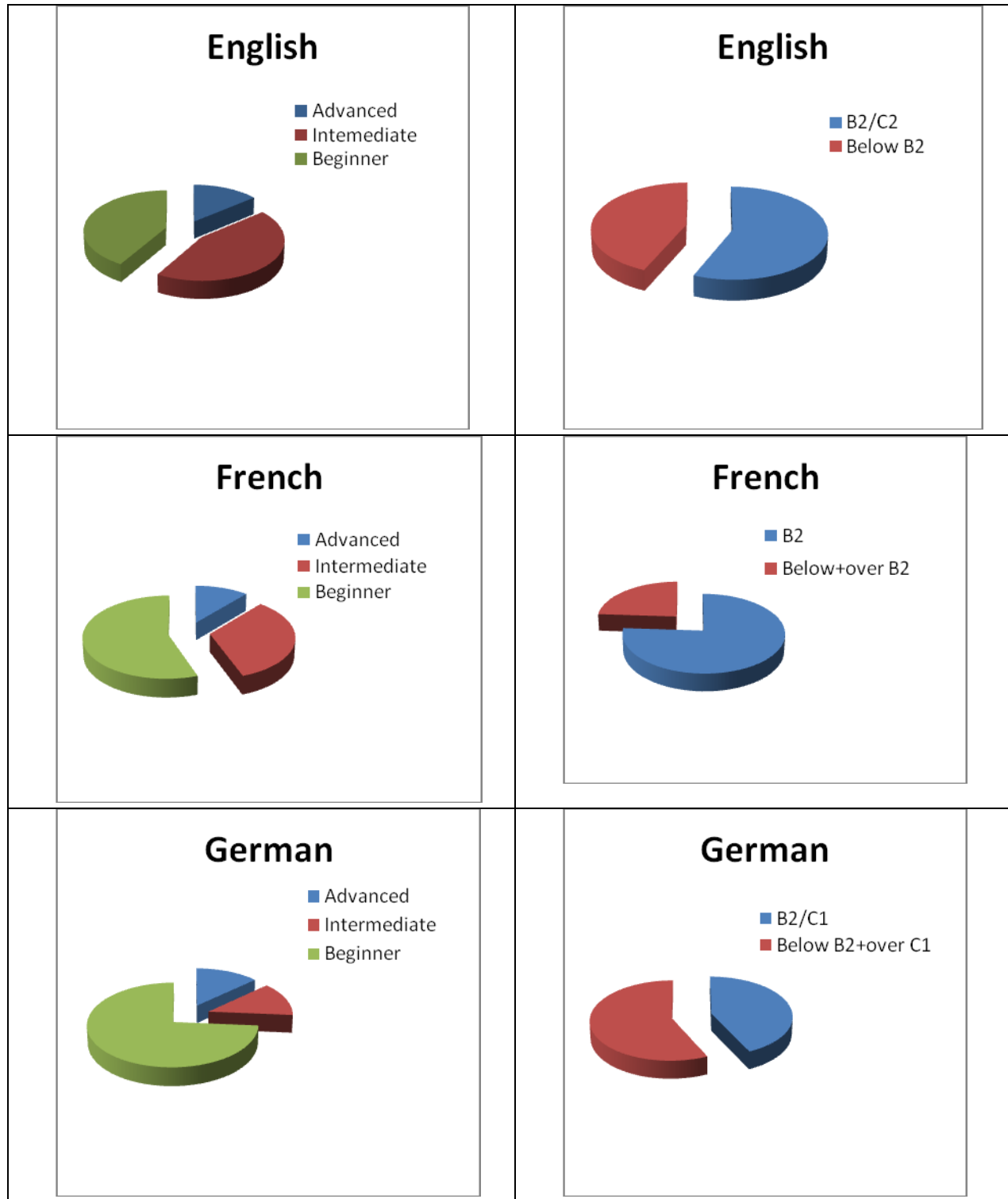
**Figure 2. Distribution of FL competence irrespective of FLs known.**



The general result does not seem to be particularly revealing of a gap existing between northern and southern Italy. To add more data, we will say that throughout 2011-2012, the *Ufficio Scolastico Regionale per la Lombardia*, headed by inspector Gisella Langé in cooperation with some foreign cultural institutions, held some sessions of placement tests on a free basis to test the level of competence of non-language teachers. Of the 108 teachers who took part on a voluntary basis, 61 revealed a competence in English between B2 and C2 (56.5%); of the 30 who sat for the French test, 23 showed a competence at B2 level (76%); of the 21 who took German, 9 were between B2 and C1 (43%) (see Figure 3, right-hand column) (Langé, 2011).

