

### Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL): Limitations and possibilities

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#### Abstract

CLIL is currently enjoying a surge in popularity across the world in its cross-curricular form. While the structural difficulties in implementing CLIL are often recognised, there is little discussion of its inherent limitations. Focusing on cross-curricular programmes, this article analyses critically four of CLIL's central claims against the evidence of the latest research. The claims analysed are: CLIL leads to greater linguistic proficiency, it boosts motivation, it is suitable for learners of all abilities and it leads to greater intercultural awareness. The article concludes that while all four claims are, to a large degree, substantiated by the evidence, there are also clear limitations, stemming from theoretical and methodological shortcomings of the CLIL model, as well as from its interaction with contextual factors. The article suggests a number of ways in which these limitations can be addressed and concludes that, unless remedied, they could lead to an understandable yet regrettable disappointment with a model that is genuinely promising.

**Key words:** CLIL, intercultural awareness, bilingual education

#### Resumen

CLIL goza en estos momentos de enorme popularidad a nivel internacional. Mientras que sus dificultades logísticas y estructurales se reconocen ampliamente, sus limitaciones intrínsecas son objeto de escaso debate. Este artículo analiza de forma crítica cuatro de los postulados centrales de sus programas croscurriculares en base a las investigaciones más recientes. Los postulados analizados son los siguientes: CLIL conduce a mayor competencia lingüística, CLIL aumenta la motivación, CLIL es adecuado para alumnos de todas las capacidades y CLIL realza la comprensión intercultural. Nuestro artículo concluye que aunque estos postulados se ven confirmados en su mayor parte por los resultados de las investigaciones, hay claras limitaciones al modelo CLIL. Estas limitaciones resultan de deficiencias teóricas del modelo CLIL así como de su interacción con factores contextuales. Se sugieren algunas estrategias para superar estas limitaciones. A no ser que se aborden estas deficiencias, estamos abocados a una decepción comprensible aunque lamentable.

**Palabras clave:** CLIL, educación bilingüe, comprensión intercultural

#### 1. CLIL: definition and rationale

The acronym CLIL was coined in Europe in the early nineties (Coyle et al (2010)) to describe any dual-focused type of provision in which a second language, foreign or other, is used for the teaching and learning of a non-language subject matter, with language and content having a joint and mutually beneficial role (Marsh 2002). CLIL has two distinctive features that set it apart from other types of provision, such as immersion teaching or EAL (Gajo 2007, Lasagabaster 2008, Coyle 2007). The first one is the integration of language and content. In CLIL, the two elements are interwoven and receive equal importance, although the emphasis may vary from one to another on specific occasions. The aim is to develop proficiency in both (Eurydice 2005: 7), by teaching the content not *in*, but *with* and *through* the foreign language. The second distinctive feature is the flexibility of CLIL to accommodate the wide range of socio-political and cultural realities of the European context. CLIL models range from theme-based language modules to cross-

curricular approaches where a content subject is taught through the foreign language. The latter model has become the most prevalent in Europe in the last few years.

CLIL's flexibility is underpinned by a theoretical framework commonly referred to as the 4C model. The 4C model is a holistic approach, where content, communication, cognition and culture are integrated. Effective CLIL takes place through 5 dimensions: progression in knowledge, skills and understanding of content, engagement in higher order cognitive processing, interaction in the communicative context, development of appropriate communication skills, and acquisition of a deepening intercultural awareness (Coyle et al 2010).

The rationale for CLIL rests on a number of points based on second language acquisition theories (Dalton-Puffer 2008). With its integration of content and language, CLIL can offer an authenticity of purpose unlike that of any communicative classroom (Greenfell 2002, Graddol 2006). By realigning language and cognitive development, CLIL can combat the lack of relevance of language teaching based on grammatical progression and boost learners' motivation (Lasagabaster 2009). CLIL provides learners with a richer, more naturalistic environment that reinforces language acquisition and learning, and thus leads to greater proficiency in learners of all abilities (Lyster 2007, Krashen 1985, Lightbown and Spada 2006). CLIL also regenerates content teaching by fostering cognitive development and flexibility in the learner through its constructivist approach, and by recognising language as an essential tool in learning (Lyster 2007, Gajo 2007, Coyle et al 2009 and 2010, Dalton-Puffer 2008). Finally, CLIL can also lead to greater intercultural understanding and prepares pupils better for internationalisation (Coyle et al (2009)). In essence, CLIL claims to be a dynamic unit that is bigger than its two parts, providing an education that goes beyond subject and content learning (Coyle et al. 2010).

