That the Italian Ministry of Education has mandated CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) as an approach to be adopted for teaching non-lingua subjects in the last year of lyceums and technical high schools by 2013 demonstrates the farsightedness of the Ministry’s Policy Makers who have understood that CLIL can contribute significantly to renovating 21st century education.

Do Coyle¹, Ana Halbach², Gisella Parise³, Piet van de Craen⁴ and Y.L. Teresa Ting⁵

¹The School of Education, University of Aberdeen, UK; ²Departamento de Filología Moderna, Universidad de Alcalá, Spain; ³Liceo
That the Italian Ministry of Education has mandated CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) as an approach to be adopted for teaching non-lingua subjects in the last year of lyceums and technical high schools by 2013 demonstrates the farsightedness of the Ministry’s Policy Makers who have understood that CLIL can contribute significantly to renovating 21st century education. In fact, this policy moves Italian educators under the limelight of the international education arena where one of the main challenges is to move beyond traditional teacher-centered lecturing towards learner-centered ways of learning. Italian teachers should realize that educators across the world will be watching them apply “the CLIL-Potential” and outcomes from Italian CLIL classrooms will help define CLIL best practice.

Here, we would like to further support Italian teachers by providing a brief description of the CLIL-Potential which has come from over a decade of research in CLIL-classrooms in the UK, Spain, Belgium and, of course, Italy. CLIL-teachers will undoubtedly succeed if they understand what CLIL is, what it is not and what it can potentially do to guide our classroom practice. Below, we discuss how CLIL can be interpreted “mathematically” to provide CLIL practitioners a Core CLIL-Construct, a way of reasoning. Implementing this Core-Construct brings into being three CLIL-Operands, which provide CLIL-teachers some concrete guidelines into ways of proceeding.

What CLIL is (and what it is not)...

If we interpret the acronym “CLIL” mathematically (Ting, 2011), we obtain a ratio, [50:50/Content:Language], which shows how ‘CLIL attends to both the language and the content’ (as per Langé, one of the original proponents of CLIL). This ratio brings us to the
question “whose Language does the [50/Language] component cater to?” Since CLIL obviously attends to how the learner – not the teacher – is acquiring, using and mastering the foreign language, the first important contribution to education is that CLIL focuses our attention on the process of learning and not the act of teaching: This is what we consider the Core CLIL-Construct. In turn, this Construct automatically leads into three very pragmatic CLIL-Operands which come from the fact that we have chosen to use a FL for content-education: First of all, as learners must acquire content knowledge through a FL for which they have limited linguistic resources, the CLIL-teacher must consider if the language of instruction is comprehensible.

**CLIL-Operand-1**
thus asks ‘Do learners understand the language that I, the teacher, or the book is using?’ Secondly, if the purpose of using a FL is so learners can master it, we must cultivate not only learners’ receptive skills of reading and listening but also their ability to use language to speak and write about content effectively.

**CLIL-Operand-2**
thus asks ‘Can learners use the right language in the right occasion to obtain information, negotiate understanding, debate, discuss and finally construct knowledge and also convey understanding?’ CLIL thus moves language learning forward, towards language using.

In attending to the language of the learner, CLIL-instruction automatically shifts classroom dynamics away from teacher-centred lecturing to learning-centred learning where the quality of both input-language/content and output-language/content become part of the learning agenda. CLIL is not, therefore, a physics or history teacher using a FL rather than L1 to deliver content – if scholastic content is already difficult or boring in L1, presenting it in a foreign language will certainly not benefit content-education and surely quench any love of the FL. In fact, the April 23 issue of Science, one of the most prestigious journals for scientific research, reported that when ex-Anglophone colonies in Africa used English, an ‘elitist FL’, to teach Science, dismal results were obtained. However, the situation was redeemed when Science-educators realized that, since the language of instruction was a FL, they had to ensure that the language of instruction was comprehensible – basically, CLIL-Operand-1. Not surprisingly, as the Science-educators in Africa became increasingly more language-aware, they came to the question ‘what are the
learners
able to do
with the language?’ This question automatically prompted educators to cultivate productive language skills so that learners could
language
their knowledge, writing and speaking logically, coherently, precisely and objectively. In doing so, learners were given a chance to transform input-information into deep-level understandings. CLIL thus develops literacy, not only giving learners an opportunity to learn to use language effectively, but also cultivates deep-level understanding of core concepts so today’s learners can become tomorrow’s informed citizens.

But there is much more to CLIL. Language-aware teaching catalyzes an important change in content-education: When one is sensitized to the fact that the input-language must be comprehensible, it comes naturally to also consider whether the input-content is comprehensible.

**CLIL-Operand-3** thus asks ‘Is the content presented in chewable and digestable aliquots?’ Comprehensible content motivates authentic interest and this in turn motivates authentic dialogic learning in which foreign language use and thus learning becomes authentic (Coyle, 2010). In fact, successful CLIL teachers in Europe and Science-educators in Africa de-construct content such that learners can then use language to reconstruct content knowledge though deep-level cognitive engagement with authentically interesting topics. The [50/Content] component of CLIL thus moves content-learning forward, beyond the mere learning of facts. In today’s information-everywhere society (Alberts, in *Science*, 2010), learners must be able to discern fact from fiction and this requires deep-level and transferable understanding of core content-concepts. Therefore, the [50/Content] component of CLIL clearly advocates content which fulfils the content-curriculum: better a monolingual surgeon who knows her content inside-out (literally) than a multilingual one who doesn’t. In fact, if CLIL-instruction uses content-learning time, we cannot reduce History, Maths, Geography or Science into “terminology learning” but must take the content-curriculum forward: knowing the terms brakes, clutch, gears and even spark plugs and oil filter does not make us a mechanic. Likewise, CLIL is definitely not about using simplified content: If students are already learning that the DNA double helix is formed when hydrogen bonds pair the bases of adenine with thymine and guanine with cytosine found on adjacent sugar phosphate backbones, should we expect them to find the statement “DNA is important...” interesting? Would we expect our mechanic find our car-user’s manual useful and fascinating?
Foreign language learning should be based on topics which generate authentic interest since the use of simplified content risks the cultivation of content-illiteracy and repeating in a FL what students have already learnt in their L1 certainly does not promise for exciting lessons. Using especially developed CLIL materials engages learners in new content which is presented in comprehensible aliquots and through comprehensible language: a concrete step towards effective education.

The flow-chart in Figure 1 illustrates the how the Core-Construct coordinates the CLIL-Operands.

In conclusion

All over Europe, CLIL practitioners are discovering that CLIL, done well, is much more than the sum of its parts: Language-aware instruction automatically leads to content-aware education and therefore naturally advocates a learner-centered approach to learning whereby core concepts are understood at a deep-level, be it in History, Physics or Geography. This is the CLIL-Potential. The realization of this Potential in Italy and elsewhere in the world will not need so much teachers who speak the FL fluently but teachers who are familiar with both content pedagogy and language pedagogy and who are Maestros at implementing learner-centered learning and establish highly motivating learning contexts where understanding is deep and transferable. Happy CLIL-ing to the teachers of Italy.
Langè, G. 