The distribution of levels in this experiment from Lombardy does not seem to be substantially different from the distribution we recorded (Chart 3; level B2 can roughly be said to correspond to an upper intermediate level of competence in the FL), unreliable as the latter may be because ours is not a statistically significant sample. Also, it is worth stressing here that the Langé data are the result of an official placement test while ours are just the result of self-declared competence.

**Figure 3. Distribution of competence levels in the FIs most widely known as declared by surveyed teachers (left-hand column); distribution of FL competence levels in the Lombardia experiment (right-hand column).**





### **The teachers' reactions to the CLIL component of the School Reform: questions and answers from the questionnaire (qualitative results)**

We will now move into the heart of the matter. In addition to being too numerous to quote in full, the answers we collected are, as we have already stated, of no statistical value. Furthermore, they are in Italian, and so of little help to the non-Italian reader; nor do we feel it would be very to offer such data in translation, as that itself would be a form of interpretation. Accordingly, as this study is an attempt at “conceptualizing the common essence” (Jansen, 2010) of the surveyed teachers' beliefs, perceptions, fears and expectations, we have chosen to report the results by identifying either the most frequent ones or those raising particularly delicate issues. However, first-hand reference to teacher voice will be available in a separate publication (Di Martino, forthcoming b).

As we have also mentioned previously, these were open-ended answers, which means that we are forced to reformulate them here in support of the minimal generalisation for which an investigation of the qualitative type should allow: we have basically tried to systematise the recurring points and the prevailing contents under general headings.

In what follows, we will present the results of our survey in relation to each question separately, offering a short discussion section in the case of particularly controversial issues. Hopefully, structure will be a better guide for the foreign reader in the deep sea of culture-bound information produced in the paper than the classical clear-cut division into separate Results and Discussion sections. We are aware that personal considerations and comments may seem to surface even in the result sections more often than not, but that is just due to the occasional use of overemphatic language that we deliberately employed to stress our choice to operate as “insiders” in this (as in all) research involving pedagogical issues. Not only do we feel (and are, in fact) first and foremost teachers ourselves, well aware of and sincerely sharing the worries (and hopes) of our colleagues who work more directly (that is, daily) on the “front lines” and some of whose students we may be teaching in the near future, but we also intended to clearly convey to them the measure of our empathy and understanding. Since we always offer the individuals we survey/interview full feedback from the results of the research in which we ask

them to take part, including copies of any published papers, we believe that allowing for *verstehen* in the written record of what started off as action research (that is, research initiated to actually attempt to solve a real problem by enquirers who feel part of the community experiencing that specific problem) is another way to maintain meaningful dialogue between researchers and respondents and we are ready to take responsibility and respond to any (possible) accusations of bias.

***“What do you think of the recent reform in relation to CLIL in secondary schools?”***

The first ‘real’ question to the teachers was “What do you think of the recent reform in relation to CLIL in secondary schools?”.<sup>6</sup> As far as this topic is concerned, 18 questionnaires revealed a positive attitude towards CLIL and only 6 questionnaires a negative predisposition. However, it is maybe worth stressing that the teachers who did not react to this specific question did not seem to show much trust in the positive reach of CLIL in their answers to the questions that followed this one. Moreover, while expressing their positive opinions, some of the teachers who reacted positively to this question also emphasised the need to consider that the moment has come to build up a real path of bilingualism in Italy starting from nursery school if we really want things to change significantly.

The most frequent positive answers may be reworded as follows:

- CLIL is ...
  - an instrument to use language as a means to convey new knowledge which is part of the curriculum.<sup>7</sup>
  - an occasion to improve both students’ and teachers’ language competence.
  - an opportunity (for teachers) to experiment new approaches to the subjects they teach.

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<sup>6</sup> A complete version of the questionnaire administered is included Appendix A.