The current processes of globalisation have made CLIL a timely solution for governments concerned with developing the linguistic proficiency of their citizens as a pre-requisite for economic success. There was already some dissatisfaction with traditional MFL teaching approaches and a perception that they were not bearing fruit. In fact, research has proved that there is no linear relationship between increased instruction time in traditional MFL settings and achievement (Eurydice 2005, Lasagabaster 2008). CLIL offers a budgetary efficient way of promoting multilingualism without cramming existing curricula. With its emphasis on the convergence of curriculum areas and transferable skills, CLIL also appears to serve well the demands of the Knowledge Economy for increased innovation capacity and creativity. Finally, its potential for intercultural understanding addresses issues of social cohesion. The EU officially endorsed CLIL in its cross-curricular form in 2005 (European Commission (2005)) and in the UK, it was not until the advent of the new National Curriculum (QCA 2008) that CLIL approaches were formally presented as a tool of choice to deliver "new opportunities" in MFL (ALL 2010).

Most studies on CLIL concentrate on the many structural difficulties surrounding its implementation. From a lack of sustainable teacher supply and insufficient pre- or in-service training, to the difficulties in sourcing teaching materials and overcoming parental reluctance, the road to CLIL is not straightforward even for the most committed (Mehisto 2008). This essay wants to take a few steps back and analyse critically some of the claims which rest on CLIL's inherent characteristics. It will specifically focus on the cross-curricular model of CLIL, on which the majority of research is carried out. By reviewing some of the latest evidence and considering the interaction between CLIL's features and contextual factors, this essay will try to provide a clearer picture of CLIL's potential and its limitations.

The claims this article will concentrate on can be summarised as follows:

- a) CLIL leads to a higher level of attainment in MFL
- b) CLIL improves motivation in all learners
- c) CLIL benefits learners of all abilities
- d) CLIL increases intercultural awareness

## **2. CLIL leads to higher levels of attainment in MFL**

Preoccupation with levels of achievement in MFL by learners is a recurrent theme (Lazaruk 2007, Lasagabaster and Sierra 2009, Rifkin 2005). In the UK, for instance, beyond the well-documented limited pool of linguistic ability (Coleman et al. 2008), inspection reviews for MFL often comment on achievement being below that of comparable subjects, with speaking a particular area of concern (Ofsted 2008).

CLIL claims to lead to an increased level of linguistic proficiency in several ways. It provides not just extra exposure to comprehensible input (Krashen 1985), but more specifically, context-embedded, cognitively challenging tasks that move the learner on in terms of both content and language (Greenfell 2002, Cummins and Swain 1986). Moreover, by creating an authentic communicative context, CLIL provides a naturalistic environment, where language can be more easily acquired while the focus is on meaning (Lightbown and Spada 2006). Finally, CLIL also provides a careful analysis of the linguistic demands that tasks place on learners. The best example of this is Coyle's model (Coyle 2007) of linguistic progression in 3 strands: language of learning (needed to access basic concepts in a given context), language for learning (language needed to operate and interact with the content in a given context), and language through learning (incidental language that results from active involvement with the task). CLIL claims thus to make transparent and accessible all language needed for successful completion of tasks and knowledge acquisition in a way that is not always found in content subjects (Coyle 1999, Gajo 2007).

The growing research evidence largely supports this claim. The outcomes of most CLIL programmes are unsurprisingly positive, with CLIL students displaying higher levels of proficiency and higher communicative competence than their non-CLIL peers. However, the differences are not always substantial (Dalton-Puffer 2008, Ruiz de Zarobe et al. (ed.) 2009, Alonso et al. 2008, Admiraal 2006, Airey 2009). Furthermore, there is evidence from longitudinal studies suggesting that the advantage of CLIL students do not always accrue over time (Ruiz de Zarobe 2008). This is particularly significant as one of the rationales for CLIL is precisely its alleged ability to avoid the plateau effect of traditional foreign language teaching. Moreover, research suggests that the profile of CLIL learners is similar to that of their historical predecessors, Canadian immersion students (Lazaruk 2007). CLIL students largely outperform their non-CLIL peers in listening and reading comprehension, fluency and range of vocabulary, but less often so in pronunciation, accuracy and complexity of written and spoken language (Dalton-Puffer 2007 and 2008, Lasagabaster 2008, Alonso et al. 2008, Naves 2009, Ruiz de Zarobe 2008).