<sup>7</sup> Unsurprisingly, this is often identified as the authenticity (among others: Wolff, 1997; Coonan, 2002) and, more valuable (acquisition-leading), spur to motivation (among others Eskey, 1997, Coonan 2002) that CLIL components bring into language courses and, consequently, are considered to represent its real added value.

***“What do you think of the compulsory introduction of CLIL paths at secondary school level?”***

Results

The second question was “What do you think of the compulsory introduction of CLIL paths at secondary school level?”. As we hinted at before, half of the teachers who filled in the questionnaires did not answer this question. Two of them openly justified themselves saying they had no clue as to what CLIL is. Amongst the negative opinions, we have decided to highlight two interesting comments reporting them here because they hit the nail on the head, emphasising two problematic areas of CLIL methodology of which both linguists and language educators alike are aware:

1. The need to make sure the level of competence teachers have self-assessed actually corresponds to real competence.
2. The contradictory exclusion of language teachers *tout court*.

Discussion

We do not know what the situation is in other countries, but in Italy it is nearly exclusively language teachers who have some experience with CLIL methodology, as they seem to be the only ones who have adopted it in their teaching in recent years (and mostly on a voluntary basis). Like some of the teachers who filled in our questionnaires, we then feel it is quite unproductive that they have been completely excluded from the CLIL reform whereas most of those who are now “forced” to teach according to CLIL methodology do not know much about it.<sup>8</sup> In this respect, it is a fact that only half of the teachers who filled in our questionnaires have shown some knowledge of CLIL and of its possible benefits. The other serious worry that the teachers surveyed clearly identified is the teachers’ level of competence in the foreign language; most Italian teachers are over forty years old and the majority of them have never really studied a foreign

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<sup>8</sup> We do appreciate the choice of not discriminating against non-native teachers, instead. There is a wide literature on the topic. We will just mention here the value of strategic code-switching in CLIL as maintained by Johnson, Swain 1994 and Coonan 2002.

language in a systematic way. Indeed, the study of one language in all degree courses has only been made a requisite for graduation in the last few years. Also, the compulsory language exam in non-language degree courses often consists in what we call *idoneità*; that is, an assessment with no final grade, which we feel is not sufficient instrumental motivation to go into much depth in the study of language. We fear the situation is not going to change much in the near future: without the motivation of affecting their final degree through the results they get in their language exams, learners only study enough to just pass, which is obviously no guarantee of the competence necessary to teach a subject in a foreign language if they then decide to opt for a teaching career.

As we have already suggested, the levels of competence declared both by the teachers who answered our questionnaire and by those who took part in the language experiment in Lombardy do not seem to be particularly worrying. However—and, again, as we have touched on before—we cannot avoid considering the fact that individuals agreeing to take part in a test or to take a questionnaire on a voluntary basis are usually more “ready” than others to face innovations and take on responsibilities. Also—actually first and foremost—drawing from our considerable experience in teacher training, such teachers seem to be more self-confident in the possession of competences. We have no evidence to prove this, we admit it, and yet some of the teachers’ statements in our questionnaires seem to us to basically confirm this perception. This is, for example, what Dora, a 60 year-old Italian teacher at a *Liceo Linguistico*, says:

Si sono “prenotati” docenti senza alcuna competenza non solo nella lingua straniera che dovrebbero utilizzare ma neanche nelle più moderne metodologie e tecnologie didattiche. Già si sente dire “Tanto spiego in italiano, chi controlla?” E mi chiedo: perché sono stati esclusi i docenti di lingua che hanno sostenuto, per es., esami in storia, o in letteratura italiana, o storia dell’arte, ecc.?<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> “Most of the teachers have declared they possess not only a competence in the foreign language, but also IT skills they do not have, really. ‘Who cares? I’m going to teach in Italian. Nobody’s going to check up on us anyway.’ And I wonder: why have foreign language teachers who possess content skills, say in history or literature for example, been left out?”

***“What type of training would help you teach using CLIL methodology best?”***

Switching from the language to the methodological training, our next question was “What type of training would help you teach using CLIL methodology best?” Here is the advice as to what contents and competence a training course should provide to help become a CLIL teacher:

- Foreign language courses both in general language and in specialised languages; possibly life-long learning paths and a distance-learning modality.
- Study abroad.
- Methodological courses.
- Investing in more young teachers.