What this evidence suggests is that the tension between language and content which CLIL theoretically had resolved (Greenfell (2002)), still prevails. Although the 4C model was originally created in response to the lack of balance between content and language observed in some early versions of CLIL, it does not appear to be sufficiently underpinning practice (Coyle 2007). It seems that in the CLIL classrooms, which are legitimately content-led, there is still an insufficient focus on form, as identified in early Canadian immersion studies (Cummins 1998). This lack of focus on form can lead to an early fossilization of errors

(Snow et al. 198), Swain and Lapkin 1995) and thus to a perceived stagnation of progress just like in traditional MFL models.

This interpretation is supported by two facts. Firstly, the uneasy relationship between CLIL and grammatical progression at a theoretical level. In most CLIL models, the assumption is that although the explicit teaching of grammatical structures is legitimate and necessary, the traditional foreign language lessons are best suited to the teaching of the “nuts and bolts” of language (Coyle et al. 2010, Hood and Tobbutt 2009). There is a distinct lack of clarity in all the literature as to how the two may be best combined. The unspoken assumption seems to be that most structure practice by nature would be context-reduced and cognitively undemanding, and thus unsuitable for CLIL. Indeed, references to Skehan’s (1998) model of post-task activities focused on form-in order to achieve greater accuracy of expression- is conspicuously absent from the most recent CLIL literature. This proves that the Krasheian element of CLIL –that language acquisition will run its course in a meaningful environment- is still strong. On the other hand, CLIL’s responsibility to provide an environment where structural knowledge can be acquired and operationalised (Greenfell 2002, Lightbrown and Spada 2006) is not made so obvious in theoretical models.

Secondly, the lack of systematic and constructive approach to error correction focusing on form in CLIL practice, as evidenced by a range of studies on error correction. Similar to what happened in Canadian immersion classes (Swain 1988), there is little negotiation of meaning in CLIL classrooms (Serra 2007, Dalton-Puffer 2007, Dalton-Puffer and Nikkula 2006 and Sajda 2008). The overwhelming majority of error correction is lexical, while correction and feedback on grammatical errors is less frequent and consistent. In addition, CLIL teachers show a preference for recasts, which interrupt the flow of lessons minimally, as opposed to other types of feedback that encourage self-repair and greater form awareness (Lyster 2004, Ellis et al. 2006). The positive outcome of this is that error correction becomes low stakes and CLIL learners often initiate repair sequences themselves (Dalton-Puffer 2007). On the other hand, learners are not often pushed to move from a semantic to a syntactic processing of their output, which is crucial to improve accuracy and complexity in the short and the long term (Long et al. 1987, Swain and Lapkin 1995).

The CLIL model, like any others, has therefore obvious limitations. However, this is something rarely recognised. CLIL is often described as a “linguistic bath” where learners can acquire all they need to be prepared for real life communication (Dalton-Puffer 2007, Lasagabaster and Sierra 2009). The risk is that an overestimation of its potential together with the current lack of definition of expected linguistic outcomes can lead to an early and unfair disappointment with results.

To resolve the tension between content and form, two different measures are needed. Firstly, a better theoretical model for the integration of content and form in CLIL needs to underpin successful practice. This model could also provide the basis for a better coordination of CLIL and foreign language lessons, integrating the linguistic dimension of CLIL and the foreign language lessons in one curriculum. Recent research on how learners move from declarative to procedural knowledge of linguistic features by a combination of rule-based and exemplar approaches could provide a solid basis (Lyster 2007, Skehan’s 1998). A useful starting point to coordinate instruction could be Ellis’ (2002) findings that the extent to which explicit instruction of structures is needed depends on their availability in unfocused tasks through naturalistic exposure. CLIL lessons, while less conducive to controlled practice on form, can nonetheless focus on it through two strategies. They can introduce tasks that encourage learners to become more aware of form, and crucially, they can engage learners in self-repair on form more systematically (Lyster 2007). In this sense, teachers’ prompts (repetition, clarification requests and feedback) act as an opportunity to elicit

form practice during a meaningful interaction, by forcing learners to move from semantic to syntactic processing. This is the only way in which CLIL lessons can enable learners to reconstruct their inter-language efficiently and can sustain their linguistic growth. From a practical point of view, using joint FL and CLIL assessment policies for linguistic aspects could be a useful strategy.

A second measure to better balance content and language would be to establish what linguistic outcomes are reasonably to be expected of CLIL programmes. It has been pointed out that the specific socio-pragmatic conditions of CLIL classrooms impose restrictions on all aspects of the communicative competence acquired by CLIL learners (Dalton-Puffer 2007, Dalton-Puffer and Nikkula 2006, Lyster 2007). There is a need in CLIL classrooms to ensure learners have access to a maximally rich environment, from a communicative point of view, as is possible within the constraints of an educational institution. Another approach increasingly found in recent research is to define the objectives of CLIL from an instrumental point of view, based on what the learners are most likely to do with the foreign language (Dalton-Puffer 2007, Airey 2009, Lasagabaster and Sierra 2009). Since in most CLIL, the vehicular language is English, it has been suggested that the acquisition, manipulation and display of knowledge is the aim of CLIL. This approach, while undoubtedly pragmatic, entails however a fairly restricted and uninspiring view of what language learning is about. Moreover, such an approach is likely to be less relevant to languages other than English, where other non-academic instrumental factors may lie behind the learner's choice. The issue of defining linguistic objectives is thus not a straightforward one, but nonetheless essential if the integration of content and language is to be achieved and if CLIL is going to survive as a valid methodology.

Through its integration of cognition and language, CLIL has undoubtedly the potential to lead to higher levels of attainment. However, if CLIL is to realise its full potential, it needs to resolve the tension between content and language that is emerging from CLIL practice. Both theoretical and practical adjustments are required so that CLIL can fully contribute to the learners' balanced and ongoing linguistic development. This is the only way that CLIL can avoid producing learners whose productive skills, as Lyster (2007: 21) puts it, seem "*linguistically truncated albeit functionally effective*".

### **3. CLIL improves motivation in all learners**

Motivation is an essential part of language learning. Two basic types of motivation are at play in language learning: integrative motivation (a desire to be part of the target language culture for affective reasons) and instrumental motivation (a desire to learn language for a personal gain) (Gardner 1985, Greenfell 2002). A considerable amount of research into learners' attitudes towards MFL in the UK has found that across the age groups, MFL is perceived by many as difficult, not enjoyable and not relevant (Dearing 2007, Evans and Fisher 2009) with surprising consistency. Davies (2004) and Coleman (2007) have also shown that as learners' progress through secondary education, their attitudes to MFL deteriorate slowly but surely, the deterioration sometimes beginning at the end of the primary phase (Jones 2010). Two main factors have been repeatedly identified as the source of the problem: the lack of relevance of current MFL lessons and an extreme interpretation of the communicative approach to language teaching. It is widely acknowledged that the contexts in which MFL is presented, still based on the notional-functional curricula, are far removed from learners' interests (Coyle and Holmes 2009, Macaro 2008, Pachler 2000, Greenfell 2002). This is compounded by an emphasis on transaction rather than genuine communication and on rote learning instead of grammatical progression (Macaro 2008).

CLIL, with its integration of language and non-language content, can boost motivation by providing a legitimate and authentic context for language use. In CLIL, the language becomes the means rather than the end in itself and this leads to a significant reduction in the amount of anxiety expressed by learners (Lasagabaster 2009). The content-led nature of the lessons allows the learners to engage with them at a more creative and challenging cognitive level and provides opportunities for genuine interaction with others, oneself and the world over a varied range of contexts (Greenfell (2002)). CLIL proposers also mention the possibility of the so-called “double effect“, i.e., positive attitudes towards the content subject may transfer to the language subject (Coyle et al. 2010). Finally, CLIL is described as fostering a “feel-good and can-do “attitude in all learners towards the vehicular language and language teaching in general (Marsh 2002, Coyle et al. 2010).

The limited research available so far in CLIL affective effects seems to back up these claims (Lasagabaster 2009, Hood 2006, Seikkula-Leino 2007, Alonso et al. 2008). CLIL learners display significantly more positive attitudes to the foreign language and language learning in general than non-CLIL learners. However, in all of these studies, the CLIL effect shows also some significant limitations. In Lasagabaster (2009), CLIL learners experienced a visible deterioration in their attitudes towards the foreign language over their secondary schooling, more so the case than their non-CLIL peers. Contrary to the researchers’ expectation and unlike the Canadian immersion experience, the gender gap in motivation was the same in both groups. In Seikkula-Leino’s study (2007), while CLIL learners remained more motivated than their non-CLIL peers, they also reported a lower self-concept of themselves as language learners.