Someone is actually convinced that the problematic areas of CLIL can only be dealt with when the next generation of teachers comes along, and therefore advises that specific postgraduate courses should be set up: “solo la formazione di neo-laureati è un’opzione sensata!” (“Only the training of the newly graduates is a sensible option!”).

First and foremost, the teachers who took the questionnaire seem to feel the need for intensive language training, and it is good to realise that even teachers who have not received a specific language formation perceive the importance that such training should not happen on a once-in-a-while basis, but rather be conceived of as a life-long form of training. Also, it is a pleasant surprise to find out that some would be willing to improve their competence abroad.

***“The methodology component of CLIL training: What contents and abilities?”***

Results

The teachers also seem to be at a loss with CLIL methodology. They emphasise the need to get specific training, which is in fact accounted for in the reform, but with no identification of specific contents. Our question in this regard was “The methodology component of CLIL training: what contents and abilities?”. The suggestions reveal the main weaknesses in the skills of the future CLIL teachers, in the opinion of those who took the questionnaire, namely a capacity for adjusting

the traditional way of selecting contents to the new methodology and the ability of choosing new materials, as well. In short, the need to switch to a different teaching methodology that should be integrated with the contents and materials used in traditional classes, which are still precious. The type of methodology to use in a CLIL training course is also an object of reflection for some teachers, who advise the recourse to a modality which should be ‘operational at the outmost’.

### Discussion

It is interesting to notice that no-one explicitly mentioned the need to learn how to create *ad hoc* teaching materials. This was partly implied in the answers we have presented above, but our perspective as language teachers reinforces the need to stress this point: turning a text into a didactic object does not simply mean to look for one, select it and use it but above all to adjust it to our didactic aims, modifying it when need be, removing the most complex parts or rewriting them, adding footnotes, glossaries and so on.<sup>10</sup>

When reflecting upon the qualities teacher trainers should possess, the teachers were adamant that competent teacher trainers were the very essence of the CLIL courses success. By stressing the need for competent trainers, the teachers who took the questionnaire seem to reveal a strong distrust of previous training experiences, as well as of the people in charge of teacher trainers recruitment, so we feel it is crucial that those who will assume responsibility for employing the teacher trainers are made aware that the latter will take on the delicate role of models. We are convinced that the success of CLIL in Italy will depend on the trainers’ ability to offer themselves as such: they will be looked at as pioneers, as those who pave the way (very little—close to nothing, we are tempted to say—of the results of CLIL experiments that have already been carried out has reached the public at large), and only excellent trainers will manage to convince teachers who are no longer young and trustful in the school system (as evidenced by other teacher statements in the questionnaires) that CLIL is the right way forward. The enthusiasm they will (or will not) manage to stimulate in the teachers they will

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<sup>10</sup> Coonan also stresses the importance of adding up a manipulative and collaborative value to CLIL didactic objects (2002, paragraph 8.4; 2009).



train is directly proportional to the interest and curiosity the latter will succeed in rousing in their students. It would certainly be good if future CLIL teachers were formed by a team of mixed competences, including a language expert, as some teachers suggest, but in light of the choices made by the Ministry (we are hinting here at the fact that the subject teacher only has been identified as a possible CLIL instructor) we cannot see how this can turn out to be useful. Actually, we fear it might even contribute to create a dangerous feeling of frustration and the anxiety of not feeling up to the challenge even in those teachers who are not prey to inadequacy as yet. This is a worry which has overtaken many, as is implicit in Dora's reflection (above): why not the language teachers, or, at least, why not the language teachers as well?

### *Previous CLIL or CLIL-like experience*

To gain an insight into how new CLIL may appear to those identified as future CLIL teachers by the reform, we also asked those who took our questionnaire about possible previous experience they could relate which may count as CLIL. It goes without saying that the mere use of materials in the foreign language should not be mistaken for CLIL, and the fact that this specific question was followed, in our questionnaire, by another question which focused more specifically on such a methodology is evidence of this. However, we felt it would be a good idea to survey the habit of using such materials so as to at least get an idea of the subject teachers' attitude towards foreign languages: 31 teachers stated they had already used foreign language materials in their classes, with 4 teachers declaring systematic use. The materials quoted are newspaper articles, films, documentaries, songs, internet texts. However, 16 teachers said they had never used any such materials.