What this suggests is that, as one would expect, CLIL, on its own, cannot solve the motivation problems associated with learning languages. The motivation to learn the content cannot be taken for granted, but neither is content on its own the source of all motivation. Motivation is an environmentally sensitive entity that needs to be created, but also maintained and reviewed (Dörnyei 2001). Other factors are at play, not least the classroom environment and specific methodology. Seikkula’s findings can be explained by the intrinsically challenging nature of CLIL lessons, where the learners are exposed to plenty of language which is above their current level of competence. Hood (2006) (in Coyle et al. 2010) had already identified the need to preserve the learners’ self-esteem in the initial stages of CLIL while they adjust to the new challenge. The implication for CLIL teachers is the need to provide plenty of positive feedback.

The persistence of the gender gap in CLIL programmes is even more revealing. In the vast literature on boys’ underachievement and lack of motivation in MFL, a recurrent theme is that boys are de-motivated by the lack of content beyond the purely linguistic. It has been argued that boys respond best to extrinsic motivation and that thus CLIL could be more appealing to them (Field 2000, Davies 2006, Clark and Trafford 1996, Jones and Jones 2001). The above findings, therefore, suggest that other factors are still at play, and these could be, among others, differences in learning styles and wider social perceptions about the gendered nature of languages. Interestingly, CLIL relies quite heavily on two types of methodology that have been seen associated with demotivating boys –the cooperative approach to tasks and an extensive use of target language (Field 2000, Jones and Jones 2001). At the same time, the hegemonic masculinity image offered in the wider cultural context continues to accord little importance to communication and contributes to perpetuate the gendered message about languages (Davies 2004, Coleman 2009, Carr and Pauwells 2006). Thus, for CLIL to have a gender-eroding capacity in motivation, it would need to be reinforced by a context where the personal and economic benefits of learning the foreign language are immediately obvious and part of the learners’ day to day experience, such as in Canada (Lasagabaster and Sierra 2009).

CLIL does not exist in a vacuum, but in the social and cultural contexts of different countries. The research on the motivational impact of CLIL has been carried out within the context of CLIL in English in Europe, where learners feel a strong instrumental motivation. Most learners know they will have to (and probably already do) use English as an instrument to do other things, from accessing knowledge to cultural products. Learning another subject through English reflects realistically their needs as learners. It is doubtful that the same considerations could apply necessarily to the context of schools where languages other than English are used as vehicular languages, such as in the UK. Research suggests that the globalisation of English as a lingua franca has resulted in a deviating trend between English and other languages, which are becoming an increasingly marginal field of specialisation across Europe (Dörnyei 2002). Learners are unlikely to see the instrumental need of learning a content subject in a foreign language other than English beyond providing a more authentic communication context. Yet the authenticity of that context seems more intrinsic than extrinsic. While it creates some specific communication needs in the classroom, it does not reflect the reality of the learner's wider experience. The danger is that CLIL could be perceived as an ultimately artificial communicative situation (Johnstone 1994).

Finally, if integrative motivation remains the main determinant of attitudes towards languages, the impact on motivation of the wider social attitudes towards "otherness" must be taken into account. In countries such as the UK where the social climate and public opinion, as reflected and shaped by the media, is conspicuously unsupportive of anything foreign and commonly portrays multilingualism as a problem rather than a resource (Coleman 2009), CLIL, for all its provision of meaningful content, on its own cannot neutralize social perceptions. It must be reinforced by an active effort, at whole school level, to counteract the way in which public discourse favours monolingualism and cultural insularity. In schools where people in key management positions overtly support languages, pupils are more likely to carry on with languages learning beyond the compulsory level (Evans and Fisher 2009). If CLIL has a chance of success, the whole school community must engage in shifting social attitudes to language learning beyond the classroom.

CLIL can enhance learners' motivation and overcome the main shortcoming of communicative language teaching by providing a meaningful context for authentic communication around relevant and cognitively challenging content. While it responds to long-established short-comings in MFL teaching, CLIL has its own limitations. It must be complemented by good practice into positive feedback and a variety of teaching styles to support the achievement of all learners. More importantly, where relevant, it must be coupled with active attempts at counteracting social perceptions of otherness and language learning. Combined with all these factors, the potential for CLIL to boost motivation could be a powerful tool.

#### **4. CLIL is for learners of all abilities**

CLIL proposers claim that it not only increases linguistic proficiency, but that it also enhances content knowledge, cognitive skills and creativity in learners of all abilities and not just top end (Marsh 2002, Baetens Beardsmore 2008, Coyle et al. 2010). CLIL, in their view, is entitlement for all (Coyle et al. 2010).

A substantial body of research proves that CLIL learners suffer no disadvantage in their levels of achievements in their first language or the content subjects, and that very often they outperform their non-CLIL peers (Serra 2007, Dalton-Puffer 2007, Lasagabaster 2008, Alonso et al. 2008, Hood 2006, Swain and Lapkin 2005, Holmes et al. 2009). This enhanced grasp of content knowledge is explained by two different factors: the relation between language and content in CLIL lessons and the so called "double processing".

The dual focus of CLIL means that the relationship between language and content has to be totally transparent. Language is seen as a tool for learning and one that needs scaffolding and progression as much as content. In this sense, CLIL exposes the linguistic issues in subject content in a way that is often absent in non-language subjects (Gajo 2007, Coyle et al. 2010, Baetens Bearsmore 2008, Mehisto 2008). This makes CLIL teachers more aware of the linguistic needs of the learners and thus more effective at ensuring comprehension (Muñoz 2002). If education is a “language socialization of learning” (Mohan 1987), this approach addresses issues of equity and inclusion, and has potentially a socially equalizing effect (Lasagabaster 2008), which, in the UK, is even more essential in an increasingly culturally diverse student body (Swain and Lapkin 2005). In this respect, CLIL can in all fairness be described as an entitlement for all.

However, this approach relies on a balanced integration of content, language and cognition, which is still not always the case. A failure to analyse and provide for the linguistic needs of learners will inevitably fail the weakest because of the intrinsic challenge of CLIL (Mehisto 2008), as has been the case in Hong Kong, Malaysia and Estonia (Mehisto 2008, Yassin 2009). Teachers’ abilities are key in this area, but the lack of specific training is an all too frequent hurdle (Mehisto 2008, Coyle et al. 2010). Lorenzo (2008) showed that often CLIL teachers lack a sufficiently wide repertoire of strategies to put academic content into an interlanguage that is understandable, stretching and sound from a content perspective. The problem is compounded by the fact that subject teachers involved in cross-curricular CLIL do not often recognise that their subjects are a place for language development and practice as much as content acquisition (Mehisto 2008, Lyster 2007, Gajo 2007). Therefore, CLIL’s potential to raise all pupils’ achievement will depend on there being sufficient acceptance of the role which language plays in mediating content.

The so called “double processing” refers to how CLIL learners process speech in a foreign language in order to take in new information, while at the same time integrating the new knowledge in an existing corpus (Sajda (2009)). While this provides learners with a motivating challenge (Hood 2006, Coyle et al. 2010), it also has a number of potentially negative side effects.

Firstly, it means that a lack of linguistic proficiency may be a serious barrier to understanding and learning, particularly in secondary schooling (Lightbown and Spada 2006). The problem can be made worse if coupled with insufficient teacher proficiency or a limited range of teaching strategies to support linguistic development. It must be noted that the vast majority of cross-curricular CLIL programmes are selective or self-selective on the basis of linguistic ability in the language and/or general academic performance (Ullman 1999, Dalton-Puffer 2007, Sajda 2008, Lasagabaster 2008, Coyle 2007). Interestingly, this “voluntary nature” is often described a key feature of successful CLIL programmes (Navés 2009, Mehisto 2008). It begs the question to what extent this type of self-selection, which traditionally attracts motivated, middle-class learners, has eschewed perceptions of the relative difficulty of CLIL. Over the next few years, it will be interesting to see results from the CLIL programmes in Madrid, which have been intentionally implemented in disadvantaged areas. Initial reports mention a 10% drop-out rate because of inability to cope with the demands of the programme (Hidalgo 2010). The challenge, if CLIL is to become an entitlement for all, will lie in developing approaches that can cater for all linguistic abilities instead of falling back onto exclusion.

A second implication of “double-processing” is that it can lead to a longer teaching process and a concentration on the basics to the exclusion of the wider elements of the subject (Sajda 2008, Dalton-Puffer 2009 and 2007, Hood 2006, and Mehisto 2008). However, this may not necessarily have a negative impact. It can lead, in the perception of both teachers and learners, to a deeper understanding of concepts. Learners benefit from having to engage more actively with the material to overcome the linguistic barrier (Dalton-



Puffer 2008) and, at the same time, teachers report avoiding overloading students with unnecessary information (Sajda 2008). The result of both strategies is that learners remember more of the material taught.