Again, it goes without saying that the mere use of materials in the foreign language should not be mistaken as CLIL. So, after surveying the habit of using such materials in the subject class, we enquired about previous "proper" CLIL experience. Only 3 teachers declared to have any, which they mostly seemed to have gained thanks to previous collaboration with their foreign language colleagues. However, we think that the number of teachers who claimed to have employed foreign language materials is still surprising, especially if we consider that the teachers surveyed mostly work in schools located in the outskirts of the

city of Naples, where teaching is frequently characterized by a more “traditional” approach due to such problems as dropout, presence of disruptive students and the like. These problems normally absorb all of the teachers’ energies. But again, we feel that the teachers who accepted to take the questionnaire represent a sort of high quality “sample” of teachers.

### ***What was the students’ reaction to the use of foreign language materials?***

The next question was “What was the students’ reaction to the use of foreign language materials?”. Most of the teachers who declared to have employed such texts seem to think the students’ reaction was overall positive. Some seem to think that both a good student reaction and the related benefits in terms of learning depend on the type of materials used, which should be easy to approach and understand. The risk is otherwise of increasing uncertainty and uneasiness in the students and undermining their self-esteem to the point of complete refusal. Some of the teachers actually maintain that the use of materials in a foreign language could help to raise awareness of the need to learn a foreign language but they also recognise that some students might experience it as an extra—and useless—burden. In relation to this, it is maybe worth emphasising once again the importance of involving all the stakeholders in the CLIL process at every single step: the teachers, the head, but also the students and their families. It is the only way to ensure positive results.

### ***“How do you think your students will react to CLIL classes?”***

After surveying the teachers’ previous experiences, we also tried to get a feel for their perceptions about the possible student response to CLIL and the trickle-down effects of the innovation on the school system. It is in analysing these data that we thought it would be better to keep the answers from vocational school teachers separate from those of teachers working in other types of schools. After all, if the legislator has deemed it important to keep the CLIL innovation optional in vocational schools there has to be a reason, and this can probably be read between the lines in the questionnaires we collected. As far as the teachers from general and technical education schools are concerned, we recorded 13 positive answers to the question “How do you think your students will react to CLIL classes?”; 7 “on

condition that” answers; 9 basically negative answers; 2 completely negative answers; 3 moving attention “from the what to the how”; 2 non-answers. We feel it is worth stressing that the answers moving attention “from the what” to the how” are also there to remind us that it is certainly not just innovations in themselves that modify the actual school reality, but rather the way such innovations are perceived, absorbed and adjusted to each and every single teacher’s personal teaching path.

Summing up the teachers’ reactions to this question, we can say that CLIL does not seem to be looked at as a way to acquire competence but rather as an approach for which the student has to be prepared in order to produce a positive response. Amongst the skills which are identified as crucial there are the competences that the teachers themselves should either possess or develop. As we have hinted at, there were many “on condition that” positive reactions and “I don’t know” answers. The motivations supporting them are interesting, too: *ifs* weaken the weight of positive reactions, while “I don’t know” answers are followed by reflections that actually turn these answers into negative. Some of the answers reveal the teachers’ sense of uncertainty, and some lexical choices make us guess a good number of the positive answers should actually be read in a doubtful tone and convey perplexities rather than a positive attitude. Here are some of the many conditions:

- “Gli studenti sono più pronti di noi alle innovazioni”.
- “[...] bene se le lezioni saranno svolte con serietà e professionalità”.
- “a patto che il docente conosca davvero la lingua straniera molto bene: sarebbe imbarazzante se i ragazzi la conoscessero meglio”<sup>11</sup>.
- “se gli studenti coinvolti sono motivati”.
- “se non si sopravvaluteranno le loro capacità in lingua straniera”.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> We feel it is crucial to add here that the teachers’ lack of effective language competence would not just be embarrassing but actually invalidate the whole CLIL innovation in a perspective of comprehensible input being its defining feature and constitutive backbone. Making teaching output comprehensible also means being able to adjust to the students’ language level, check their comprehension as well as amplify, sum up and reformulate the message in case of need (and obviously act as a role-model for the students’ acquisition of those very same strategies and skills). This clearly requires quite a sophisticated language knowledge, in addition to strategic awareness and skills (see Coonan, 2002, paragraph 7.4.1).