There is a further side effect of CLIL which has only recently come to light. Research in Finland (Seikkula 2007) suggests that although learners of all abilities achieve as expected, CLIL programmes cap overachievement. While in CLIL programmes more pupils achieve in line with their ability and less pupils below, there is a significantly lower proportion of pupils exceeding initial expectations. The results are attributed to the intrinsically more demanding nature of the CLIL learning situation. The implication for individual learners is that reaching maximum outcome results may need to be sacrificed to increased mastery of a foreign language.

In contexts such as the UK where there are educational markets in operation, the implications of such findings could be potentially decisive for the uptake of CLIL. CLIL could potentially enhance the overall value-added of a school for the middle and bottom end, yet it could also limit the amount of top grades in the content subjects<sup>1</sup>. While value-added league measurements are valued by inspectors, raw results ultimately decide the social perception of a school, due to the nature of education as a positional good (Winch 1996). If to this limitation we add, in some countries, a social context which is at best lukewarm towards language learning CLIL looks like a choice that only the bravest of headteachers may want to make.

A final point must be made about the general cognitive advantages of bilingualism, which are often quoted in support of offering CLIL to all learners (Baetens Beardmore 2008, Coyle et al. 2010, Directorate General 2009, CCN 2010). There is evidence to suggest that properly developed school bilingualism is linked to greater communicative sensibility, metalinguistic capacities and elasticity in thinking and creativity (Mehisto 2008, Baker 2006). However, there is also evidence that the amount of foreign language knowledge needed for the benefits of bilingualism to be evident is substantial (Lightbown and Spada 2006). There is so far no evidence that the much more limited scope of cross-curricular CLIL can deliver the same sort of linguistic proficiency and thus cognitive effects. The risk, once again, is that presenting the advantages of CLIL on a par with those of immersion education (Lasagabaster and Sierra 2009) can lead in a few years' time to serious questioning of its effectiveness. There is an urgent need to define what the cognitive advantages of the limited yet enhanced communicative proficiency provided by CLIL could be.

CLIL has the potential to lead to better understanding of content and to raise achievement for all, but this will only happen if CLIL is put in the context of optimal teaching practice that scaffolds language development as much as content development. CLIL can be seen as an entitlement for all, with different outcomes for different learners, but stakeholders must accept that even the best delivered CLIL programme, because of its intrinsic difficulty, may limit the extent to which learners can overachieve. Competitive pressure in the current educational markets and a social attitude still sceptic about foreign languages may limit severely the interest in such programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> This is in the hypothetical scenario where content subjects could be taken in a foreign language as is the case in some European CLIL programmes.

## 5. CLIL leads to greater intercultural awareness

CLIL is generally linked to the development of greater intercultural awareness (Coyle et al. 2010 and 2009) by providing learners with experiences that would have been impossible in a monolingual or traditional MFL setting. Although language and culture are inseparable, language work in itself does not necessarily lead to the sort of self-awareness and tolerance of difference linked to intercultural understanding (Broady 2004, Byram 1997, Jones 2000). In CLIL, the key difference is the provision of a meaningful context and the use of the foreign language as a tool to explore and construct meaning. In this way, learners can engage in deeper learning about themselves and others, and, at the same time, experience the process from the perspective of their counterparts (Coffey 2005). An intercultural ethos is thus a defining feature of the CLIL classroom both a micro-level, through meaningful interactions in the vehicular language and potentially, at macro level, by providing pupils with the linguistic tools and knowledge to extend their interactions beyond the classroom (Coyle et al. 2010). The use of new technologies and school partnerships abroad can make CLIL a catalyst for living intercultural experiences, and teachers are encouraged to be proactive in order to fulfil CLIL's potential.

There are potentially some theoretical and practical limitations to this claim. In the CLIL cross-curricular model, it is often the case that the learning of a subject is not culturally located at all, such as in science, maths or PE. In these contexts, the amount of *savoirs* (Byram 1997) developed by the learner can be limited. However, it can be argued that the use of a foreign language as a medium for learning is in itself a decentring process of one's own linguistic worldview and thus, in itself, an essentially intercultural process (Coffey 2005). The use of a different language to explore the world can be seen as a first *prise de conscience* of a different culture and of the commonality of the human learning experience. In the context of increasingly diverse student populations, such as in the UK, CLIL can thus also contribute to the development of social cohesion within a given society through greater intercultural competence<sup>2</sup> (Anderson 2008).