When we read the answers of teachers working in vocational schools in detail, we realise these are clearly negative: if the legislator has decided to make CLIL optional in vocational education, he must have done so out of his awareness that although theoretically, in our country, students may choose their learning paths according to their personal interests, it is a fact that it is weaker students, and not students who are actually interested in that specific curriculum, who enrol for vocational education. From a “traditional” perspective students of this type are in fact not ready for the challenges of CLIL. We feel, instead, that the learning-by-doing principle and the advantages of task-based instruction which are at the basis of this teaching modality are exactly the type of approach which could succeed in motivating weaker students. Getting back to the main topic, amongst the teachers working at technical and vocational schools, one felt the need to add that CLIL “sarà un motivo in più di distrazione” (“will be another good reason for distraction”), and another teacher stressed the fact that such an innovation “richiede impegno, e l’impegno va scemando sempre più” (“requires an effort and very few people are willing to work hard towards an aim, nowadays”). One even claimed: “Sarà inutile, anzi dannosa, come molte altre cose della Riforma. Meglio aumentare le ore nelle materie di indirizzo” (“It’s going to be useless, even detrimental, as many innovations the Reform has brought about. It’d have been better to increase subject teaching time, instead.”).

### ***“What types of difficulties do you envisage?”***

#### Results

The final part of the questionnaire aimed at giving those who have been working in the Italian school for years and can therefore be considered to be the real “experts”, the possibility to give us an idea of the possible problems along with working solutions. The different types of difficulties identified seem to depend on:

- Organization and planning both at individual and at school level.
- The teachers’ preparation and commitment.

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<sup>12</sup> “hopefully, students react well to innovations”; “The reaction will be positive if the lessons are well planned and held by competent teachers”; “they will get accustomed to it if they are adequately motivated”, “... if their [the students’] language competence isn’t overestimated”.

- Difficulty in researching and selecting adequate materials.
- Extra work for the teachers involved.
- Relationship (some say “contrast”) between the foreign language component and the content language component of the curriculum (that is, between the two teachers).
- The students’ level of competence not only in the foreign language but also in their mother tongue.
- The assessment of students.

In addition to the serious worries about the rather limited professionalism of some teachers and the doubts about the actual possibility for teachers over a certain age to acquire a communicative competence in the foreign language which would then make it possible for them to teach CLIL effectively, what also comes forth in the questionnaires is the old/new problem of assessment. We all know this is an 'underexplored' area, an issue which is acknowledged as rather 'problematic' but still unsolved in spite of the great interest it raises (Honig, 2010). The fear is that subject learning be slowed down and the doubts are if and how the CLIL path will manage to integrate with the traditional one and whether Italian teachers will ever manage to work in a truly cross-curricular way which is free from petty infighting about what is still perceived as “one’s own” territory.<sup>13</sup> Those who have worked at or attended Italian schools know exactly what we are talking about here.

The possible solutions teachers identify are:

- Careful planning and work organization.
- Good coordination amongst all the teaching staff.
- Help and support from the school.
- Adequate teachers’ training with subsequent support of in-school foreign language teachers.
- Support of audio-visual material provided by the school/Ministry.
- Support of a mother tongue colleague during the CLIL lessons.
- Allow cooperation between those teachers who wish to work together.
- Allow teachers time to study.

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<sup>13</sup> The well-known lack of cooperation amongst Italian teachers is also worrying in that it builds up the dual focus which is the essence of CLIL on shaky foundations and may indeed fail to affect language competence significantly.

## Discussion

The last two pieces of advice actually seem to encourage reconsideration of the CLIL modality once again, by allowing its implementation exclusively on the basis of a voluntary choice. Indeed, the anger of some teachers for CLIL compulsoriness is well expressed in this answer from Concetta, a 45-year-old teacher at IPAM: “Non ne vedo la necessità, quindi se ci saranno difficoltà, ben vengano, così verrà eliminato tutto” (“I can’t see why it is needed, so if problems arise, they will be very welcome because the whole thing will have to be cancelled that way”).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In a very crude summary, the teachers who took our questionnaire expressed serious worries about the limited professionalism of some colleagues and doubts about the actual possibility for the present teaching class (that is, mostly teachers over a certain age) to acquire a sufficient communicative competence in the foreign language to enable them to teach CLIL in a way which is both interesting and motivating for students.

What also came forth in the questionnaires is some teachers’ worries about the well-known issue of assessment and the fear that subject learning could well be slowed down by CLIL. Last but not least, doubts emerged about the well-known difficulty of Italian teachers to work in a truly cross-curricular manner.

We personally think that a transitional phase should have been devised before the proper CLIL ‘revolution’, involving the foreign language teachers. Many of them are already used to teaching according to CLIL methodology. Indeed, focus could have been placed on the next generation of teachers.

It may well have been auspicious for the project to start on an experimental basis with selected teachers, for instance those who have actually studied subjects in English at University (some universities have been doing so for many years) or those who teach disciplines characterised by a highly formulaic language.

Above all else, we feel the need to stress that quality training is the key to success. Once again, we are convinced that the success of CLIL in Italy will depend on the trainers’ ability to offer themselves as such: only the best trainers will manage to convince teachers who are no longer young and trustful in the school system that CLIL is the right way forward. The enthusiasm they will (or



will not) manage to stimulate in the teachers they will train is directly proportional to the interest and curiosity the latter will (or will not) succeed in rousing in their students.

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**APPENDIX A**

NOME (indica solo il nome di battesimo) + CITTA' + ETA'

MATERIA INSEGNATA

TIPO DI SCUOLA SECONDARIA

LINGUE STRANIERE STUDIATE DAGLI STUDENTI

IL TUO LIVELLO DI COMPETENZA IN INGLESE O ALTRA (SPECIFICARE) LINGUA STRANIERA (PRINCIPIANTE, INTERMEDIO, AVANZATO).

COSA PENSI DELL'INTRODUZIONE NELLA RECENTE RIFORMA DELLA SCUOLA SECONDARIA DEL CLIL?

- 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.
- Come traguardo dell'intero percorso liceale si pone il raggiungimento di un livello di padronanza riconducibile almeno al livello B2 del Quadro Comune Europeo di Riferimento per le lingue.
- Si realizzeranno... con l'opportuna gradualità anche esperienze d'uso della lingua straniera per la comprensione e rielaborazione orale e scritta di contenuti di discipline non linguistiche.

IN COSA PENSI DOVREBBE CONSISTERE LA FORMAZIONE AFFINCHÉ UN INSEGNANTE POSSA TENERE DELLE LEZIONI IN MODALITÀ CLIL?

TI È MAI CAPITATO DI UTILIZZARE MATERIALI IN LINGUA STRANIERA NEL CORSO DELLE TUE LEZIONI (SITI INTERNET, ARTICOLI TRATTI DA GIORNALI, VIDEO O FILM, ECC.)?

SE SÌ COME HANNO REAGITO GLI STUDENTI?

COME HAI GESTITO L'EVENTUALE DIFFICOLTA' LINGUISTICA (DA SOLO, HAI CHIESTO AIUTO AL COLLEGA DI LINGUE, HAI CHIESTO LA COLLABORAZIONE DEGLI STUDENTI DURANTE LA LEZIONE, HAI CHIESTO LA PRESENZA DEL COLLEGA DI LINGUE)? PROVA A SPIEGARE PERCHE' TI SEI COMPORATATO IN TALE MODO.

SE HAI GIA' AVUTO UNA VERA E PROPRIA ESPERIENZA CLIL PROVA A DESCRIVERLA BREVEMENTE PER I TUOI COLLEGHI E RIASSUMINE VANTAGGI E SVANTAGGI.

COME PENSI REAGIRANNO GLI STUDENTI A QUESTO TIPO DI LEZIONI?

CREDI CHE SARANNO UTILI? PROVA A SPIEGARE LE RAGIONI.

CHE TIPO DI DIFFICOLTA' PREVEDI?

COME SI POTREBBERO EVENTUALMENTE PREVENIRE TALI DIFFICOLTA'?

SE C'E' ALTRO CHE VORRESTI DIRE, SCRIVILO QUI



Biodata

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