It is interesting to note that not all CLIL models accord the same central importance to culture and intercultural understanding as Coyle's 4C model. Whereas her model places culture at the centre of the 4C pyramid, other European models place language and communication at the core and culture as a peripheral element (Dalton-Puffer 2008). This difference may stem from the practical fact that CLIL in Europe is essentially CLIL in English (Dalton-Puffer 2008). The motivation to learn English is linked less to an interest in the culture(s) it is associated with and more to its usefulness as a lingua franca (Byram and Risager 1999, Holly 1990). However, even if the motivation to learn English is purely instrumental, developing the full range of *savoirs* associated with intercultural awareness is still essential, because a lingua franca is never culturally neutral (Byram and Risager 1999). Learners of different native languages using English to communicate will inevitably do so by reference to cultural realities embedded in the lingua franca. CLIL in English, in many ways, has greater potential to develop intercultural awareness than CLIL in other languages, because it multiplies exponentially the range of possible opportunities for contact with a broader range of cultures. It can therefore contribute to placing learning in a truly multilingual context. It is thus essential not only that the intercultural ethos is maintained in the classroom, but also that the cultural

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<sup>2</sup> Of course, CLIL would reach its maximum intercultural effect if community languages were used as vehicular languages, but so far, CLIL is overwhelmingly restricted to the so called "prestigious languages", another mark of its elitist origins (Dalton-Puffer 2007).

elements that underpin English as a language are incorporated in the process. Failure to do so would result in an impoverished CLIL experience for learners.

CLIL certainly has the potential to lead to greater intercultural awareness than traditional content or language teaching. In fact, this is probably its most solid claim. Its integration of context, language and cognition creates the perfect environment to encourage reflection and self-awareness, while allowing learners to re-appropriate the language as a learning tool in their own context. In this sense, CLIL can allow the learners to step outside their own experience and develop a “perspective consciousness” of cultural processes (Broady 2004, Coffey 2005) more effectively than traditional classrooms. With the growing need for a genuinely global sense of citizenship, this dimension of CLIL programmes is probably its most valuable asset and one that cannot afford to come second to the more practical aims of enhancing linguistic proficiency. Ironically, because of the status of English as a lingua franca, this may be strength of CLIL programmes which use other vehicular languages, as will be the case in the UK.

## 6. Conclusion

CLIL as an alternative and complementary model for MFL teaching has the potential to address many of the shortcomings of traditional approaches. Although research is still limited, there is increasing evidence that, as its proposers claim, it leads to a higher level of linguistic proficiency and heightened motivation, it can suit learners of different abilities and it affords a unique opportunity to prepare learners for global citizenship. However, as this essay has shown, CLIL also has inherent limitations not often recognised, but which are beginning to emerge and which point at both theoretical and methodological shortcomings. The CLIL learners can have an imbalanced linguistic development which favours their receptive rather than productive skills, while their motivation is still subject to contextual and social influences. The extra level of difficulty which CLIL entails can leave the weakest learners very vulnerable if insufficient scaffolding is provided for linguistic development, and finally, while CLIL’s greatest potential lies in its intercultural dimension, the role of cultural awareness in CLIL models where English is the vehicular language is less well established.

If CLIL’s potential is to be fully implemented, a number of measures are needed. A clearer theoretical model is required to better underpin the integration of content and language in CLIL lessons and the relationship between the CLIL language curriculum and the traditional MFL lessons. In this sense, CLIL could make a crucial contribution to addressing the long standing tension between content and form in all models of language teaching. If CLIL is to be accessible to all learners and leave behind its selective past, it should trigger more integrated and socially inclusive whole-school language policies, with a clearer focus on the role that language plays in assimilating concepts across subjects. Its motivational potential needs to be complemented by broader initiatives which counteract entrenched social perceptions, and its intercultural ethos needs to be protected from a utilitarian approach which sees CLIL as the way purely to achieve greater linguistic proficiency.

Addressing these limitations is essential for the future of CLIL, not less because there is currently an unmistakable evangelical tone about much of the CLIL literature. It is presented as a timely and perfect solution to the demands of the global knowledge society for a multilingual, adaptable workforce, and this has led to a lack of definition and occasional over-estimation of its expected outcomes. Yet CLIL is a costly model, in terms of financial and human resources, and its implementation must be seen to deliver maximum

benefits. The risk of implementing CLIL under the weight of unrealistic expectations and without specifically addressing its emerging shortcomings is one that we cannot afford to run. It would lead to CLIL being perceived as a quick fix rather than a timely solution and to a logical yet regrettable disappointment with a model that is genuinely promising.

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